

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

Groton Town Hall  
173 Main St Groton, MA 01450  
Second Floor Meeting Room  
Wednesday March 29, 2023

*Approved 4/29/23*

**Present for the Finance Committee:** Bud Robertson, Chair; Colby Doody, Vice Chair; David Manugian, Scott Whitefield, Gary Green, Michael Sulprizio, Mary Linskey

**Present for the Select Board:** John Reilly, Chair; Rebecca H. Pine, Vice Chair, Peter Cunningham, Matthew F. Pisani

**Absent:** Alison Manugian

**Also Present:** Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant; Destination Groton Committee: Gregory Sheldon, Joni Parker Roach

**Joint Meeting with the Select Board.**

Bud Robertson called the Finance meeting to order at 7:00 PM

Becky Pine called the Select Board meeting to order at 7:00 PM

**Destination Groton Committee Budget Request**

Gregory Sheldon was present representing the Destination Groton Committee and discussed the prospects for the upcoming year. He said surveys would be utilized for strategic planning and that the Committee is organizing the first annual tourism conference to be held at the Groton Inn. The original budget request was for \$30,000 and has been reduced to \$15,000 subsequently from applying to the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission for a grant to aid in the strategic planning up to \$45,000. Mr. Sheldon said that the State Department of Travel and Tourism requires that the municipality spend a minimum of \$15,000 in the previous fiscal year to qualify for their grant. This would be an important place holder for years to follow with the opportunity to apply for up to \$250,000. Mr. Robertson asked how the \$15,000 would be expended this year. Mr. Sheldon said that \$5,000 would be utilized for the tourism conference in the fall and the remaining \$10,000 would be set aside to meet grant opportunities that contain a matching requirement. For example, the Freedom Ways Grant assists in promoting historical areas however, requires recipients to match all grant monies awarded. The Committee is pursuing State Designation as district recognition, there are only 53 present in the State. The Town of Groton exceeds the requirements for cultural depth and State Representatives have been contacted for their advocacy. Mr. Sulprizio asked what the determining factor is and what the current status is of the Freedom Ways Grant. Ms. Parker Roach said that the Mass Cultural Council determines the recognition. Mr. Sheldon said that the deadline for the submission of the application is in December and that the Committee is still exploring how the money would be expended. The Committee has been engaging the community and observing the public needs. Mr. Sulprizio asked if grant writers are being utilized and said that they are beneficial and provide a competitive edge. Mr. Sheldon said that the Committee is presently eligible for grant writing assistance. Mr. Sheldon said that the 250th anniversary of the United States is occurring in the year 2025; the Destination Groton Committee would like Groton to participate in the event due to the Town's history with the American Revolution. Ms. Parker Roach has been in contact with a representative from Concord and said that the Minuteman National Park receives a million visitors annually and they are expecting 4 million from the celebration. This event would significantly impact hotels and restaurants.

Ms. Linskey questioned the potential revenues in the 10-year plan that had been presented. Mr. Sheldon said that the \$45,000 grant awarded would fund strategic planning including the study being conducted within the next six months. This will aid in their long-term visions of generating revenue for the Town of Groton. Mr. Manugian asked why the \$15,000 is not being requested in the operating budget. Mr. Haddad said that last year the \$15,000 was budgeted however, for FY24 there would have been a deficit in the operating budget and he suggested that the amount be requested separately and funded by free cash if approved.

*Ms. Linskey motioned to support Article 8: Funding for Destination Groton Committee, seconded by Mr. Doody. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

#### WARRANT ARTICLES

*Mr. Manugian motioned to support Article 13: Community Preservation Funding Accounts, seconded by Mr. Green. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

*Mr. Manugian motioned to support Article 14: Community Preservation Funding Recommendations, CPC Proposal A: Housing Trust Funds Request, seconded by Mr. Green. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

*Mr. Manugian motioned to support Article 14: Community Preservation Funding Recommendations, CPC Proposal B: Preservation of Lake Massapoag, seconded by Ms. Linskey. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

*Mr. Sulprizio motioned to support Article 14: Community Preservation Funding Recommendations, CPC Proposal C: Conservation Fund FY-2024, seconded by Ms. Linskey.*

Mr. Green commented that he was unsupportive of the proposal and believes that the Conservation Commission should not have the ability to expend significant amounts to acquire property without receiving additional guidance or approval. He noted that the Town of Groton has one of the highest percentages of owned conservation land. Mr. Manugian suggested that the Conservation Commission reduce their total amount being requested. The Finance Committee agreed that the process of acquiring land should be conducted differently.

*The motion passed. 6-1 Mr. Green-nay*

*Mr. Whitefield motioned to support Article 14: Community Preservation Funding Recommendations, CPC Proposal D: Rebuild Major League Baseball Diamond, seconded by Ms. Linskey. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

Article 14: Community Preservation Funding Recommendations, CPC Proposal E: Construct Softball Diamonds at Cutler Field

Mr. Haddad said that he received an email from Dan Twomey questioning where the lacrosse team would go if the baseball diamond is rebuilt. The Parks Commission has contacted Mr. Twomey, and Don Black (Park Commission) said that there would be room to accommodate both sports. Mr. Haddad said that the issue would be resolved by Town Meeting. *The Finance Committee deferred taking a position on this article.*

*Mr. Green motioned to support Article 14: Community Preservation Funding Recommendations, CPC Proposal F: Housing Coordinator- FY 2024, seconded by Mr. Manugian. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

*Mr. Green motioned to support Article 14: Community Preservation Funding Recommendations, CPC Proposal G: Squannacook River Rail Trail, seconded by Mr. Manugian. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

*Mr. Green motioned to support Article 31: Amend Funding Distribution for Middle School Track, seconded by Mr. Manugian. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

Mr. Haddad said that there was a question regarding Article 29 and the total amount of money being transferred has been calculated to \$85,500. Ms. Dufresne assured that number would remain the same until the Town Meeting. Additional Line-Item Transfers that may be needed prior to year-end would be addressed by July 15<sup>th</sup> as per usual. For now, \$55,000 would be transferred to the Country Club, approximately \$20,000 would be transferred for software for the building inspector and Open Gov permitting, and \$5,355 for the BOH consulting.

*Mr. Green motioned to support Article 29: Current Year Line- Item Transfers, seconded by Mr. Manugian. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

Mr. Haddad said that Article 30: Appropriate Money to Offset the Snow and Ice Deficit would be deferred until the Town Meeting but is expected to approximate \$150,000. The current amount in deficit does not reflect the expenses for the previous storm.

#### Finalize FY24 Operating & Capital Budget

Mr. Haddad displayed the three budget options that had been presented to the Select Board and the Finance Committee on Monday, March 27, 2023. Option #1 states that the Town reduces the Town Manager's proposed municipal budget by another \$239,497 and votes to appropriate \$26,177,213 for the operating assessment of GDRS, plus \$465,796 for the District's Debt Assessment. Option #2 states that the main motion for the Budget would be described as in Option #1, once it is established a member of the Finance Committee immediately amends the motion to reduce the amount by \$239,497. If that motion were to fail then the Town Manager suggests that another motion be made to require the additional \$239,497 be added in. If the amendment were to pass the Select Board would be required to call for a Special Override Election prior to June 30, 2023. Option #3 states that the Select Board calls for an Override Ballot question on the balanced budget and for an additional amount of \$490,547 which would be contingent on the approval of an override at the Annual Town Election. The Select Board voted on Monday night that they would be willing to entertain an override up to \$490,547 based on what the Finance Committee decides for the budget.

Mr. Green commented that the School Committee has the ability to keep returning the same assessment to the Town. Mr. Haddad said that is correct, explaining that a decision needs to be reached by July 1st or a 1/12 (or monthly budget) appropriation would be imposed on the 1.8-million-dollar increase. Mr. Whitefield commented that if the School Committee accepts the Select Board's advice and returns with reducing the \$239,497 then the proposed Town budget would be finalized. Mr. Haddad said that he was hoping that the School Committee would have accepted the balanced budget at their previous meeting and that did not occur. He said that they are scheduled to meet again on Tuesday, April 4, 2023. He recommended that the Finance Committee schedule a meeting simultaneously at the Performing Arts Center along with the Select Board. Mr. Sulprizio suggested watching the School Committee meeting from the Town Hall so there could be further discussion. Mr. Haddad suggested that the Finance Committee take a vote tonight on the recommended budget. If it is voted with a contingent override and the School Committee reduces their assessment then the override can be eliminated. If it stays in place and the vote is supported for an override and the School Committee continues to keep the \$239,497 then the Select Board would then potentially vote on adding the override question to the ballot. The Finance Committee has the opportunity to decline an override and pass a balanced budget. If the School Committee does not reduce \$239,497 then Option #2 would be considered.

Mr. Robertson further discussed the potential scenarios of option #2 and whether the voters at Town Meeting might be supportive of funding the School District with an override. Mr. Haddad said that the override could be solely on the School District and exclude an increase on the municipality side. Ms. Pine said that the Select Board was inclined to not make an override exclusively for school spending.

Mr. Haddad said that the Select Board had unanimously voted on Option #3 which allowed for an override up to \$490,000 including both the town and the district.

A resident of Boston Road asked if the Town of Dunstable is in a position of requiring an override to support their assessment. Mr. Haddad said that the Groton's assessment has always been the driving factor and if Dunstable has been unable to fund the amount, then the School Committee generally reduces the amount and Groton receives a break as well. Mr. Green commented that the Superintendent had indicated that Dunstable was \$300,000 in the red prior to the assessment increase. Mr. Haddad said that the School Committee's current vote unbalances the Town's budget and there needs to be deliberation on where the money would be acquired. Ms. Linskey commented that one of the options discussed on Monday night was that the Town Meeting could require the School Committee to reduce their assessment. Mr. Haddad said that is correct however, the School Committee then has the ability to call for the district wide meeting and the Town would have no option if it were passed.

Mr. Robertson said that he is unsupportive of an override as the deficit is insubstantial. The Town is reducing their budget by \$181,000. The School District is receiving \$400,000 and their total budget is \$45-\$48 million dollars. He believes that the School District can find a way to cover the deficit.

Art Prest, resident, said that he attended the School Committee meeting and the Superintendent advocated for a \$400,000 reduction, after three hours of deliberation the School Committee reduced the amount to approximately \$174,000. He said the vote on April 4th is unknown and that Option #3 is the best choice which allows for a contingency after the School Committee's vote. Mr. Sulprizio said that the alternatives being suggested are not really beneficial and the reductions being proposed on both sides are going to affect the community significantly. He said the decision needs to be determined by the ratepayers.

Mr. Whitefield questioned why Mr. Robertson is worried about requesting an override. Mr. Robertson said that once an override is requested this year there is potential to continue the pattern adding more burden on ratepayers year after year. He agreed that there are tough reductions being proposed. He asked Mr. Haddad what the budget would be if an override fails at Town Meeting. Mr. Haddad said the balanced budget would exclude the \$490,547. Mr. Green said the way the Finance Committee votes on the motions would allow for a balanced budget contingent on the approval of an override or denial, either decision determined at the Town Meeting would provide a budget. Any of the monies that need to be raised above the levy is passed separately contingent on the override.

Mr. Whitefield commented that the Finance Committee had decided previously that they would reduce the fire fighter and the communication department wages and questioned why it was shown on the budget displayed. Mr. Haddad requested that the Finance Committee revisit the positions if there is a request for an override. Mr. Haddad said that he made reductions to establish a balanced budget, the 1.6 million dollars was satisfied, however, the School Committee is requesting for an additional \$240,000. This provides the Finance Committee an opportunity to consider if those positions should be returned to the budget. Mr. Haddad said that the Select Board voted that they would entertain adding an override question on the ballot if the Finance Committee determines that an override is necessary. Mr. Whitefield said that if the School Committee insists that the \$239,000 be funded that the Finance Committee should support only that amount being requested. Mr. Doody said that he was disappointed in the suggestion of reducing kindergarten tuition with the proposed reductions for teacher positions. He said he does not support an override, however, if there is a need for an override, as a resident he would want to see the municipal side benefit as well. Mr. Green commented the School Committee is utilizing revolving funds and the tuition revenue would not impact the total assessment.

Mr. Whitefield commented that the procedure when voting on budgets is completed section by section. He questioned why line items cannot be broken down. Mr. Haddad said that the motions would be contingent then broken down into the two questions, as shown in Option #3. Ms. Pine noted that there

are some residents who are unaware of the reductions that have already occurred by both the Town and School Committee. They are going to question why the amount cannot be shared.

Mr. Prest agreed that the general public is not going to understand the four options discussed tonight. These reductions being proposed by the municipality are critical positions for the community. He said after observing the minimal changes in the amount of employees throughout the years 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 for the School District there was a drastic increase in 2020 to accommodate the impacts of covid. He was displeased that the reductions within the school are teacher positions and not administrative positions.

Phil Francisco, resident, said Mr. Haddad was making an effort to create a balanced budget and those temporary reductions would end up affecting FY25. He agreed that the positions being eliminated are essential and should be included with the school deficit if an override is presented.

Mr. Reilly asked prior to the school assessment if those reduced amounts were included in the balanced budget. Mr. Haddad said that the balanced budget included the 1.2 million dollars and the items listed on the proposed reduction.

Mr. Green proposed that the Finance Committee review the items that the Town Manager reduced in the budget and vote on them independently knowing if they are supported an override would be necessary. He said that the Finance Committee needs to decide if these items should be added only contingent on the School Committee requesting for an override.

*Mr. Green motioned that the Finance Committee add the reduced items contingent if the School Committee requests for an override.*

Mr. Green said that if the School Committee determines that an override is unnecessary then the reduced items would be withheld from the budget. If the Finance Committee votes to add one of the specific line items into the budget the municipality side would be required to request an override.

The Finance Committee agreed that it is potentially premature to vote on the suggestion of an override. The decision could enable the way the School Committee votes. Mr. Whitefield suggested that the vote be taken after the School Committee meeting on Tuesday.

*Mr. Green motioned that the Finance Committee vote to include the municipal budget in an override if the School Committee votes for an override, seconded by Mr. Sulprizio.*

Mr. Robertson questioned if the Finance Committee supported in participating in an override and the School Committee still requests the \$239,000 where does that leave them. Mr. Haddad said there are two things to consider: first: whether the Select Board is willing to entertain an override, and second: there is a list of \$ 239,000 of reductions that need to be eliminated to ensure a balanced budget prior to Town Meeting. Ms. Linskey said that an educated decision cannot be made prior to the School Committee meeting. Mr. Haddad reminded the members that the School Committee had presented their budget and voted 6-1. There needs to be three people to change their vote. Mr. Green asked what occurs if the School Committee decides to reduce the deficit to \$150,000. Mr. Haddad said at the School Committee meeting Fay Raynor suggested adding \$111,000 and Dr. Chesson suggested utilizing the E & D funds. Mr. Green noted that the School Committee may be concerned with the balance of the E & D funds. If there is an override the Town should consider adding back the municipal reductions.

Mr. Green and Mr. Whitefield said that they were both uncomfortable representing that the Finance Committee is willing to pass an override. Mr. Haddad reiterated that the School Committee already knows that the Select Board is willing to entertain an override. Mr. Sulprizio was supportive of voting on each line item, in hopes that the School Committee is making the necessary reductions. Ms. Pine commented that a balanced budget has been proposed by the municipality and the School Committee has not reached one, she said that the Town needs to be prepared and reiterated that Option #3 is the best way to proceed.

Mr. Pisani commented that the municipality side has been collaborating to solve the deficit for the school budget. The School Committee has not shared partnership and is unwilling to schedule an emergency meeting to resolve the issues. Mr. Reilly said that he encounters numerous people daily and they are concerned that the school is not making the appropriate reductions. He said that most of the tax dollars are provided to the School District. He said that he supports bringing the decision of an override to the ratepayers. The School Committee did not agree entirely with Dr. Chesson's reductions and proceeded to review each line item. 1.2 million dollars was budgeted for the School District and every year the budgeted amount has been very comparable however, this year the amount was off by 2.1 million dollars. The budget needs to be reviewed further and additional reductions need to be made.

Mr. Robertson explained that voting no to an override does not adjust the district's budget; then the Town would be required to adjust their budget. Mr. Green said that the Finance Committee would have the ability to modify their vote after the School Committee votes.

Mr. Green withdrew his original motion. After several language changes and recommendations Mr. Green made the following motion:

*Mr. Green motioned that the Finance Committee present a budget to the Town with the option for an override, seconded by Mr. Sulprizio.*

Judy Anderson, resident, said that the question is very simple: Does the Committee want an override or not? She said if the answer is yes to an override the School Committee will mostly likely not consider reducing their budget.

Mr. Green said it is impossible to predict if next year the Town and the School Committee would be in the same position they are presented with this year.

*The motion was denied by a roll call vote. Sulprizio-aye, Mr. Manugian-aye, Mr. Green- nay, Mr. Robertson-nay, Mr. Doody-nay, Mr. Whitefield-nay, Ms. Linskey-nay. 2-5*

Mr. Haddad asked the Finance Committee to approve the \$49,505,757 balanced budget, the amount to include the \$1.6 million increase to the Groton Dunstable Regional School District.

*Mr. Manugian motioned to accept the Town Manager's proposed \$49,505,757 balanced budget, seconded by Mr. Whitefield. The motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote. 7-0*

Mr. Haddad said that the School Committee is scheduled to meet on Tuesday, April 4, 2023 to discuss and vote on the Budget. There would be no opportunity for public comments at that time.

The Select Board meeting was adjourned at 9:27 PM.

### **Meeting Minutes**

*Mr. Manugian motioned to approve the meeting minutes from March 04, 2023, seconded by Ms. Linskey. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

*Mr. Manugian motioned to approve the meeting minutes from March 08, 2023, seconded by Ms. Linskey. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

*Mr. Manugian motioned to approve the meeting minutes from March 13, 2023 as amended, seconded by Ms. Linskey. The motion passed unanimously. 7-0*

The Finance Committee meeting was adjourned 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristine Fox  
per diem Minute Taker  
Town of Groton



**Town Manager**  
Mark W. Haddad

## **TOWN OF GROTON**

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## **Destination Groton Committee**

Greg Sheldon, *Chair*  
Jeff Gordon, *Vice Chair*  
Mairi Elliott, *Clerk*  
Julie Platt, *Member*  
Joni Parker-Roach, *Member*



### **Finance Committee Meeting - March 29, 2023**

**The Destination Groton Committee is requesting \$15,000. For the FY 2024.**

#### ***Article 8: Funding for Destination Groton Committee***

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, and/or borrow pursuant to any applicable statute, a sum or sums of money, to be expended by the Town Manager in Fiscal Year 2024 and thereafter, for the purpose of providing funding for the Destination Groton Committee to carry out the Charge of the Committee and all costs associated and related thereto, or to take any other action relative thereto.

#### ***Destination Groton Committee***

#### **Select Board:**

#### **Finance Committee:**

**Summary:** The purpose of this Article is to provide \$15,000 in funding for the Destination Groton Committee to carry out its charge, which is to pursue a course of action intended to engage all Town stakeholders, including the business and non-profit communities, Town leaders, Federal and State elected officials and Town residents in a series of public information forums, economic research and data analysis, in order to, through a ten year Strategic Plan, prepare for an increase in visitors to town while at the same time work to preserve its rural small-town charm. The purpose of this request is to meet a state required minimum local Town expenditure in a prior fiscal year of \$15,000 in order to qualify for major matching grants in Destination Development, Historic Preservation, Infrastructure, and Cultural programs that promote Groton for increased visitors. A portion of this funding will be used to set aside for local match opportunities and in producing the First Annual Tourism Conference to promote Groton as a gateway for the region.



## DGC Operating Goals and Mission: FY24

- The Destination Groton Committee has embarked on a comprehensive marketing campaign to promote Groton and its many attractions while working to preserve the beauty and charm of the Town we all love.
- The DGC has launched a new logo and website that has received broad regional press coverage and people are taking notice. The response to date has been a wonderful source of civic pride! ***Groton - Enjoy the Experience!***
- The DGC has formed fifteen regional partners to date including Local, State, and Federal elected officials, Regional Planning Commissions and Regional Chambers covering a 250 square mile area from Fitchburg to Lowell. This year, we will continue to increase our network of regional partners.
- DGC has an interest in increasing local tax revenues to the town through attracting targeted economic investment and thereby, derive the benefits from the economic impact a clean industry like tourism will bring.
- Our agenda for the year is to produce a quarterly Newsletter; conduct a Townwide Survey; apply for a series of development grants; submit an application for the state to designate Groton as a "Cultural District"; produce a Regional Tourism Conference; and conduct the necessary research and data analysis for a ten-year Strategic Blueprint.
- We heard from the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission regarding the January 30 Select Board letter requesting District Local Technical Assistance. It was accepted! A contract has been executed with a scope of services that will equate to \$45,000 in value!
- We asked the Select Board at their March 27 meeting to sign a letter requesting support for a potential grant from the MRPC "Augmentation Funds". The Select Board agreed. This grant, should we win it, would cover the cost of hiring a grant writer.
- Our FY24 plan is to leverage funds from the Town to meet our operating goals and to secure grants and attract matching funds from a variety of federal, state, and regional sources.

### **Proposed FY 24 Budget:**

- Regional Tourism Conference: \$ 5,000.
- Matching Grants: \$10,000.

## **Destination Groton Committee 2022 Annual Report**

Charged by the Town Select Board in December 2021, DGC began meeting in January 2022.

### **Background**

Groton has long been recognized for its rich history, extraordinary landscape, and small-town character. In recent years, the arts, culture, fine dining, recreation, education, and hospitality have enhanced Groton's destination reputation. The Destination Groton Committee's Mission is to tell Groton's quintessential New England story and to help bring it to life. The Committee's Goals include engaging all stakeholders; collaborating; communicating; celebrating; and building civic pride. The Committee's Objectives include establish an Advisory Group; conduct public forums; build regional partnerships; promote Groton's many attractions; maintain the Town's quality of life and contribute to Town revenues.

### **Organization**

The five member Committee will oversee and manage a series of specific infrastructure, development, event, marketing and finance initiatives by working collaboratively with Town stakeholders and regional partners. DGC members include Chair Greg Sheldon, Vice Chair Jeff Gordon, Clerk Mairi Elliott, Julie Platt, Joni Parker-Roach.

### **Destination Groton Committee Activities 2022**

Participated in MA Municipal Association "One Stop" Economic Development Grant application Webinar. Met with the Planning Board to discuss including the Destination Groton concept in the Master Plan Update. Met with State elected officials including Senator John Cronin, Senator Edward Kennedy, and State Representative Dan Sena as well as State Representative Margaret Scarsdale and Town officials from Pepperell to discuss forming a strategic partnership. We are scheduled to meet U.S Rep. Lori Trahan in February. Met with the Executive Director of the MA Office of Travel and Tourism Keiko Orall last spring to discuss potential state grant opportunities. Met with Town Leaders including Select Board Chair, Town Manager, Groton History Center, Groton Historical Commission, and members of the Trails Committee and the Sustainability Committee. Worked with Nashoba Valley Living magazine to assist in publishing a Fall/Winter edition dedicated to Groton. Met with and discussed forming regional partners with the Nashoba Valley Chamber, Visit North Central Massachusetts, Northern Middlesex Council of Governments, Montachusett Regional Planning Commission. In May and June, a series of three Public Forums were held with approximately 100 participants. A synopsis can be found on our Town website. Concerns were expressed about the need for traffic mitigation strategies and infrastructure investments, including traffic calming, noise, directional signage, and the need for more parking in Town Center and at recreational trails. Participants expressed the need for a strong, visible Visitors Center and other municipal services, such as public rest rooms. DGC will conduct a Townwide Survey seeking to weigh public support for specific programs and improvements as outlined from our Public Forums. The DGC will organize a Working Group to assist in researching and drafting a Strategic Implementation Plan to submit to the Town Manager and Select Board in 2023. DGC officially unveiled the Destination Groton Website, Logo, and Tagline for the Select Board and the public to see.

- Visit website: [www.destinationgroton.com](http://www.destinationgroton.com)
- DGC Town website: [www.grotonma.gov/destination-groton](http://www.grotonma.gov/destination-groton)