### Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

**Approved 3/04/23** 

GDRSD Middle School Performing Arts Center 344 Main St, Groton, MA

Wednesday February 8, 2023 at 7:00 PM

FinCom Members Present: Bud Robertson, Chair; Colby Doody, Vice Chair; David Manugian, Scott Whitefield, Gary Green, Michael Sulprizio

FinCom Member absent: Mary Linskey

Select Board Members Present: John Reilly, Chair; Becky Pine, Vice Chair; Matt Pisani, Clerk; Alison Manugian, Peter Cunningham

School Committee Members Present: Brian LeBlanc, Chair; Jeff Kubick, Vice Chair; Lacey McCabe, Secretary; Rosanna Casavecchia, Yasmeen Cheema, Rafael Gold, Fay Raynor

Also Present: Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant; Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Hannah Moller, Tax Collector/Treasurer; Dr. Laura Chesson Superintendent of Schools, Sherry Kersey Director of Finance and Operations

Joint Meeting with GDRSD School Committee for Presentation of FY24 Proposed School District Budget

Superintendent Dr. Laura Chesson released the proposed FY 2024 School District Budget and has calculated the Town of Groton's Assessment as \$ 27, 808,707. The Town Manager had previously proposed \$26,800,655 in the preliminary budget therefore leaving a deficiency of \$1,262,939. Both Committees will need to reevaluate their budgets and determine the best solution to cover the deficit.

Dr. Laura Chesson and Sherry Kersey, Director of Finance and Operations prepared a PowerPoint presentation to review the proposed School District FY24 Budget. Ms. Kersey said that ARPA funding would be depleted and the budget is higher than anticipated. There were preliminary assessments conducted and the school budget reflects the modifications that were made prior to reaching the budget as currently presented. Ms. Kersey said there are budget guidance items that would be discussed further tonight including reducing or eliminating full day kindergarten fees, funding OPEB liabilities, and the use of the excess and deficiency funds.

Ms. Kersey said that three model scenarios were explored to reduce the tuition for the full day Kindergarten and the impacts it would have on the general fund if implemented in five, four, or three years. The School District currently charges the highest tuition rate within the market basket. In the first scenario there is a five year fee reduction plan. The \$5,000 tuition would be reduced to \$4,200 utilizing the \$50,000 revolving balance and would be the least impactful progression to the General Fund (approximately \$100,000 a year), commencing in FY25. Scenario two represents a four year reduction plan and scenario three has a three year reduction plan with the highest impact during the last two years at approximately \$185,000 to the General Fund. Ms. Kersey said that \$365,000 would be a substantial addition to the General Fund if implemented in one year. The classes now are a combination of full-time students and ½ day students. There are no additional staffing expenses proposed however, and there would be a \$70,000 transportation savings for the return trip for the ½ day students. Ms. Kersey said currently there are only four Kindergarten classes and generally there are five. The enrollment increase from private Kindergarten to first grade is minimal and the School District does not project adding another teacher next year. Ms. Kersey said that the Other Post- Employment Benefit (OPEB) line has a recommended funding of \$20,000. The contingency was reduced from \$320,000 to \$300,000 to allow for a placeholder for this budget initiative as the FY24 budget is considered in totality by the Towns and School Committee. Ms. Kersey said that Excess & Deficiency has been certified at \$1,199,921 which is 4.35% of their operating budget. She said when the original projected funding deficit was calculated at \$2.6 million the School Committee recommended that another \$200,000 be added from the E & D to reduce the burden on the two towns, increasing the amount to \$800,000. Ms. Kersey said that the District Capital Stabilization fund has a \$0 balance currently and the School Committee has been discussing PFAS soil remediation and costs associated with building repairs of the Swallow Union Building. The administration is recommending utilizing \$300,000 from the E & D funds to be transferred into the Stabilization Account. This transfer of money would not impact taxpayers. Ms. Kersey said that the FY24 Budget Book can be found online at www.gdrsd.org and is very comprehensive and includes the District Overview, a Financial Section, Capital Funds Requests, Debt Obligations, and the E & D. The FY24 proposed assessment for the Town of Groton is \$27,808,707 and was calculated by adding the operating budget (\$26,800,655), debt service (\$465,796), and the capital (\$542,257). The Town of Dunstable received an assessment calculated at \$8,227,774. Ms. Kersey said that both assessments are higher than the Towns' preliminary budget: in Groton the assessment is \$1,262,939 more than the placeholder and in Dunstable it is \$708,000. She noted that these projections will change when the School District receives the minimum contribution update from the State by March 1, 2023 and the assessments will be recalculated at that time.

Dr. Chesson said that the School Committee started with a 5-year projection and discussed each step. Expenditures were reviewed from previous years including full time employees, a list was created of needed increases to FTE, items were identified to be removed from the operational budget, the revenue expectations were reviewed, and the draft budget was finalized to present to the Towns. She said that there are positions that were funded through ARPA Funding and the School District is obligated to expense the \$726, 589 to keep those positions. (Reading & math interventionists, psychologist, special education specialist).

Jake Lewon, Chair of the Dunstable Advisory Board, said that the Advisory Board believed that utilizing ARPA money for one time funding of these positions was a terrible decision. Dr. Chesson said that budget modifications and long term grants would have more than covered the one time funding.

Dr. Chesson said that there were budget additions that were unforeseen expenses which included therapeutic contract services & medical contract services (\$240K), health Insurance (\$605K), retirement assessment (\$42K),regional transportation (\$49K), utility costs (\$220K), custodial contracted service (\$64K), teacher retirement incentives (\$85K), substitutes (\$42K), paraprofessionals (\$147K), ODD placement (\$300K), and ABA contracted services (\$38K). She said that there has been a significant increase of ODD placement and that the School District is reaching its capacity and that they will potentially need to add another classroom.

Mr. Lewon commented that with the increase of costs the School District can longer keep those positions and funds are not infinite. Mr. Leblanc said with Covid there were new challenges and the ARPA funding was

available and could be utilized for certain items, however the problems still exist. He said the school needs are as equally as important as the municipalities'. Unfortunately, the School Districts budget is less predictable compared to the Town. Mr. Lewon said that Dunstable's only source of revenue comes from taxpayers and with the amount being requested he does not want to impose additional taxes on rates that are already high. Dr. Chesson said that there is a list of options that would be implemented to keep the assessments close to what they are and the Town has the ability to determine the amount that they can expense.

Bud Robertson, Chair of Groton FinCom, requested clarification from where the numbers on the "Budget Additions Unforeseen Expenses" is being calculated from. He explained the process of how the Town conducts their budget (observing prior year, current fiscal year and determining where there will be increases). He said he reviewed the School Districts summary function codes for FY23 vs FY24 and observed that health insurance for employees and retirees made up 56% of the budget (approx. \$1.2 million). Another \$836K is expensed on specialty classroom teachers. There is approximately \$2 million being added to the budget year over year just for those items. Ms. Kersey said that the numbers on the Unforeseen Expense slide reflect the amounts above the five-year projection for FY24. Dr. Chesson noted that the School District pays for 85% of their employees' healthcare and there have been claims filed that have impacted the percentage rate.

Ms. Cheema, member of the School Committee, said she is struggling with the unknown costs regarding PFAS, the building repairs, the decision to reduce Kindergarten tuition, and the utilization of the E & D funding when there is already a projected deficit. She questioned the rationale of hiring five reading interventionists for one school and two for another and how these amounts compare to the market basket. She also wanted to know how many math interventionists there were. She commented that every item needs to be explored if savings are to be achieved. Dr. Chesson explained that the number of interventionists is impacted by the benchmark. Students are assessed two times a year and with the occurrence of the pandemic they have seen a significant increase of students below the benchmark and extra assistance is needed. Florence Roche Elementary School also has a higher enrollment of students compared to Swallow Union which explains why more staffing is necessary. Ms. Raynor commented that the number of interventionists would be reevaluated when the next assessments are conducted.

Dr. Chesson said that she understands the financial stress that the school budget imposes on the two Towns and discussed the process for further reductions for consideration. She said that she has observed a decline in enrollment at the high school and will reevaluate the class size and the amount of FTE's that are needed to continue the level of service without additional expenses. She will prioritize the student impacts first and minimize reductions of current staff. She said that the budget incorporates the reduction of one FTE at the first-grade level due to the estimated size; however, the position may need to be added back for the following fiscal year. She said she will ensure that the school is not overstaffed once the Kindergarten registration meets its deadline.

Ms. Kersey said there are four options to close the deficit gap: 1. The two Towns provide additional funding. 2. Utilize the additional alternative revenue sources. 3. Reduce expenses. 4. The Towns and the School District reduce expenses jointly and apply alternative funding. Ms. Kersey said that the budget is a level service budget compared to FY23. She explained that some positions that were previously funded by ARPA funds have been added to the General Fund. The recommended operating budget reflects an increase of 8.29%. She noted that the Capital Plan assessments to the Towns remain relatively stable and discussed each facility and technology

need. Ms. Kersey said that the School Committee has scheduled a public hearing on Wednesday, February 15, 2023 at 7:00 pm.

Ms. Pine commented that she has not reviewed the enrollment figures and the number of FTEs. She said by experience those numbers are significant in determining the budget. Mr. Leblanc said that the class size and the total number of FTEs is broken down in the Budget Book located on pages 12&13.

Jim Frey commented that there was quite a significant increase with pre k students and asked what the impact may be on the school. Dr. Chesson said that the number has increased from 53 to 94 and the majority of the students identified were from early intervention. The School Committee will be reviewing the appropriate class size. Mr. Frey referenced page 59 in the Budget Book and asked what the zero amounts signified. Ms. Kersey said that the entitlements are grants that the School District knows it will be receiving year after year and some grants are only a one time grant. Dr. Chesson confirmed that the School Committee is constantly exploring grant opportunities.

Matthew Naughton, member of the Dunstable Advisory Board, asked how the revenue sources are distributed. Ms. Kersey said that the statutory method formula is utilized and that State funding is applied first, then the minimum contribution from the Towns and the remaining is the percentage in the regional agreement. Mr. Naughton questioned why the dump truck needs to be replaced. Ms. Kersey said that the 2007 Chevy Truck was previously utilized by the Town DPW and has a list of repairs. Dr. Chesson confirmed that the School Committee has explored using the truck for one more year however there are safety concerns.

Ms. Manugian asked where she could locate the descriptions of the capital projects and the options that were discussed at the January 21, 2023 meeting. Mr. Leblanc said to email him directly and he would compile a list of questions and answers to be publicized. Dr. Chesson said that the discussion from the previous meeting could be located under the School Committees documents on their website and they were not included in the budget presented.

Mr. Lewon asked if reductions would be made to administrative costs first. Dr. Chesson reviewed their methodology for budget reductions. She reiterated that the School Committee has reviewed all data and then prioritized the student impact first. If employees were anticipating retiring that was considered second. Dr. Chesson discussed the proportional analysis of possible reductions. She said that there are currently nine central office team members and they are considering reducing one member at 11%. There are 190 professional staff and there are considerations of a reduction of 14, 4 which will not be filled at 7.3%. Mr. Leblanc stated that Groton Dunstable Regional School spends less than most schools in the market basket on administration.

Mr. LeBlanc discussed the benefits of full day kindergarten and it being a service that most Towns provide for their residents whereas Groton does not. Mr. Leblanc asked the Committee to make a motion to eliminate the \$5,000 tuition. The Committee decided to table the request and revisit the topic.

Mr. LeBlanc said that the School District tried to compile a level service budget in the most efficient way possible. In December, while meeting with the Select Boards, the School District had promised to explore each item and the School District was able to reduce the deficit to \$1.6 million. 77% of the amount is presented to the Town of Groton and the remainder to the Town of Dunstable. He noted that Mr. Haddad advised the Select

Board to not absorb the entirety. Mr. LeBlanc said that the School Committee cannot do the same or there would be a significant impact to their services provided. He said that Mr. Haddad would be meeting in an Executive Session with the Select Board on February 27, 2023 and that the School Committee would need to approve the budget by March 15, 2023.

The Select Board members were all in agreement that an override is something that they want to try and avoid due to the recent request for additional funds for the new construction of the elementary school. They said it is important to keep the tax rate down for their residents. The Select Board said that they could not make an official position prior to the scheduled Executive Session however, they said that they would further explore meeting in the middle to resolve the deficit.

Mr. Lewon said that his board is currently not taking any positions. He needs to review a viable solution and it looks like the Town is headed for an override and that is not acceptable. He commented that the voters of Dunstable have not denied an override in the past however this request may impose some challenges.

Mr. Leblanc was unsure of what the School Committee would do if they are presented with a situation of one Town not being able to satisfy the deficit. The school system is known for its level of service and they do not want to affect that.

Mr. Naughton said that ultimately, he would be observing the Town of Groton's decision and then determine how to proceed.

Ms. Raynor commended the Town for supporting the PFAS issue. She said that she has worked tirelessly to return positions to the school and every year a budget is proposed and achieved without an override. She said that the School Committee wants to ensure that the levels of services are being met while still being competitive with the market basket.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:26 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Kristine Fox, Minute Taker

Groton-Dunstable Regional School District Superintendent's Proposed FY23 Budget **February 8, 2023** 

Presented By: Dr. Laura Chesson, Superintendent of Schools Sherry Kersey, Director of Finance & Operations

### Budget Season thus far...

Administration has been busy communicating with both towns regarding preliminary outlooks on the

not fund the assessments. This included enrollment data & class size to use as reference for possible January 25 - Presentation to the School Committee on what budget cuts could look like if towns do January 19 - Presentation to the Dunstable Selectboard December - Notified towns of preliminary assessments December 19 - Presentation to the Groton Selectboard

Non-Personnel Budget modifications presented to school committee were generally supported by the school committee and are reflected in the budget presented today.

### Presentation Agenda

- Incorporating budget guidelines
- Components of Comprehensive Budget Package
- Assumptions
- Assessments
- Capital Items
- Important Dates

## Budget Guidance Items

Guidance we addressed:

Model some scenarios to reduce/elimination Full Day Kindergarten Fees

Funding OPEB liability

Use of Excess and Deficiency funds

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# Full Day Kindergarten Fee proposal for FY24

districts do not charge and the other 5 are: Groton-Dunstable \$5,000, Westford A market basket comparison of Full Day Kindergarten annual fees shows that 5 \$4,200, Harvard \$3,750, Acton-Boxborough \$3,750, N. Reading \$3,500. Proposal: It is anticipated that there will be a fund balance remaining at the end of the fiscal year in the revolving account. The district could reduce the fee to match Westford at \$4,200, and the fund balance can be used to absorb the reduction in

This accomplishes reducing the fee and it does not place any additional financial burden on the general fund.

# Full Day Kindergarten Fee - Long Term

There are currently 4 teachers and 2 paraprofessionals that are funded with the Full Day Kindergarten Fees. That expense for FY24 is \$365,000, which would be a substantial addition to the General Fund if implemented all in one year. The least impactful progression to the General Fund is a five (5) year

### Scenario 1

FY25 - Fee \$3,500 - Incorporate 1 teacher and 1 para back into the General Fund (\$102,000) FY26 - Fee \$2,000 - Incorporate 1 teacher and 1 para back into the General Fund (\$99,000) FY27 - Fee \$1,000 - Incorporate 1 teacher back into the General Fund (\$83,000) FY24 - Fee \$4,200 - All current staff remain funding in the revolving fund.

FY28 - Fee \$0 - Incorporate 1 teacher back into the General Fund (\$81,000)

### /

# Full Day Kindergarten Fee - Long Term

A four (4) year fee reduction plan would look like this:

### Scenario 2

FY26 - Fee \$1,500 - Incorporate 2 teachers and 1 para back into the General Fund (\$182,000) FY25 - Fee \$3,000 - Incorporate 1 teacher and 1 para back into the General Fund (\$102,000) FY27 - Fee \$0 - Incorporate 1 teacher back into the General Fund (\$81,000) FY24 - Fee \$4,200 - All current staff remain funding in the revolving fund.

# Full Day Kindergarten Fee - Long Term

A three (3) year fee reduction plan would look like this:

### Scenario 3:

FY24 - Fee \$4,200 - All current staff remain funding in the revolving fund.

FY25 - Fee \$2,000 - Incorporate 2 teachers and 1 para back into the General Fund (\$185,000)

FY26 - Fee \$0 - Incorporate 2 teachers and 1 para back into the General Fund (\$180,000)

### Other Post-Employment Benefit (OPEB) Funding

start implementing funding the liability in FY24. In order to have a The OPEB expense line has a recommended funding of \$20,000 to from \$320,000 to \$300,000. This will allow a placeholder for the net zero impact to the budget, the contingency line was reduced budget initiative as the school committee and communities consider the FY24 budget in totality.

# Use of Excess & Deficiency (E&D)

E&D has been certified at \$1,991,921 as of January 17, 2023 (4.35% of our operating budget)

supported that we add another \$200,000 of E&D to reduce the burden on the towns. There is in FY23 to \$600,00 in FY24 to fulfill budget guidance. Once a total projected funding deficit of Initially, Administration was prepared to recommend reducing the use of E&D from \$730,000 approximately \$2.6 million was estimated, it was presented to school committee and \$800,000 use of E&D in the revenue projections.

Administration would also recommend that the Capital Stabilization Fund be funded with an additional E&D appropriation.

## Capital Stabilization Fund

There are two (2) issues currently concerning the school district that the school committee should consider funding the Capital Stabilization Fund. Those projects include:

- Possible PFAS soil remediation at the high school
- Costs associated with building repairs associated with the return of the Union Building to the Town of Dunstable in the summer of 2024.

the Stabilization account using Excess & Deficiency funds. This is roughly 25% of the remaining certified E&D funds (\$1,991,921 less \$800,000 for GF=\$1,191,921 remaining). This is our rainy Administration is recommending including \$300,000 in the capital budgeting process to fund day fund and will not impact the taxpayers of either town.

## The FY24 Budget Book

The Budget Book can be found online:

www.gdrsd.org

Menu: Business & Finance Business & Finance Documents FY2024 Budget

### **Executive Summary**

District Goals

**Budget Timeline** 

FY24 Budget Focus

Total Budget (General Fund, Grants, Revolving Accounts)

**Enrollment Trends** 

FTE's - FY23 vs FY24

### District Overview

Mission and Vision Statements (pg. 14 and 15) School Committee FY24 Budget Goals (pg.16) Administration Organizational Chart (pg. 16) Account Structure - DESE compliant (pg. 20) Budget Policies & Regulations (pg.18)

### Financial Section

Total Revenue Sources (pg. 23)

Total Expenditures by Object (pg. 25)

Total General Fund Revenue (pg.27)

Total General Fund Expenditures by Object (pg.29)

Total General Fund Expenditures by Function (pg. 31)

## Financial Section (cont.)

Total General Fund Expenditures by Function Categories (pg. 33)

Explanation of changes in function codes from FY23 to FY24 (pg.35)

General Fund Budgets by Location (pg.38-58)

Grants and Revolving Fund Budgets (pg.59-75)

# Capital Fund Requests (not Stabilization)

Capital Fund - Feasibility Study Flo Ro (pg.76)

FY20-FY24 Capital Requests (pg. 77-78)

FY25-FY29 Capital Requests (pg. 78-76) \*coming soon

Capital project planning took into consideration attempting to keep the estimated capital assessments as close to the prior 5 year projections as not to create dips and spikes in requests to the towns.

### Debt Obligations

Debt Schedules FY24-FY28 (pg. 81)

Note: Bonding required as a result of a successful town vote to build a new Florence Roche Elementary School is through the Town of Groton and will not appear on district balance sheet.

## Excess & Deficiency (E & D)

Certified Excess & Deficiency FY15-FY23 (pg. 82)

## FY24 Assessment - Groton

FY23

\$24,319,318

Operating Budget:

Debt Service:

Capital:

\$ 482,904

5 577,026

\$25,379,248

Total Assessment

FY24

\$26,800,655

465,796

\$ 542,257

\$27,808,707

## FY24 Assessment - Dunstable

FY23

FY24

Operating Budget:

\$ 7,201,464

\$ 130,148

135,369

\$ 7,909,345

Debt Service:

188,974

\$ 8,227,774

188,281

Capital: Total Assessment

\$7,525,807

# Assessment vs. Current Town Funding

- The assessment to Groton is \$1,262,939 more than the placeholder they have in their preliminary budget.
- year, which is about double what their increase typically The assessment to Dunstable is \$708K more than last is to the school district.

# Assessment vs. Current Town Funding

With the use of E & D appropriation of \$800,000, that already reduced \$618K to Groton's assessment and \$182K to Dunstable.

The assessments will need to be recalculated once the new minimum contributions are released from the state in March.

## Annual Budget Process

- Begin with the 5 year projection
- Review each expenditure from previous year including all FTE's
- Jse data to create a list of needed increases to FTE/other line items
- Determine what can be removed from operational budget to allow for additions
- Review revenue expectations
- Complete draft budget and discuss with town administrators

# Budget Additions-ARPA Positions

### ARPA Positions Included in Budget

BECC 1.0 FTE Integrated Preschool Teacher
BECC 0.8784 FTE Integrated Preschool Para
ELEM 1.0 FTE Reading Interventionist
ELEM 1.0 FTE Reading Interventionist
ELEM 1.0 FTE Math Interventionist
DW 1.0 FTE DEI Coordinator
DW 1.0 FTE School Psychologist
DW 1.0 FTE Special Ed/Reading Specialist

\$73,015 \$26,443 \$100,574 \$66,971 \$104,295 \$92,836 \$76,356 \$96,551 \$89,548	C776 E00
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## **Budget Additions Unforeseen Expenses**

herapeutic contract services & Medical contract services (\$240K)

lealth insurance - currently projected at and 15% increase (\$605K)

Aiddlesex Retirement assessment 9.9% increase (\$42K)

legular Ed Transportation, 3.2% increase, but the additional regional transportation evolving account has \$100K less to offset assessment (\$49K). Special Ed

Itility costs: heating, electricity, water & sewer including new Flo Ro coming online for 3

months (\$220K)

Custodial contracted services 9% increase (\$64K) Teacher retirement incentives (\$85K)

Substitutes - increased usage (\$42K)

araprofessionals - Fluctuates, budgeted for estim. need, but difficult to fill (\$147K)

ABA Contracted Service - Increased usage (\$38K)

ODD placement increase \$300,000

Further Reductions For Consideration - Process

Review all data to identify possible areas for reduction

Prioritize student impact first

Minimize work reductions of current staff

first grade due to estimated class size and reduction of Budget incorporates reduction of 1.0 FTE at Flo Ro at 1.0 FTE at high school due to retirement

## How can we close the gap?

There are 4 ways to close the gap:

- Additional funding from the member towns.
- considered one time funds that may create a funding hole in the future Jse additional alternative revenue sources - Those available to us are ex. E & D, Circuit Breaker, ect.)
- Reduce expenses As this is a level service budget, any reductions would bring the budget below level services.
- A combination of both reducing expenses and applying alternative funding. 7

## 5 Year Budget Projections

Future Budget Projections FY24-FY28 (pg. 84) \*coming soon

### Level Service Budget

have been added to the General Fund, thus town assessments This budget is a level services budget in comparison to FY23. SOME (not all) positions previously funded by ARPA funds will reflect this additional cost.

The recommended operating budget reflects an increase of

### Capital Plan

The Capital Plan assessments to both towns are relatively stable compared to last fiscal year.

Difference	-\$34,766	969\$-	-\$35,462
FY24	\$542,257	\$188,281	\$730,538
FY23	\$577,023	\$188,977	\$766,000
	Groton	Dunstable	Total

### Capital Plan

### Facility Needs

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District Window Shades

PFAS Water Treatment/Remediation

MS North Flooring Tile Replacement

Swallow Ductless Split Project PAC Lighting Replacement

PAC Audio Replacement

\$65,000

\$72,000 \$70,000 Note: Year 1 of 2 \$55,000 Will complete this initiative

\$32,500

\$60,101

### Capital Plan

### **Technology Needs**

•	Replacement of DW Infrastructure	\$75,000 (Net reimb) -
•	Zoom Telephone System	\$46,187
•	Zoom Telephone Purchase	\$30,000
•	Student Chromebook Lease	\$138,500
•	Teacher Device Lease	\$20,000
0	Lab Computer Lease	\$27,500
•	iPad Lease	\$28,750

### Public Hearing

Wednesday, February 15, 2023 at 7:00 pm School Committee Meeting

## Important Upcoming Dates

March 9 - Send Assessment Letters to Towns February 15 - Public Hearing on the Budget March 8 - School Committee/Certify Budget May ?? - Dunstable Annual Town Meeting April 24 - Groton Annual Town Meeting