

SELECT BOARD / FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES MONDAY, JUNE 21, 2021

SB Members Present: Rebecca H. Pine, Chair; Alison S. Manugian, Vice Chair; Peter S. Cunningham, Clerk; Joshua A. Degen, Member; John F. Reilly, Member

FinCom Members Present: Bud Robertson (Chair), Gary Green, Scott Whitefield, Colby Doody, Art Prest, David Manugian

Also Present: Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Ravilla Garthe, Acting as Executive Assistant; Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant

Ms. Pine called the meeting to order at 7:00pm and reviewed the agenda.

Mr. Haddad informed the Board of an added item to the Town Manager's report regarding Article 6-A, Article 9 and Article 10 that were reviewed at the Spring Town meeting. One bid received from Oppenheimer & CO with a .428%. The Treasurer/Collector will be speaking with the Board on this matter after the first item on the agenda.

Bud Robertson called the Finance Committee to order at 7:03 PM

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Pine stated the Housing Summit cosponsored by the Task Force and Affordable Housing Trust is happening this coming Sunday June 27th at 2pm at the Senior Center in West Groton as an in-person event. Residents are welcome and will have the option to tune in remotely. This is an opportunity to give input and ask questions about the topic of Affordable Housing in Town. Also, Vanessa Abraham, Library Director has requested to announce that the library has now reopened, their new hours are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 10AM to 8PM, Friday and Saturday from 10AM-5PM continuing to offer curbside pick-up and summer reading has started. Third announcement, Town of Groton will host fireworks in celebration of 4th of July on Monday July 12th.

7:04PM Pine opens the floor to the public for comments.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

2. As the Board is aware, we have been searching for a new Council on Aging Director to replace Kathy Shelp, who resigned last month to become the Council on Aging Director for the Town of North Andover. To assist me with the Search, I created a Screening Committee made up of me, Select Board Member Peter Cunningham, Mihran Keoseian and Richard Marton of the Council on Aging, Human Resources Director Melisa Doig and Executive Assistant Dawn Dunbar. I had asked Bud Robertson, Chair of the Personnel Board, to serve on the Screening Committee, but he was unavailable on the day we did our interviews. We received 24 applicants for the position and decided to interview five (5) of the applicants. Based on the interviews, we narrowed it down to two and had them interview before the Council on Aging. I am pleased to say that during this process, one candidate rose to the top and was the choice of both the Screening Committee and Council on Aging. Ashley Shaheen, the current Director of Elder and Human Services for the Town of Littleton is my choice for Council on Aging Director. She has an excellent background in elder issues, has amazing enthusiasm and is the right person to lead our Senior Center. Ms. Shaheen's start date is August 9th.

Mr. Cunningham stated he was very impressed and agrees with Mr. Haddad statement.

Ms. Pine addressed Ms. Shaheen stating, your reputation has been met with a lot of enthusiasm from people who participated in the process. Ms. Pine asked about the coverage at the Senior Center until Ms. Shaheen's start date, to which Mr. Haddad responded we have great help from Stacy Jones and Paula Martin, who is on the council and our former Building Department Assistant who has come back to help us with coverage at the Center.

Ms. Shaheen addressed the Select Board stating, she is very excited to serve the community and is excited to transition the Center back to normal after the pandemic.

7:09 PM Mr. Riley moved to ratify the Town Manager's appointment of Ashley Shaheen as the new Council on Aging Director effective August 9th, 2021. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Mr. Haddad apologized for the short notice on this matter, stating due to timing issues and bills that are owed, we needed to do a BAN for three projects approved at the Spring Town Meeting. Specifically, we needed to temporarily borrow the following:

Water Treatment Plant	\$722,300
Whitney Well	\$300,000

Dump Truck	\$185,000
Total	\$1,207,300

Mr. Haddad stated the two projects for the Water Department are already underway and have outstanding bills so we need to bond that money before July 1st. Because we are doing a short term note for this and for the dump truck, it made sense to include the dump truck into the original BAN as well so that we can roll it over next year with 4 years to pay it off. We received 4 bids for the \$1.2 million and the lowest bid was from Oppenheimer & CO for .428%. We have 5 documents for the Board to vote to approve the BAN and sign off tonight if you choose.

Ms. Pine addressed Mark asking, if there any options other than approving and signing off tonight.

Mr. Haddad responded by saying it should be signed tonight because the price is only set for a certain amount of time and if it goes past the due date, we will have to start the process all over again.

Ms. Manugian asked what the duration is.

Mr. Haddad stated it is for one year, because when the Water Department goes out in the fall for the construction, we will float that for another year as well. The Town will renew this BAN next year for one year and then finally we will permanently finance the Water Treatment Plant and the Whitney Well construction in about a year and a half from now. The Dump Truck will roll over for 4 consecutive years.

Mr. Cunningham clarified that these items were presented and discussed during Spring Town Meeting.

7:13 PM Mr. Cunningham moves that the board authorize the BAN in the amount of \$1,207,300.00 for the funding of Article 6 Motion A, Article 9 and Article 10 that was approved at the town meeting. Mr. Riley seconds the motion. The motion carries unanimously.

4. Mr. Haddad informs the Board of the Fire Chief's desire to appoint a career Firefighter (as well as a Call Firefighter) as a Lieutenant to fill a leadership void on the Fire Department. As a Strong Chief, this is within his purview, however, since there is a funding component, we felt this should be brought before the Select Board for your input and support. Fire Chief McCurdy started by saying formal leadership is something that the Fire Department continually works on. The fire department is comprised of folks in very different capacity that manage the personnel that are assigned to them. We are looking to add a Career Lieutenant in the Fire Department. Fire Department leadership positions have suffered recently as many individuals are retiring, or moving to another community. The goal is to keep up with other towns so that folks aren't leaving. The Fire Chief reviewed the 2014 Org Chart as well as the New Org Chart (see attached). He is recommending to increase the number of full time Lieutenants to 3 total; currently there are two. The Captain position was absorbed within the Deputy Chief when Art was promoted two years ago. There needs to be continuity of leadership at all times of the day; right now, the department can only guarantee supervision about 50% of the time. Other times, either the Chief or Deputy Chief fills in which is fine for a short duration however it is not ideal for a long-term plan. Utilizing the money that has been saved by the loss of other positions (which is around \$20,000) we are able to promote a Lieutenant in Lost Lake Station which currently does not have one, and utilize some of that money to fill a Career Lieutenant position. We did take a cut to the budget this Fiscal Year of about \$11,000; and that takes up the additional money that was there for officers that were needed within the department. The Chief reviewed the Incident Org Chart and explained that when an incident occurs, it is converted to something like this. Having an individual in a leadership position that has the certification and training as well as experience to fill in different divisions, groups and sectors of the organizational chart is critical. The Deputy Chief addressed the board stating that when looking at a chart like this, as officers we talk about a span of control. That span of control is between 3 and 5 individuals; so looking at this if myself or the Chief is wearing multiple hats then our span of what we can possibly control is limited. The extension to leadership and supervision really comes down to a safety issue in those types of situations.

Ms. Pine confirms with the Fire Chief that the third full time Lieutenant is an existing employee promoted into the role as well as an on-call Lieutenant in the Lost Lake station who will be promoted into the on-call Lost Lake Lieutenant.

Mr. Riley confirmed that safety concerns exist when the Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief have to oversee multiple areas during a fire.

Mr. Degen asked if the two proposed individuals who are being promoted to Lieutenant have received the appropriate training to which the Fire Chief responded that they have.

Ms. Pine asked if those positions need to be posted in which the Fire Chief responded by saying a test is posted for a period of time starting with an exam that runs every 2 years, it's pretty much a 6 month run up.

Ms. Manugian asked about Lost Lake (where there will be one Lieutenant and six firefighters posted). Fire Chief said that Lost Lake is equipped with an Engine and a Brush Truck. When there is a fire called, depending on what type of fire it is, they will take what is appropriate. There is a tiered system, including folks who roll out immediately when a call comes in. However, on most fire incidents you need to have those next tiers of service in order to supplement the operation.

Mr. Cunningham asked if this will create a new position, to which Fire Chief Replied by saying no, this won't create a new position, it is a promotion of a current employee.

The Fire Chief stated he kick-started the recruitment of on call personnel and it drew the interest of 8 people. He is pleased with the results of this recruitment which took place over many weeks and included signs, social media and a banner over Main St. 2020 was a difficult year, especially for emergency services. With that being said the Chief wants to start long-term planning, training, policies, research etc.... We are looking at the next 3-5 years to plan what types of needs must be met for emergency, prevention, on call personnel and leadership within the organization. He would also like to consider having our own paramedic service. We are in the middle of a Grant right now that was acquired two years ago that allowed us to pay for new gear, uniforms and tuition for the academy. He has requested that Bud Robertson and Peter Cunningham help us focus on developing these plans and catch things we may miss.

Mr. Degen asked the Fire Chief how the town could prevent on call firefighters from leaving to serve other communities to which Fire Chief responds by saying folks are leaving for full time opportunities. Groton has a strong training program, and this is something we are always working on. We have reached out to other communities such as Carver (being the best in the Nation, they have a very large on call department). Their source for all these people is Ocean Spray, they have a partnership with Ocean Spray. There are a lot of Grants available to keep people on board, we cannot stop folks from leaving to other communities, but we should try to keep them involved after they leave.

The Deputy Chief pointed out that the demographic group that stays tends to be the ones who have a family and have been in the community for some time; they are not looking to move. We also have a lot of younger folks who want to start their career and we train them; however we don't have the ability to allow them to move up as quickly as other departments.

Ms. Pine asked the Fire Chief if there was an attempt to reach out to the larger employers in this area, to which the Chief responded by saying he has reached out to Hollingsworth & Vose and the majority of their employees are out of town. It was not economically feasible to establish a partnership.

Mr. Haddad reminded the board that there is no vote needed in this matter, this is within the Chief's purview, but he felt the Select Board should be made aware in case of any questions or objections.

Ms. Pine affirms there are no objections, as for the long-term study. She applauded the Chief for thinking long term. She is aware our attempt at the community wide participation over hiring full time fire fighters did not prove to be very satisfactory from anyone's standpoint but Groton should not abandon the idea of involving the public more completely. She is pleased to have Mr. Robertson and Mr. Cunningham consultants on this, and at some point, hopes the effort will involve additional people.

The Fire Chief said he will continue to report back to the Select Board. He is always trying to refine his 5-year plan, typically preferring to have one planned out well in advance. We are going back to what we used to do and we are involving new people so we can start working the long-term plan.

Ms. Pine asked whether the benefits of working remotely increases the pool of available people in town for on call positions. Fire Chief responded by saying yes, of the 8 people who have shown an interest, 3 of them are doing so due to a change in their work situation.

5. Mr. Haddad stated he had previously advised the Board, our OPM for the Florence Roche Elementary School Project has recommended that we hire separate Legal Counsel for the Project given the fact that this is the first time we have done a CM-At Risk Project. According to David Saindon, they have worked with Christopher Petrini and Associates and has stated that his past projects have been extremely well serviced by them. Petrini is currently providing special counsel services for Leftfield's Marblehead Project. Now that the project has been authorized, David is recommending that the Town engage Chris Petrini to review all contracts for any edits as may be required. The project budget will cover the cost (\$50,000) which will not come out of the Town's budget; it is included within the project budget. While the contract is well defined, this is more of a review and refinement. Also, certain WBE/MBE reporting requirements have recently been changed in the Commonwealth that requires legal interpretation. Petrini charges \$300 an hour. Based on this advice from our OPM, I would respectfully

request that the Select Board vote to appoint Christopher Petrini and Associates as Special Town Counsel for the Florence Roche Project.

Mr. Cunningham asked if an RFP is needed which Mr. Haddad responded by saying an RFP is not needed for legal services under 30B.

Mr. Haddad clarified that the \$50,000 is enough to cover what Petrini has to do and if any legal issues come up throughout the process. He is being hired at a \$300/ HR rate.

Mr. Degen questions how much the Associates rates are.

Mr. Haddad to obtain the information and resume discussion after item 5.

Mr. Haddad informed the board of the Construction Manager update, and that he, Colby Doody, David Saindon and Steve Michener spent Thursday and Friday interviewing 9 applicants. They will be meeting again tomorrow to choose 3 firms to bring back to the Florence Roche Committee to make a decision.

Mr. Haddad stated the Associates rates are as followed:

Principle/ Senior Associate- \$250/HR

Associates- \$225/HR

Clerk/ Paralegal (if required) - \$125/HR

Mr. Doody confirmed the firms are very good and any of them could handle this construction project.

Mr. Cunningham asked if the Town's Building Inspector was involved in the process and Mr. Haddad responded by saying no, because it is a prescribed process through the Mass State Building Board, they decide who serves on the screening committee.

9:13 PM Mr. Degen moves the Select Board approve Special Counsel for the Florence Roche project to hire Chris Patrini and Associates at the rates listed by the Town Manager's Report and not to exceed \$50,000 for the life of the project, Mr. Cunningham seconded, motion passed unanimously

6. 7:54 PM Mr. Haddad states we will be receiving a Federal Grant (ARPA) of \$3,385,120 to supplement and support our efforts to deal with the impact of the Pandemic. There are certain items listed on the Proposed Budget Report (see attached) for which that money can be spent. One key part of where the money can be spent is to make up for educational loss during the remote learning period. The proposed budget for the use of these funds is as followed:

Groton Dunstable Regional School District \$900,000

- This will be used to hire Special Ed teachers, additional teachers and Occupational Therapists to help make up the gap in student learning due to the pandemic. The Town of Dunstable will provide a matching amount based on enrollment %.

Public Safety Radio Towers \$971,515

- We need to replace two towers and add one tower with a cellular component at the High School. We have been Awarded a Grant from the state for \$429,000 towards this project therefore we will need approximately \$500,000.

Public Safety Communications Center \$150,000

- The town had previously appropriated \$180,000 through the capital budget, but we do need another \$150,000 to complete this.

Sewer Infrastructure- Nod Rd Pump Station \$520,000

- Nod Road pump station is in need of upgrade. Out of that amount, \$20,000 will be used to put together a plan and design this project. It is going to be a public/private partnership to get his done, so we will join with the developer for the Deluxe Property project to get it done.

Revenue Loss \$508,736

- We go back to FY 2019 prior to the public health emergency as a starting point for estimates of revenue growth lost through the pandemic.

Fill Highway Department Vacancy \$90,000

- Filling of positions lost due to the pandemic is an eligible use of ARPA funds.

Water Infrastructure- Taylor St Water Main \$244,869

- This is also tied to the redevelopment of the Deluxe Property project. It is made of Asbestos Cement which is the oldest kind of pipes serving our Water Ratepayers and is prone to leaking.

Total Requested: \$3,385,120

This leaves a balance of \$429,000 still available; it is important that we use this money or it will have to be returned to the US Treasury. The Town Manager presented couple of ideas, stressing that the board does not have to make a decision tonight. We will receive half of the money within the next 30 days and the other half after 12 months. The first batch to be dispersed is \$450,000 to the Groton/Dunstable School if the Board approves. \$500,000 will be for the Radio Towers and Revenue Loss. The Sewer and Water project can be deferred until later. We have until December 31st, 2024 to spend that money. He would like the board to consider offering Tax Relief as a fund for disadvantaged people affected by the pandemic. Secondly, a potential Affordable Housing Project on Cow Pond Rd will provide 11 Affordable Units. He would like to see if some of that money could be set aside to also assist with that project. He said he is really passionate about using some of the Revenue Loss funds to reinstate employee COLA's that were cancelled due to the pandemic. All of our Unions stepped up and agreed to a 0% COLA increase last year. I would like the Board to consider whether or not we should use some of this money to offset the COLA adjustment for our employees who agreed to this in order to help the Town.

Ms. Manugian asked, in terms of either the School District or the Highway what are their ongoing costs, as well as far as Tax Assistance what information or what indicators are we seeing showing a need for it.

Mr. Haddad answered by saying his understanding relative to the district is that it is for the next year restoring positions that were lost. We can use the money for employment. In terms of the Town, the Highway vacancy would be ongoing. The position itself is 69,000 and the rest is health insurance. In terms of tax relief, the Town collects 98% of our taxes owed, and our residents continue to pay. But there are some people that are having a hard time making payments and we want to help them before they end up getting into tax title. Also, over the next few years the Florence Roche Project will add to the hardship. He will work on getting statistics.

Mr. Degen said he agrees that the Town employees did step up to the plate and he does think something should be done for that, however he would like to re-open the contract for negotiation as part of the collective bargaining which needs to be done anyway due to the one-year contract negotiated. He wants to be able to say this is a one-time increase to pay back the COLA that was not received during COVID. This is to avoid the Town being hit with a 3-year contract increase. This money could be used as leverage to offset those increases, rather than just giving it to the employees I would like to give it in conjunction with contract negotiation. Second, he shares Alison's concern with the Highway Vacancy, if this money is to be used in this situation, he would like approximately \$300,000 to be ear-marked for this position. He would also like to discuss the \$244,000 for the Water Infrastructure plan as well as the \$520,000 Sewer Infrastructure plan and whether this should be paid by the Rate Payers. One of the provisions of this Grant is for businesses affected by the Pandemic and we should possibly set some criteria to see which local business were affected and did not receive any relief from the Government. Also, we should consider individuals in our community who have lost family members due to Covid-19. He is not against to what is proposed as long as these additional options are discussed.

Mr. Haddad stated as he mentioned in his memo, he is looking to implement the Highway position into the FY23 Budget to make it a permanent cost. He understands the concerns with the Sewer and Water Infrastructure; however, the Federal Law specifically states that one of the main purposes of this Grant is that it may be used for Water and Sewer Infrastructure. Also, if we use this money in partnership with the developer and the property is redeveloped, the tax payer will benefit from the new growth that comes in from those projects, it is an investment in the future.

Ms. Pine addressed Mr. Haddad by saying; she likes his ideas but wants the board to take some time to further consider how best to use the ARPA funds.

Mr. Haddad said there are two priority projects; the School District and Radio Towers. We should receive the first half of the funding in the next couple of weeks and should start thinking about that. He would like to put this on a future agenda so once we have the money, we will have the authorization from the Board to spend it accordingly. This is a Grant, it does not go on the Recap Sheet, it does not need further approval and it does not go to Town Meeting, this spending is at the discretion of the Select Board.

Ms. Manugian asked what the original pricing was for the Radio Towers and how the scope has changed. Mr. Haddad responded by saying, the original estimate was \$650,000, and that was carried in the capital budget at the time we brought in the state and the experts needed to design it. However, the equipment that is needed on the 3rd Tower at the High School has added approximately \$150,000 to the budget. This is definitely a priority. He will have the Police Chief and Fire Chief come in and explain the project changes to the board.

Mr. Degen asked Mr. Haddad if he has spoken to the Dunstable Administrator regarding their share out of the \$900,000 for the School District.

Mr. Haddad said Dunstable is getting ARPA funds and they are supposed to match what Groton is giving. We cannot give all the money if Dunstable cannot match.

Gary Green, member for the Finance Committee asked, in regards to the Revenue Loss, if it is likely that most of that \$508,736 ends up in free cash? He also approves of the Public Safety Radio Towers as well as the Communications Center project. He would like to look at the capital plan over the next several years, he thinks we need to prioritize anything that we have bonded over the next 5-10 years so that we can leverage these funds to reduce the impact on the tax payers over the next 5-10 years.

Mr. Haddad responded, yes the money could end up in free cash.

David Manugian, Member of the Finance Committee, asked whether the Town looked at leasing space for wireless carriers. Also, what is the backup plan for the Sewer and Water project if the Deluxe Property project does not go through? Finally, is the Highway Vacancy a new benefitted position?

Mr. Haddad responded by saying The Town has reached out to carriers especially for the high school because that is a radio dead spot in Town. If the Deluxe Project is abandoned, we would still have to do the Nod Rd pump station and probably would not have to upgrade the pipe so that could free up more money for other projects if we don't reach an agreement with the developer. The Highway opening is an existing vacant position that was always benefit eligible.

7. 8:22 PM Section 5.1 of the Groton Charter reads as follows: "Organization of Town Agencies - The organization of the town into operating agencies for the provision of services and administration of government may be accomplished by any method consistent with law and this charter, including the adoption of by-laws, appropriation of funds or adoption of rules and regulations by appropriate entities. The town manager may, with the approval of the select board and consistent with law and this charter, establish, reorganize, consolidate or abolish any department or position under the town manager's direction and supervision." To that end, Mr. Haddad would like to propose a change in operation. As you know, Margot Hammer has decided to retire as the Zoning Board of Appeals Office Assistant. This position is currently budgeted at 15 hours a week. He would like to rearrange the office and take Park Commission from Kara Cruikshank who is the Building Administrative Assistant and assign Zoning Board of Appeals to her because it makes sense with her current title. There are two options for this rearrangement, In addition to this 15 hour a week position, we have budgeted a new 15 hour a week Clerk position in the Treasurer/Collector's Office. We have advertised this new position for the last two weeks and have very few applicants. Filling a 15 hour a week position is proving difficult. He would like to propose that we increase the 15 hour per week Treasurer Clerk's position to 25 hours. This position would then handle the Treasurer and Park Commission responsibilities. This overall proposal would make our operation much more efficient and allow us to advertise a position with more appeal (25 hours versus 15 hours). However, there would be a cost factor by creating a benefitted position. While I understand that \$11,337 is an increase in the Budget, it may not be that much depending on who we hire, whether or not they take Health Insurance and what the final numbers are for Health Insurance after open enrollment.

Ms. Manugian said it make sense to merge the Building and ZBA into one assistant, however Parks Commission Assistant and Treasure/Collector Clerk duties do not have much in common. He wondered whether there are any other current positions who have the extra time.

Mr. Haddad pointed out that there are other offices who have different departments that do not share similar tasks. but it still works. All other department Assistants are 40 hrs with no extra time. Depending on the time of the year Kara spends between 8-15 hrs/week doing Parks Commission related work. Mr. Degen said creating a benefitted position right now doesn't make sense. He would suggest both positions be filled at 15/hrs a week. Mr. Robertson said he agrees with Mr. Degen's statement.

Mr. Haddad said he will request that Melisa Doig ask applicants for the 15/hr position whether they would be willing to increase hours to 25/hrs. a week and take on the Parks Commission. The only downside is a weekly night meeting.

8. Mr. Haddad has appointed Jessica Goodman-Leong as a Camp Counselor and Shawn Czado as a Lifeguard at the Groton Country Club. He would respectfully request that the Board consider ratifying these appointments
Mr. Degen moved to ratify Town Manager's Appointment of Jessica Goodman-Leong as Camp Counselor and Shawn Czado as a Lifeguard at the Country Club; Ms. Manugian seconded the motion passed unanimously.
9. Mr. Haddad reviewed the board meeting schedules. He noted one additional item regarding remote meeting participation. The Town Manager's Office received an email from the Chair of the Sewer Commission requesting to be allowed to meet through

Zoom. There are some Board members who are still at risk. People would be able to attend meetings on Zoom but it will not be broadcast live on cable, it will be recorded.

Ms. Pine said in some ways the public are better served if the meetings are on Zoom, recorded and later broadcasted. She doesn't think we lose anything by allowing committees to choose at their own discretion, particularly the ones that do not need to be broadcast live. It is different for those who do.

Mr. Degen said he does not support that, as appointed officials should be meeting live, there is no state of emergency anymore. He understands the Sewer Commission concerns and he thinks we can make an exception for the time being until we develop a Hybrid meeting.

Mr. Cunningham states he agrees with Ms. Pine, we have time to see how it works and we should be flexible.

Mr. Reilly said we want to make more accessible to the public, but a hybrid is unadvisable; we should go one way or the other.

Ms. Pine said remote participation is and has been allowed for 10 years and you have to have a quorum present, we are hoping to improve the technology to improve on calling in. We should allow some committees to meet through Zoom, the public does not lose anything and we do not lose anything.

8:55 PM Mr. Cunningham moves that the Board following the new State law will allow virtual meetings for the next three months until September 2021, with the exception of Selectmen, Board of Health, Planning Board and Conservation who will still need to meet in person, Ms. Pine seconded, motion passed: in favor 3 Opposed 2 Ms. Manugian and Mr. Degen

Mr. Robertson officially adjourned the meeting of the Finance Committee at this time (9:00 pm).

respectfully *submitted*:

Ravilla Garthe

Date Select Board Approved: 7/12/2021

Date Finance Committee Approved: 9/14/21