

**FINANCE COMMITTEE / SELECT BOARD**  
**Meeting Minutes**

FinCom Approved 4/1/25

Tuesday, March 18, 2025 @ 7:00 P.M.  
Meeting Virtually via ZOOM

**Present for the Finance Committee:** Bud Robertson, Chair; David Manugian, Kristina Lengyel, Gary Green, Mary Linskey, Scott Whitefield, Mike Sulprizio

**Present for the Select Board:** Peter Cunningham; Alison Manugian, Chair; Matt Pisani, Becky Pine

**Also Present:** Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Hannah Moller, Treasurer/Collector; Patricia Dufresne, Assistant Finance Director; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant; Megan Foster, Principal Assessor; Melisa Doig, HR Director; Art Cheeks, Fire Chief

7:00 P.M. Mr. Robertson called the FinCom meeting to order; Ms. Manugian called the Select Board meeting to order.

Mr. Robertson reviewed the agenda. Mr. Haddad noted that he hopes to have the structure of the proposed tax override questions delineated by the end of the meeting tonight.

**FY26 Balanced Budget Summary:** Mr. Haddad explained that his original proposed FY26 Operating Budget of \$52,046,682 included an increase of \$474k for Town expenses and approximately \$1.3 million for the GDRSD assessment. The revised budget, after adjusting for health insurance increases requires another \$41,557 on the municipal side, and is balanced at \$52,448,239. This was accomplished by increasing revenue estimates for motor vehicle excise, interest earnings, PILOT payments and meals/room excise taxes. In reply to a question from Ms. Pine, Mr. Haddad emphasized that this budget does NOT include any tax override amounts. The number he presented is only for the FY26 balanced budget, which he asked the Finance Committee to take a position on. Mr. Robertson asked for a motion to that effect.

**On a motion by Mr. Manugian, seconded by Ms. Linskey, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to support the FY26 Balanced Operating Budget as presented. Roll Call Vote: Mr. Manugian – Aye, Ms. Lengyel – Aye, Ms. Linskey – Aye, Mr. Whitefield – Aye, Mr. Green – Aye, Mr. Sulprizio – Aye, Mr. Robertson – Aye (7-0-0)**

**FY26 Budget Contingent on Override Vote:** Mr. Haddad proposed a potential Tax Override Question 1 that would provide \$28,451,198 to the GDRSD (an override of \$673,250). This would add \$.25 to the tax rate and approximately \$177 to the annual property tax bill for the average household. Mr. Haddad also proposed a potential Tax Override Question 2 that would add 6 additional Fire Fighters to the municipal budget at a total cost of \$780,904 (including the related pension adjustment for FY28). The cost for FY26 would be \$630,904 (without the \$150k delayed pension costs). This would add \$.22 to the tax rate and approximately \$156 to the annual property tax bill for the average household. After a brief discussion the members generally agreed that it was important to include the pension cost in the information supplied to voters even though it would not be assessed to the Town for two years after the Fire Fighters were hired.

Mr. Haddad noted that GDRSD is not yet ready with a five-year projection; they are waiting to see the results of the operational audit currently underway, and also any impacts from Project 211. Mr. Robertson opined that the Town should limit any budget projections to three years. Mr. Haddad agreed to produce a three-year projection.

Mr. Haddad then proposed a potential Tax Override Question 3 that would add only 2 Fire Fighters at a cost of \$210,301. This option would add \$.07 to the tax rate and approximately \$50 to the annual property tax bill for the average household. He noted that the proposed budget without any tax overrides would add approximately \$375 to the average tax bill, \$113 of which is due to Florence Roche school construction debt service. The group discussed the tax impacts of various override scenarios. Mr. Haddad strongly advocated for providing no more than 2 override questions on the ballot (funding for GDRSD and 6 Fire Fighters). He feels that this would help eliminate voter confusion. Irrespective of the closure of NVMC, Mr. Haddad believes Fire Chief Cheeks has fully justified his need for 6 additional Fire Fighters. Adding only 2 would not provide sufficient coverage in the event of simultaneous calls. Mr. Robertson agreed that services provided in both the school and the Fire Department would decline dramatically without tax override support. He believes that at least 2 Fire Fighters are needed, but he is not convinced about adding more than that. The population of students and elderly in Town is roughly similar, and both stand to be impacted by the override proposals. He added that there are still some unknowns regarding next steps for filling the gap caused by the NVMC closure. He suggested an unemotional approach and favors supporting the GDRSD override and combining it with an override on the Town side for 2 Fire Fighters. Additional Fire Fighters could be added in future years if the data support doing so. This will stop the service decline for both students and the elderly in Groton.

Mr. Haddad pointed out that the District will continue to need year over year tax overrides until they resolve their structural deficit. However, if the override is passed to hire 6 Fire Fighters, the Fire Department should not need additional support for many years to come. He reiterated that the true need in the Department is for 6, and requesting funds to meet the full need will help to avoid "voter fatigue" that occurs when tax overrides are requested routinely. Ms. Linskey agreed with this statement. Mr. Sulprizio would prefer to augment the Fire Department staff incrementally. He feels that there are so many variables in an operational budget that the actual need may change next year or the year after. The Department may be able to operate effectively on fewer than 6. Mr. Haddad does not believe an incremental approach is viable, but Mr. Sulprizio believes there is value in keeping the request "digestible." Mr. Pisani recounted a personal story of having to fight a fire at H&V with insufficient staffing. He said that while on-call members are important, they are not the solution here. He agrees with Mr. Haddad that we should meet the public safety needs in the Fire Department once and for all. Ms. Manugian supported this saying that the Select Board has a responsibility to communicate the true need, which equates to 6 Fire Fighters. Multi-year tax override requests are unrealistic. Additionally, many other towns are also recruiting Fire Fighters currently; by delaying the hiring process Groton runs the risk of overwhelming those officers it already has and potentially losing them. Mr. Cunningham reminded the group that the Fire Department has been asking for additional staff for at least 5 years. The hospital closure has exacerbated a problem that was already underway. He believes the residents should be informed of the drastic impact they will see in services if the override fails. He would like to see the override requests for the school and Town combined as they complement one another. Mr. Green pointed out the importance that both boards are aligned with regard to the messaging. He urges the Select Board to separate the tax override questions on the ballot, as the

to the messaging. He urges the Select Board to separate the tax override questions on the ballot, as the results of the vote will make it easier to determine what the voters value. He agreed that it is compelling to ask for funding for 6 Fire Fighters, but he doesn't want to burden tax payers if the Department can make do with fewer. Adding only 2 more will result in at least 3 per shift.

Ms. Lengyel reminded the group that many compelling stories are heard by board members during meetings but not ever heard by taxpayers. She feels that the group has to determine how to articulate to the voters the value of hiring the full 6. She is concerned that separating the ballot questions will divide the voters and lead to failure of both requests. She asked if it is even possible to hire all 6 in one year. Mr. Haddad would like to ask the Fire Chief to answer that, but he feels that if hiring is phased in, the Department will be short-staffed for the next 2 or 3 years. Mr. Whitefield feels that 6 is the right number. He went on to say that while we have a great deal of data on this subject, there is little in the way of analysis. Additional efforts can be made to analyze the data we have and better quantify the actual need. Trying to convince voters with emotional arguments is less likely to succeed than doing so through proper data analysis. He went on to say that he believes an override of more than \$1 Million is likely to fail; it is wiser to give the voters an option by providing 2 separate questions so they can choose either one or both. Ms. Pine said she could not support an override request for 6 Fire Fighters. She believes that is too many to even recruit and on-board. She would prefer a gradual approach. She does not want to push for an ideal for the Fire Department, but something less than ideal for the School District. If we ask for only 2, we can explain to voters that we are willing to live with something less than ideal for both the School and the Fire Department. She supports a single tax override ballot question for the School and 2 Fire Fighters. She emphasized that the Fire Department has grown rapidly over the last several years. Also, she has received letters from constituents advocating for a combined tax override question, in the interest of avoiding divisiveness.

The group briefly discussed the percentage of overlapping calls received since the closure of NVMC. Ms. Manugian advised against trying to oversimplify the problem; the issue is very complicated and there is no good answer. She favors requesting an override for 6 Fire Fighters. A brief discussion ensued regarding the best way to format the ballot questions. Mr. Haddad agreed that 2 additional officers won't provide the resolution that is needed, and coming back for additional overrides in future years erodes the voters confidence in Town leadership. Voters often feel that tax overrides are wrong or illegal, but they are simply a way to allow the Town to provide more services beyond the restraints of Proposition 2 ½. Mr. Haddad is firmly in favor of providing a single override question for each entity (School & Fire Department). The group discussed the impact of various pass/fail override scenarios.

Mr. Robertson moved the question. Mr. Haddad received permission to read into the record a comment from one of the attendees at the meeting. The attendee opined that as both override requests are important, the attendee wished to advocate for a single combined ballot question so as not to lose either option.

**Mr. Cunningham moved to recommend a single combined tax override question on the ballot to meet the needs of the GDRSD and to add six (6) Fire Fighters to the Fire Department. Ms. Manugian seconded this motion. Mr. Pisani clarified that it would be preferable to separate the two motions. Mr. Cunningham agreed to amend his motion to support the Fire Department override request for six (6) additional Fire Fighters. Ms. Manugian seconded the amended motion. The Vote: Mr. Cunningham – Aye, Ms. Manugian – Aye, Mr. Pisani-Aye and Ms. Pine-Nay. (3-1-0)**

**The Vote: Ms. Linskey-Aye, Mr. Manugian-Aye, Mr. Whitefield-Aye, Mr. Sulprizio-Aye, Mr. Green-Aye, Ms. Lengyel-Deferred, Mr. Robertson-Deferred. (5-0-2)**

Mr. Robertson noted that he deferred taking a position until the Select Board decides whether to combine the ballot votes into a single question; he believes the override request will fail unless it is combined with the school district request.

**Mr. Green moved to recommend adding six (6) additional Fire Fighters to the budget presented to Town Meeting.**

Mr. Green explained that he is not yet convinced that the data supports a need to hire as many as 6 additional Fire Fighters. Ms. Lengyel agreed with his statement, saying she is not opposed to putting it on the ballot, but voters should support the number that they value. Mr. Haddad pointed out that Town Meeting will want to know what the FinCom recommends. Discussion ensued regarding whether FinCom should decide on and recommend a particular number of additional Fire Fighters rather than presenting options for the voters to choose. Mr. Robertson felt that FinCom needs to make a recommendation as to the number of Fire Fighters to add to the budget. Mr. Green reiterated that he supports presenting the budget, but not recommending a particular number of Fire Fighters. Mr. Whitefield said that FinCom has to make recommendations based on the information in hand, even if some of the group members are uncomfortable with the rigor of the analysis done. If that information is not convincing, then the members can vote against it. He believes that it is a bad idea to keep going back to the voters to ask for additional hires; if the right answer is probably somewhere between zero and six, then support six.

No second was received for Mr. Green's motion.

FinCom positions on Town Meeting Warrant Articles:

FinCom agreed to recommend to Town Meeting Articles 1 thru 7:

1. Hear Reports
2. Elected Officials Compensation
3. Wage & Classification Schedule
4. FY26 OPEB Contribution
5. FY26 Annual Operating Budget
6. FY26 Annual Capital Budget
7. CPA Funding Accounts
  
8. CPA Funding Recommendations: FinCom deferred taking a position on Article 8 until CPA makes final project decisions.

FinCom took no positions on Articles 9 thru 20 (no financial component) excepting Article 10:

9. Proposed Amendments to Groton Charter
10. (Article recommended below)
11. Amend Chapter 81 Town Meeting Code
12. Disposition of Hoyts Wharf Town Owned Land
13. Amend Chapter 25 Demolition Delay Code

to the use and management of the Conservation Fund. He would also like them to present an annual report to the Select Board and Finance Committee detailing fund balance, expenditures, anticipated funding needs, and any other relevant policy updates. The group was generally in agreement with the proposed new language. Mr. Green will send the exact language to Ms. Dufresne for incorporation into the Financial Policy document, and the updated version can be voted at a subsequent FinCom meeting. Mr. Robertson requested that the Conservation Commission be notified of the proposed changes so they can comment if they wish.

The Finance Committee and Select Board meetings were adjourned at 9:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Patricia Dufresne, Assistant Finance Director

**TOWN OF GROTON  
FISCAL YEAR 2026  
TAX LEVY CALCULATIONS**

Revised: 3/15/2025

**FY 2026 PROPOSED EXPENDITURES**

**TOWN MANAGER - Proposed Budget**

General Government	2,565,835	
Land Use Departments	549,503	
Protection of Persons and Property	4,864,896	
Regional School Districts	29,075,470	
Department of Public Works	2,475,216	
Library and Citizen Services	2,439,509	
Debt Service	5,555,403	
Employee Benefits	4,922,406	

**Sub-Total - Operating Budget** \$ 52,448,239

**A. TOTAL DEPARTMENTAL BUDGET REQUESTS**

\$ 52,448,239

**B. CAPITAL BUDGET REQUESTS**

\$ 899,435

**C. ENTERPRISE FUND REQUESTS**

\$ 3,338,093

**D. COMMUNITY PRESERVATION REQUEST**

**OTHER AMOUNTS TO BE RAISED**

1. Amounts certified for tax title purposes	\$ -
2. Debt and interest charges not included	\$ -
3. Final court judgments	\$ -
4. Total Overlay deficits of prior years	\$ -
5. Total cherry sheet offsets	\$ 32,311
6. Revenue deficits	\$ -
7. Offset Receipts	\$ -
8. Authorized deferral of Teachers' Pay	\$ -
9. Snow and Ice deficit	\$ -
10. Other	\$ -

**E. TOTAL OTHER AMOUNTS TO BE RAISED**

\$ 32,311

**F. STATE AND COUNTY CHERRY SHEET CHARGES**

\$ 104,498

**G. ALLOWANCE FOR ABATEMENTS AND EXEMPTIONS**

\$ 150,000

**TOTAL PROPOSED EXPENDITURES**

\$ 56,972,576

**FY 2026 ESTIMATED RECEIPTS**

ESTIMATED TAX LEVY			
Levy Limit	\$	39,317,497	
Debt Exclusion	\$	5,258,050	
<b>A. ESTIMATED TAX LEVY</b>	\$		44,575,547
<b>B. CHERRY SHEET ESTIMATED RECEIPTS</b>	\$		1,192,703
<b>C. LOCAL RECEIPTS NOT ALLOCATED</b>	\$		5,568,327
<b>D. OFFSET RECEIPTS</b>	\$		-
<b>E. ENTERPRISE FUNDS</b>	\$		3,552,095
<b>F. COMMUNITY PRESERVATION FUNDS</b>	\$		-
<b>G. FREE CASH</b>	\$		603,855
<b>OTHER AVAILABLE FUNDS</b>			
1. Stabilization Fund	\$	-	
2. Capital Asset Fund	\$	819,435	
3. GDRSD Capital Asset Fund	\$	-	
4. EMS/Conservation Fund	\$	530,614	
5. Bond Surplus Transfer	\$	-	
6. Local Access Cable RRFA	\$	130,000	
<b>H. OTHER AVAILABLE FUNDS</b>	\$		1,480,049
<b>TOTAL ESTIMATED RECEIPTS</b>	\$		56,972,576
<b>FY 2026 SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>	\$		(0)

3/18/25

## Contingent Budget - Additional Requested Amount for Override Questions To Be Held at Annual Town Election on Tuesday, May 20, 2025

### Question #1 - Additional Funding for Groton Dunstable Regional School District Assessment

Line Department/Description	FY 2026		FY 2026		Additional Tax Rate Impact	Impact on Average Tax Bill
	Proposed Within Levy	Additional Amount Requested	Proposed With Override			
1410 GDRSD Operating Assessment	\$ 27,777,948	\$ 673,250	\$ 28,451,198	\$ 0.25	\$ 177	
<b>Total</b>	\$ 27,777,948	\$ 673,250	\$ 28,451,198	\$ 0.25	\$ 177	

### Question #2 - Additional Funding to Add Six (6) Firefighters to the Groton Fire Department

1311 Fire Department Wages	\$ 1,367,470	\$ 446,704	\$ 1,814,174	\$ 0.16	\$ 113
1312 Fire Department Expenses	\$ 225,646	\$ 34,200	\$ 259,846	\$ 0.01	\$ 7
3010 Health Insurance/Employee Expenses	\$ 1,906,470	\$ 150,000	\$ 2,056,470	\$ 0.05	\$ 35
<b>Total</b>	\$ 3,499,586	\$ 630,904	\$ 4,130,490	\$ 0.22	\$ 156

### Question #3 - Additional Funding to Add Two (2) Firefighters to the Groton Fire Department

1311 Fire Department Wages	\$ 1,367,470	\$ 148,901	\$ 1,516,371	\$ 0.05	\$ 35
1312 Fire Department Expenses	\$ 225,646	\$ 11,400	\$ 237,046	\$ -	\$ -
3010 Health Insurance/Employee Expenses	\$ 1,906,470	\$ 50,000	\$ 1,956,470	\$ 0.02	\$ 14
<b>Total</b>	\$ 3,499,586	\$ 210,301	\$ 3,709,887	\$ 0.07	\$ 50



# IMPACT OF OVERRIDE ON TAX BILL

## Override for Groton Dunstable Regional School District

Override Request	\$	673,250
Amount Impacting FY 2026 Tax Rate	\$	673,250
Anticipated FY 2026 Tax Rate Increase	\$	0.26
Impact on Average Tax Bill (Home Valued at \$707,877)	\$	177
Impact on \$100,000 of Value	\$	25
Impact on \$200,000 of Value	\$	50
Impact on \$300,000 of Value	\$	76
Impact on \$400,000 of Value	\$	100
Impact on \$500,000 of Value	\$	125
Impact on \$600,000 of Value	\$	150
Impact on \$700,000 of Value	\$	175
Impact on \$707,877 of Value	\$	177
Impact on \$800,000 of Value	\$	200
Impact on \$900,000 of Value	\$	225
Impact on \$1,000,000 of Value	\$	250

## Override for Groton Fire Department

Override Request	\$	280,301
Amount Impacting FY 2026 Tax Rate	\$	210,301
Anticipated FY 2026 Tax Rate Increase	\$	0.07
Impact on Average Tax Bill (Home Valued at \$707,877)	\$	50
Impact on \$100,000 of Value	\$	7
Impact on \$200,000 of Value	\$	14
Impact on \$300,000 of Value	\$	21
Impact on \$400,000 of Value	\$	28
Impact on \$500,000 of Value	\$	35
Impact on \$600,000 of Value	\$	42
Impact on \$700,000 of Value	\$	49
Impact on \$707,877 of Value	\$	50
Impact on \$800,000 of Value	\$	56
Impact on \$900,000 of Value	\$	63
Impact on \$1,000,000 of Value	\$	70

## TOTAL OVERRIDE REQUEST

Override Request	\$	933,551
Amount Impacting FY 2026 Tax Rate	\$	883,551
Anticipated FY 2026 Tax Rate Increase	\$	0.32
Impact on Average Tax Bill (Home Valued at \$707,877)	\$	227
Impact on \$100,000 of Value	\$	32
Impact on \$200,000 of Value	\$	64
Impact on \$300,000 of Value	\$	96
Impact on \$400,000 of Value	\$	128
Impact on \$500,000 of Value	\$	160
Impact on \$600,000 of Value	\$	192
Impact on \$700,000 of Value	\$	224
Impact on \$707,877 of Value	\$	227
Impact on \$800,000 of Value	\$	256
Impact on \$900,000 of Value	\$	288
Impact on \$1,000,000 of Value	\$	320