

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Regular Session

Tuesday November 5 at 7:00 pm
Town Hall Second Floor Meeting Room
173 Main Street, Groton, MA 01450

Present: Bud Robertson (Chair), Gary Green, (Vice Chair), David Manugian (Clerk), Colby Doody, Arthur Prest, Scott Whitefield

Also present: Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant

At 7:00 pm Chairman Robertson called the session to order. He reviewed the agenda for the evening which consists of interviewing two candidates for the open seat on the committee. He welcomed the candidates Mary Linskey and Peter Doherty.

Chairman Robertson reviewed the interview process. The current term of the seat to be filled ends in June 2020, after which, the person can be reappointed for a three-year term. He described the responsibilities of the Finance Committee which includes a regular overview of the town budget. The budgeting season between December and the Spring Town Meeting is the busiest for the Committee. Finance Committee members are often asked to sit on the Capital Planning, Five Year Planning or other ad-hoc committees. After the interview process this evening, the Finance Committee will make a recommendation to the Select Board who will take this up on their next meeting agenda (at which time they will decide whether to appoint the recommended candidate).

The Committee began interviewing Mary Linskey first and Peter Doherty exited the room. She provided her background explaining that she is a CPA with experience in public accounting. She spent time as the controller at the Brooks School. This included time working on school budgets and sub budgets. She has also worked as a CFO for a thoracic surgery group that privatized. Currently she is back working in public accounting. She is interested in getting involved in the Finance Committee because she moved to Groton about a year ago and she is looking to getting involved with the community. She inquired about the time commitment. Chairman Robertson answered that it is typically one evening meeting twice monthly. She mentioned that her background is mostly in audit. C. Doody asked if she has experience with Yellow Book / single audits to which she answered yes. He also mentioned that, as a CPA himself, he has been able to manage the time commitment necessary to serving on the FinCom.

D. Manugian asked for her to speak to her experience in private schools. As the controller at the Brooks School, she was responsible for reporting and running audits. She interfaced with the town often. She was not as involved with facilities and operations. She took part in an annual conference with representatives from 40 other private schools, where there was a lot of information sharing.

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Chairman Robertson added that the Finance Committee is tasked primarily with managerial accounting that includes budgeting, forecasting, tracking what is being spent, trends, and taking into account what is important in the town.

She added that at Brooks she watched the budget, but did not put it together. She did a lot of work forecasting (5-10 years out) as part of her position with the thoracic surgery group. In her experience in public accounting she has spent a lot of time in budgeting and forecasting.

S. Whitefield inquired on her initial impressions of the town as she is a new resident. She commented on the speed of getting things done and referenced the town-wide crosswalk project. She was pleased to see that the installment of a crosswalk in front of the elementary and middle school was brought to Town Meeting shortly after the installation of the other crosswalks throughout Main Street in town.

A. Prest commented that his professional experience included 30 years in the corporate sector and 20 years in non-profit. He commented that town government is very different. The budgets rely on property taxes and decisions made at Town Meeting. Prioritizing involves understanding what is important to the constituents. He asked the candidate about her initial impressions of the school budget, and whether she's aware of it. She replied that she does not have an understanding of the school budget as her daughter attends a private school nearby.

The candidate had a question about the accounting software used in the town. P. Dufresne replied that Groton is currently using a platform called Community Brands. It is a cost-effective solution. She also commented on the challenges of integrating into the financial software the work of so many different business units within the town government.

G. Green commented that being in this position involves a huge learning curve. He wanted to understand her level of commitment as there is a large amount of time spent at the beginning getting up to speed. The candidate responded that she is very interested in staying on the committee long term and understands the time commitment.

At 7:30 pm M. Linskey exited the meeting.

The second candidate, Peter Doherty, re-joined the meeting. Chairman Robertson recapped that the responsibilities of the Finance Committee are mostly in managerial accounting. The Town Manager and the Finance Department analyze the operational data regularly and the Finance Committee advises. G. Green began with questions. He asked what sparked his interest in the committee. The candidate replied that, considering various discussions online and elsewhere about the town's tax rate, that he sees these as opportunities to effect changes. He also discussed the amount of open space in the town, as well as the various non-profits' abilities to contribute. He is interested in investigating how to create profitable situations that can be taxed. In his professional experience he has focused on technical operations and how to accomplish similar results with lower capital investments. He is interested in helping the town

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find potential investment opportunities that can create a return, enhance private commerce and while retaining the town's identity.

C. Doody inquired if he follows some of the town's capital projects, such as the library roof and senior center, and how he views those items. The candidate replied that it's important to look at the town's objectives and if anything can be recouped, as well as incurring a net positive for the social good of the town.

D. Manugian mentioned the 5-year strategic plan and how they perform revenue projections with various scenario models depending on when funds will be needed. Chairman Robertson also mentioned that this position requires a large learning curve. Municipal government is very different from the corporate environment. Ultimately the goal is for the societal good. He wanted to ensure the candidate's time commitment and his intent to stick around.

S. Whitefield described that working on the Finance Committee can often include discussions involving misconceptions and varying values. He asked how the candidate would approach this. The candidate responded that he would focus on what is important to the town, and back it up with data that supports the Finance Committee's recommendation.

A. Prest inquired how long the candidate has lived in Groton, and Mr. Doherty replied 5 years. A. Prest commented that the social benefit is in much of what is discussed in budgeting discussions. He inquired if the candidate could explain his sequence of jobs. The candidate answered that upon college graduation he worked for Enterprise Rent a Car. He also worked for Raytheon but decided he wanted to move on from defense contracting. He ended up at Parexel, before the company moved to North Carolina. At that time, the candidate accepted a position with Thermo Fischer Scientific. It was not what he was expecting and an opportunity arose for his involvement in a family start up, which is where he is currently.

P. Dufresne commented that some members of the Finance Committee act as liaisons to other committees based on their interest and inquired if the candidate had any ideas of what departments he may wish to be involved with. He replied that he would be interested in the zoning or planning departments, and learning more about areas that are potentially revenue generating.

Chairman Robertson discussed that the committee will talk it over and will vote this evening. He thanked the candidate. At 7:50 pm P. Doherty exited the meeting.

Chairman Robertson led the committee through anonymous voting. Mary Linskey received four votes and Peter Doherty received 2. The committee discussed that Mary's private school experience was important. While the members agreed that both candidates were eminently qualified, S. Whitefield commented that Mary will add diversity of thought. A. Prest noted P. Doherty's corporate-focused job experience and wondered how it might translate to his involvement in town government. Chairman Robertson was in

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favor of Peter and thought he was strategic and well qualified. Chairman Robertson commented on finances and modeling not being hugely different in the corporate world and town government.

The Committee discussed sending a memo to the Select Board with a recommendation to encourage the appointment of Mary Linskey to the Finance Committee.

Upon a motion by A. Prest, seconded by D. Manugian, the Committee VOTED in favor to make the recommendation to the Select Board to appoint Mary Linskey to the Finance Committee by a unanimous vote. (The Vote 6-0-0)

The Committee discussed the meeting minutes from the October 21, 2019 meeting. They referenced the receipt of \$6,275 in room-tax revenue for the quarter. The members had been concerned that given the apparent success of the Groton Inn, that number seemed very low. It was subsequently discovered that the revenue received was for July only. There will be an approximate amount of \$18k for the full quarter (July, August and September) once the state has processed it through to the town's bank account. The town is therefore on track to reach \$70k for room tax revenue this year.

A. Prest wanted to briefly discuss an idea for the Economic Development Committee. He supplied a map for this evening's meeting that showed an area in Groton that could potentially be developed. He is going to begin petitioning with Sheila Harrington, the Select Board and others. Chairman Robertson agreed that the town should try to get legitimate business property when possible.

C. Doody reported on the Florence Roche School Building Committee and announced that there will be a public input meeting on November 16, 2019 from 8 – 11:30 am at the Groton Center (the new Senior Center building).

P. Dufresne reported that Department budgets are due on November 22. The budget review meetings with the various Department Heads will be held the first week of December as is customary.

At 8:05 pm, upon a motion by G. Green, seconded by D. Manugian the Committee VOTED to adjourn this evening's meeting by a unanimous vote.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Naomi Campbell Siok, per diem recording secretary, Town of Groton.