

TOWN OF GROTON: SELECT BOARD/FinCom MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, December 19, 2022
Approved 03/04/23

SB Members Present: John F. Reilly, Chair; Rebecca H. Pine, Vice Chair; Alison S. Manugian, Member;

SB Members Virtually Present: Peter S. Cunningham, Member

SB Members Absent: Matthew F. Pisani, Clerk

FinCom Members Present: B. Robertson (Chair); G. Green, C. Doody (Vice Chair); S. Whitefield; M. Sulprizio; M. Linskey

Also Present: Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant; Melisa Doig, Human Resource Director; Laura Chesson, GDRSD Superintendent; Sherry Kersey, GDRSD Director of Business and Finance; Megan Foster, Principal Assessor; Hannah Moller, Treasurer/Collector; Michael Hartnett, Assistant Treasurer/Collector; Brian Leblanc, President of the School Committee

John Reilly called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and reviewed the agenda.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Haddad said on Wednesday, January 4, 2023 from 1:00pm to 2:30pm, the Center in West Groton will feature Members of the Nashoba Valley Artist Guild with a presentation of their artwork. All are welcome.

There will be a public hearing held on January 11, 2023, at 7:00pm, for the proposed Broadmeadow Road improvements. The public hearing will be held at The Center in West Groton.

Mr. Bud Robertson called the Finance Committee to order.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

A member of the public, Rebecca Tabaski, wanted to primarily speak to black youth and adults of the community. She wanted to let them know there are people of the Groton community that are here to stand with them. Ms. Tabaski said last week there was an incident at the middle school. The principal of the Groton Dunstable Middle School sent a letter out to families stating there was an 8th grade classroom using an online review game. A student(s) created anonymous hateful/hurtful user names. Ms. Tabaski wanted to raise awareness and acknowledge these issues.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Update from Finance Team on New Growth and its impact on the Operating Budget:

Mr. Haddad thought it would be important for the Finance Team to present a presentation about what new growth is and how it is calculated. Principal Assessor, Megan Foster prepared a power point and a video from the Department of Revenue. Ms. Foster said the State of Massachusetts defines new Growth as the calculation of the new increase in municipal property values because of new construction/subdivision and a return of exempt property to the tax role. Ms. Foster said there are different types of new growth we are seeing here in Groton. The construction of residential homes and condos, new construction of commercial and industrial buildings, personal property growth of new businesses occupying existing buildings, new lots created from a subdivision and change of property use code.

2. Consider Accepting the Nomination by the Town Manager and Appointing Chris Furcolo to the Williams Barn Committee:

Ms. Pine made a motion to appoint Chris Furcolo to the Williams Barn Committee with term to expire June 30, 2023.

Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call vote: Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye.

3. FY24 Budget Development Update:

The Select Board and Finance Committee met in Joint Session to discuss additional FY 2024 Budget Guidance. The School Committee, School Superintendent and Business Manager were all in attendance for the discussion. Mr. Haddad said he wanted to discuss where we are with the budget and why we are there tonight. He also wanted to give time for the School Superintendent and Business Manager to walk everyone through where they are with their budget request at this time. Then, he would like to talk about the guidance from the Finance Committee and Select Board.

Mr. Haddad said this past week we met with GDRSD Superintendent Laura Chesson, Assistant School Superintendent Kristin DeFrancisco and Director of Business and Finance Sherry Kersey to receive an update on where they stand for the FY24 budget. The Finance Team cannot meet the guidance given the anticipated request of the School Department at this time. An override might be required, but the Finance Team needs additional guidance. Mr. Haddad wanted to start with reviewing his budget memo to show where the budget stands. Mr. Haddad walked the Board and Finance Committee through his memo (**please see attached memo**).

Ms. Laura Chesson and Ms. Sherry Kersey delivered a power point presentation on the status of their budget. Ms. Chesson said there are two types of Budgets that they were going to present, a level funded budget and level services budget.

- Level Funded Budget- the number requested is the same as the year prior.
- Level Services Budget- the same services requested as last year and one additional ELL teacher.

Ms. Kersey said since the beginning of COVID, the School District has received relief funds directly from the state and indirectly from the member Towns. This funding included ESSER I, ESSER II, ESSR III, Groton ARPA and Dunstable ARPA. There are many unforeseen increases that have developed, including medical contract services, health insurance, Middlesex County Retirement, Regular Ed transportation, Utility Costs, Custodial Contracted Services, Teacher Retirement Incentives, Substitutes, Paraprofessional, and ABA Contracted Service. Ms. Kersey wanted to reiterate that this budget is preliminary at this point. The official presentation to the School Committee will be February 8, 2023. The administration has been assessing all ARPA positions.

Mr. Haddad put together and explained one Potential FY24 Budget Breakdown for GDRSD on an excel spreadsheet. It would require reductions in both budgets and eliminate the capital budget for the School District in FY 2024. Mr. Haddad said this is just an idea and he is not in favor of this action, but he is asked to present a balanced budget. The idea proposed would not be good for neither the town or school district. Finance Committee Chair, Mr. Bud Robertson said he is in favor of the Potential FY24 Budget Breakdown. He said we need to have an objective to not have an override. Also, to not affect our AAA bond rating. In the preliminary budget, Mr. Haddad usually puts a number in and the school abides by that number. Mr. Haddad does not want to leave an unrealistic expectation for the school budget. Mr. Haddad and Ms. Chesson will work collaboratively and have in years past.

Ms. Manugian thinks the School and the Town need to continue to work collaboratively. Mr. Haddad said he can present a balanced budget, Potential FY24 Budget Breakdown that was presented, and explain the devastation to both sides. Ms. Pine said she is opposed to having an override and does not think anyone else would want an override.

Finance Committee Member, Mr. Gary Green said he believes it would be a mistake to present a balanced budget implying they do not need \$3.2 Million. It needs to be clear \$3.2 Million is a need. He said this is a starting point.

How does he present a balanced budget without locking them in. Ms. Manugian believes delaying Capital investments in the past has hurt us and has cost us more in the future. It is a risk. Ms. Pine said it is important to explain that the 2 million short fall, as a potential override, is caused by certain unexpected increases in the state and the school budget. Our students are having more needs now than pre-COVID. This is a big part of why cutting personnel in the schools is not a solution to this problem.

No specific budget guidance was provided to the Town Manager, beyond the mandate to provide a balanced budget, exclusive of a Prop. 2 ½ tax override, while working with the school districts to make sure their needs are met. Mr. Haddad stated that he will provide a balanced budget as required, along with options to address a potential shortfall caused by the anticipated request of the Groton Dunstable Regional School District.

Mr. Robertson adjourned the meeting of the Finance Committee at this time (8:37 pm)

4. Consider Proposed Meeting Schedule Through 2023 Spring Town Meeting:

Monday, January 9, 2023	-FY 2024 Town Manager's Budget Presentation
	-Open Warrant for 2023 Spring Town Meeting
Wednesday, January 11, 2023	-Public hearing on Broadmeadow Improvements
Monday, January 16, 2023	-No Meeting (MLK Holiday)
Monday, January 23, 2023	-Regularly Scheduled meeting
Monday, January 28, 2023	-Potential FinCom Budget Hearing
Monday, January 30, 2023	-Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Saturday, February 4, 2023	-Potential FinCom Budget Hearing
Monday, February 6, 2023	- Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, February 13, 2023	- Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, February 20, 2023	- No Meeting (President's Day)
Monday, February 27, 2023	- Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 6, 2023	- Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 13, 2023	- Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 20, 2023	- No Meeting
Monday, March 27, 2023	- Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 3, 2023	- Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 10, 2023	- Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 17, 2023	- No Meeting (Patriot's Day)
Saturday, April 22, 2023	- Potential Date for 2023 Spring Town Meeting
Monday, April 24, 2023	-Default Date for 2023 Spring Town Meeting
Saturday, April 29, 2023	- Potential Date for 2023 Spring Town Meeting

SELECT BOARD ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION AND ACTION

1. Consider Increasing the Maximum Abatement for Individuals Participating in the Senior Work off Program from \$750 to \$1,000.

In an effort to assist some of our Seniors offset the property tax impact of the Florence Roche Elementary School Construction project, Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Select Board consider increasing the maximum abatement for individuals participating in the Senior Work- Off Program from \$700 to \$1,000. This would increase the number of hours from 50 to 66. Ms. Manugian asked the Town Manager to provide what the impact would be if they raised the abatement to the maximum amount to \$1500.

Ms. Pine made a motion to increase the maximum abatement in the senior work off program to \$1000. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll call vote: Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye.

2. Consider Amending Charge of the Capital Planning Advisory Committee (CPAC) to Limit the Number of Members Serving on Both the CPAC and Finance Committee.

Select Board Member Pine has requested that the Select Board consider amending the Charge of the Capital Planning Advisory Committee (CPAC) to limit the number of members serving on both the CPAC and Finance Committee. She is recommending that no more than two members of the Finance Committee can serve on the CPAC. Ms. Pine said when the committee was formed, they saw this as a different task than what the Finance Committee does. They wanted different people to focus on the Capital side of the budget. There are currently two members of the Finance Committee on the Capital Planning Advisory Committee.

Ms. Manugian thinks the Finance Committee should be reviewing the Capital Planning. Mr. Robertson believes the charge should remain as is. Mr. Cunningham did not have strong feelings either way and Mr. Reilly does not believe it should be changed.

The Select Board decided the Charge of the Capital Planning Advisory Committee to remain the same.

OTHER BUSINESS

Consider Issuing Letter of Support to the Community Preservation Committee for the Application by Squannacook Greenways (#2024-09) for a Grant for the Completion of the Squannacook River Rail Trail

Mr. Cunningham, President of the Squannacook Greenways, would like the Select Board to consider writing a letter of support to the CPC. They are working on the third phase of the Squannacook River Rail Trail that will be constructed this year. This will be the Groton portion of the trail. They are looking for a letter of support from the Select Board to the CPC for this phase of the trail to be completed in Groton. Ms. Manugian thinks it would be helpful for Mr. Cunningham to provide a copy of the plan and the cost. Mr. Haddad agreed to draft a letter and Mr. Cunningham will send Mr. Haddad a copy of the plan and cost. He will send the copies to the Select Board Members.

MINUTES

Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting on December 12, 2022 as revised. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Cunningham-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly- abstained.

The Select Board meeting was adjourned at 9:15PM

S. B. Approved: January 9, 2023: Matthew F. Pisani, Clerk

Respectfully submitted: Kara Cruikshank,
Executive Assistant to the Town Manager

Budget Scenario to Address GDRSD Budget Request

Current Proposed School Budget Increase	\$	1,218,398	65.51%
Current Proposed Municipal Budget Increase*	\$	641,483	34.49%
Total New Revenues	\$	1,859,881	100.00%

Anticipated School Budget Increase	\$	3,230,982
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Current Budget Deficit	\$	2,012,584
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Dividing the Deficit Between School and Town

In FY 2023, GDRSD is 58% of Budget (excluding Debt)

School Portion of Deficit	\$	1,167,299
Town Portion of Deficit	\$	845,285

For Town to Reduce Budget Request by \$845,285, would require a Reduction of \$203,802 from FY 2023 Appropriation

Proposal to Meet \$845,285

GDRSD Capital Fund	\$	253,407	
Free Cash Set Aside for GDRSD Capital	\$	298,796	
Remaining Balance	\$	293,082	
School Increase In Budget Using Capital Towards ARPA and Reduction of \$293,082 from Town Request	\$	2,063,683	
New Revenues to GDRSD	\$	1,511,480	81.27%
New Revenues to Town	\$	348,401	18.73%
	\$	1,859,881	100.00%

*Includes \$50,000 from EMS Funds to pay for proposed New Firefighter