

SELECT BOARD /FINANCE COMMITTEE HYBRID MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, JULY 14, 2025
APPROVED

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

Select Board Members Absent: Peter Cunningham;

Finance Committee Members Present: Bud Robertson, Chair; Mary Linskey, Vice Chair; Gary Green; Scott Whitefield;

Finance Committee Members Virtually Present: David Manugian;

Finance Committee Members Absent: Michael Sulprizio; Kristina Lengyel;

Also Present: Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair; Patricia DuFresne, Town Accountant; Arthur Cheeks, Groton Fire Chief; Terrence Gardner, Deputy Fire Chief; Members of the Groton and Littleton Fire Department.

Chair Pisani called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and reviewed the agenda.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Haddad announced that on Wednesday, July 30th, the Town Hall will close from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. for an Employee Appreciation BBQ.

Groton Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks announced that, after months of searching for a new Deputy Fire Chief, they have selected Terrence Gardner, a former Lieutenant with 18 years of service at the Littleton Fire Department. Chief Cheeks said they are excited to welcome him aboard. The Town Clerk, Dawn Dunbar, was present to swear in Deputy Chief Gardner. Mr. Haddad, Chief Cheeks, the Select Board, and the Groton and Littleton Fire Departments congratulated Deputy Chief Gardner.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

None

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- 1. Consider Ratifying the Town Manager's Appointment of Trevor Bettencourt, Anthony Yafrate, Joshua Consolo, Brody Duffy, Trevor Haggerty, Brecan Novak, Colin Werth, and Colin O'Brien to the Groton Country Club Golf Staff and Layla Barie, Sarah Pudans, and Grace Slocum as Groton Country Club Lifeguards.**

Mr. Reilly made a motion to ratify the Town Manager's Appointment of Trevor Bettencourt, Anthony Yafrate, Joshua Consolo, Brody Duffy, Trevor Haggerty, Brecan Novak, Colin Werth, and Colin O'Brien to the Groton Country Club Golf Staff and Layla Barie, Sarah Pudans, and Grace Slocum as Groton Country Club Lifeguards. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Proposed Select Board Meeting Schedule through Labor Day.

Monday, July 21, 2025	No Meeting
Monday, July 28, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, August 4, 2025	No Meeting
Monday, August 11, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting

Mr. Haddad announced that Dawn Dunbar, the Town Clerk, will take on a new role as the Assistant Town Administrator and Human Resources Director for the Town of Harvard. He congratulated Ms. Dunbar and wished her the best of luck in her new position.

Mr. Haddad explained that they now have an important appointment to make and wished to expedite the process, emphasizing the importance of filling this role as soon as possible. He said that the Town Charter does not have a provision for appointing an acting Town Clerk. According to the Charter, the Town Manager is required to present two qualified candidates to the Select Board for consideration. The position has already been advertised in the Groton Herald, the MMA Beacon, and on the Town of Groton website, and they have received 18 applications so far. The application deadline to apply is July 31, 2025. Mr. Haddad has created a Search Committee that includes himself, Jason Kauppi (Moderator), Raquel Majeski (DEI Chair), John Amaral (Omni Properties), Melisa Doig (Human Resources Director), and Kara Cruikshank (Executive Assistant). Interviews are scheduled for the week of August 4th. Mr. Haddad aims to narrow the candidates down to two to present to the Select Board during their meeting on August 11th to make a decision.

Monday, August 18, 2025	No Meeting
Monday, August 25, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, September 1, 2025	No Meeting (Labor Day)
Monday, September 8, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting

ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL

1. Call for and Open the Warrant for the 2025 Fall Town Meeting.

Mr. Haddad said it is that time of year for the Select Board to call for the 2025 Fall Town Meeting. He explained that the default date for the meeting is the third Monday in October (this year, October 20th). Mr. Haddad stated that the Bylaw allows the Board to choose an alternative date in September, October, or November, provided at least six weeks' notice is given to residents. He recommended calling for the Fall Town Meeting on Saturday, October 18th, at the Performing Arts Center beginning at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Haddad reviewed a proposed timeline for the meeting with the Board (see attached).

Mr. Reilly made a motion to call for the 2025 Fall Town Meeting to be held on Saturday, October 18, 2025. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Manugian made a motion to open the warrant for the Fall Town Meeting on Monday, July 14, 2025, and to close the warrant on Thursday, August 21, 2025, at the end of the business. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Consider Approving a One-Day All Alcoholic Beverages License for the Friends of Prescott for an invite-only party for its supporters to be held on Wednesday, July 23, 2025, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Ms. Manugian made a motion to approve a One-Day All-Alcoholic Beverages License for the Friends of Prescott for an invite-only party for its supporters, to be held on Wednesday, July 23, 2025, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

6:15 P.M. Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks- Discussion on Services/Staffing Issue at Groton Fire Department.
Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks was in attendance for the discussion.

Chief Cheeks sent a memorandum to the Select Board about changes he is considering or implementing at the Fire Department to address the staffing issues they are facing. Since Nashoba Medical Center closed, the Fire Department's ability to continue providing all services has become increasingly difficult. The growing number of times the Fire Department has responded to multiple calls simultaneously, while also trying to complete other mandated and community tasks, has become an everyday challenge.

The Chief explained that the Groton Fire Department offers various programs and services to the Town of Groton. He reviewed some of the programs they provide, such as Student Awareness of Fire Education (S.A.F.E.), CPR and AED training for schools and other groups, free car seat installation services, and various types of inspections. He noted that most inspections are conducted from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and that these inspections take a considerable amount of time.

Chief Cheeks also stated that they are reviewing the current staffing model, as two new hires are planned to fill vacancies left by firefighters who have transferred to other departments. By early August, the Department will be fully staffed. Ms. Pine asked the Chief to clarify the current number of employees compared to this time last year. The Chief explained that in FY 2024, there were nine employees plus one vacancy. Additionally, two positions were added during the 2024 Fall Town Meeting, bringing the total to 12 currently.

The Chief reviewed the proposed changes to the Select Board that he believes would improve daytime services.

- Option One: consolidate the inspections within a specific window of time on Tuesday and/or Thursday mornings.
- Option two: Based on availability, dedicate a single weekday for the inspections to occur, while also capping the number of inspections that can be accomplished in the day.

He also compared the differences between daytime and nighttime services, shifts, and staffing, then reviewed the hourly breakdown of emergency service requests for the Town with the Board. He explained that calls increase during nighttime hours, but staffing remains minimal. Chief Cheeks stated that they are handling 15% more calls than last year.

Chief Cheeks explained that they attempted to seek an override to fund six firefighters at the Spring Town Meeting in 2025, but they were unsuccessful. The Chief stated that he wouldn't change his

recommendation, emphasizing that he had presented the Department's needs to the Board and would not alter anything. Since the override failed, he had stepped back to reevaluate how to move forward in meeting the Town's needs. He said they need to prioritize and restructure what services they must provide and what they need to discontinue.

Mr. Haddad stated that the Fire Department will continue to respond immediately, as always, to provide excellent emergency services. The proposed changes would impact services such as inspections, car seat installations, and CPR courses, due to staffing limitations.

Mr. Pisani explained that six firefighters would have solved the staffing problem for years to come.

Mr. Robertson suggested compiling a list of priorities.

Ms. Pine said they need to remember that they don't have the personnel they wanted and want to understand how their department will operate with the current staff. She agreed with Mr. Robertson's suggestion to create a list of priorities. Ms. Pine then asked which option the Chief was recommending. Chief Cheeks stated that he looking for the Board's support in addressing this situation.

Ms. Manugian thanked the Chief for informing the Board of the Department's needs, and said it is their role to make tough decisions and communicate to everyone. Mr. Haddad explained that the schools had a budget shortfall, and the Board created a solution to address that issue. Now the Board (and Town Manager) need to develop a solution to address the Fire Department Staffing issue. The Chief said they need to work together to address the Fire Department's situation. Ms. Manugian emphasized that the community needs to understand their role in this. Chief Cheeks indicated that the memo was meant to inform them about the need to develop a plan.

Mr. Haddad explained that this was the first step in a lengthy process and how they would address the failed override. He said this was an important conversation to have and thanked the Chief for sending the memo to the Select Board.

Mr. Haddad and the Select Board thanked the Fire Chief for his time.

7:00 P.M. In Joint Session with the Finance Committee- Review and Approve FY 2025 Line-Item Transfers.

Finance Committee Members Bud Robertson, Chair; Gary Green; David Manugian (virtually); Mary Linskey, Vice Chair; and Scott Whitefield were present. Patricia DuFresne, the Town Accountant/ Assistant Finance Director, was also present for the discussion.

Mr. Robertson called the Finance Committee to order at 7:05 p.m.

Mr. Haddad stated that at the end of the fiscal year, the Select Board and Finance Committee conduct Line-Item Transfers to fund shortfalls within the municipal budget. He stated that this is a redistribution of the funding within the budget. Mr. Haddad provided the Board with the proposed line-item transfers for year-end 2025 (see the attached).

Mr. Haddad highlighted some of the line-item transfers:

Line item 5400-162, Election Expenses: This was an opportunity to upgrade the voting machines. Mr. Haddad said that this was a great deal, and the machines were used during the Spring Town Election.

Line item 5120-241, Fire Wages: The overtime for the Fire Department wasn't as high as anticipated, totaling \$42,820.

Mr. Haddad emphasized that the Country Club had an excellent year, surpassing \$1 million in revenue with a profit of \$65,000. He said this was really great news.

Line-item 5400-541, The Council on Aging: The seniors had an issue with visibility during movies, so room-darkening blinds were ordered for \$7,000. Mr. Haddad said this will help darken the room.

Mr. Haddad reported that the total final shortfall in the operating budget for the year-end 2025 is \$255,815. This amount will be deducted from various accounts, with \$154,822 taken from the Employee Health Insurance account.

Finance Committee

On behalf of the Finance Committee, Mr. Manugian moved to approve the Line-item transfers for the FY25 budget as presented that evening. Ms. Linskey seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Linskey-aye; Green-aye; Robertson-aye; Whitefield-aye.

Select Board

On behalf of the Select Board, Ms. Manugian made a motion to approve the line-item transfers as presented. Mr. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

Pursuant to the Charter, Authorize the Town Manager and One Member of the Select Board to Sign Warrants for the Next 30 days.

Ms. Manugian made a motion to authorize the Town Manager and one member of the Select Board to sign the Warrants for the next 30 days. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

On-Going Issues

- A. PFAS Issue- A Joint Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 30th, at the Town of Pepperell, involving the Select Boards, Finance Committees and Water Commissioners from the Towns of Groton, Dunstable, and Pepperell. This meeting is to discuss Phase Three of the waterline project. Apex Engineers will make a presentation on the project at this meeting. The time is to be determined.
- B. UMass Satellite Emergency Facility- On Thursday, July 17th, there will be the first public hearing with the Planning Board and the Stormwater Committee regarding the UMass Satellite Emergency Facility. This meeting will take place via ZOOM and will be broadcast live on the Groton Channel.

C. PILOTs- The Board would like to keep PILOTs under Ongoing Issues at this time.

SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS

None

Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting of June 30, 2025.

Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of June 30, 2025. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Pisani-aye; Reilly-aye.

The Select Board recessed at 7:19 p.m. before entering into an executive session.

Mr. Haddad requested that the Board enter Executive Session #1- pursuant to M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a), Clause 7- “To comply with, or act under the authority of, any general or special law and federal grant-in-aid requirements”-Purpose: Review Executive Session Minutes.

Then enter into a second Executive Session #2 pursuant to M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a), Clause 2- “To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with Non-Union Personnel or conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with Non-Union Personnel”- Purpose: Fire Chief’s Contract.

And not to return to the open session.

Ms. Manugian made a motion to enter into Executive Session. Mr. Reilly seconded. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye.

At this point in the meeting (7:20 pm) the Finance Committee relocated to the Lunch Room to conduct other business.

Present for the Finance Committee: Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair; Mary Linskey, Vice Chair; Gary Green; Scott Whitefield

Also Present: Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant

Approval of Minutes

On a motion by Ms. Linskey, seconded by Mr. Whitefield, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to approve and release the minutes from their meeting held on 4/16/25 as drafted. The Vote 4-0-0

On a motion by Ms. Linskey, seconded by Mr. Whitefield, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to approve and release the minutes from their meeting held on 4/26/25 as amended. The Vote 4-0-0

On a motion by Ms. Linskey, seconded by Mr. Whitefield, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to approve and release the minutes from their meeting held on 5/23/25 as drafted. The Vote 4-0-0

On a motion by Ms. Linskey, seconded by Mr. Robertson, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to approve and release the minutes from their meeting held on 6/4/25 as drafted. The Vote 4-0-0

Annual Review of Financial Policies

Mr. Green requested (from the Town Accountant) electronic copies of the current Conservation Commission language included in the financial policy document, the FinCom requested changes, and the Conservation Commission's rebuttal. The board members will take up this discussion again at a subsequent meeting.

Reorganization of the Finance Committee for FY26

The members discussed the fact that the committee had lately struggled to achieve a quorum for scheduled meetings, with Ms. Linskey expressing concern that evening meetings may be a burden that are preventing some members from being able to participate. The group debated whether recent attendance had fallen below minimum requirements for the committee to be able to properly perform its function. Mr. Robertson wondered if it would help to choose a different default meeting day. Ms. Linskey would like to see the Finance Committee meeting more frequently on its own (rather than in joint session with another board) in order to give the members a more consistent platform for expressing their opinions and reaching consensus on issues as a unified group. Mr. Whitefield suggested publishing a list of critical meetings for the year, to give members a chance to plan in advance. The group decided to postpone reorganizing until a subsequent meeting when more members can be present.

Discussion regarding Fire Department Staffing

Mr. Robertson believes the FinCom has no immediate action item with regard to ongoing operations in the Fire Department. He feels that the Fire Chief should provide a list to the Select Board of tasks that the department is struggling to accomplish. The group briefly discussed the kinds of tasks that could still be performed provided no concurrent fire emergencies were taking place.

The Finance Committee officially adjourned at 7:47 pm

Respectively submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager and Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant

PROPOSED LINE ITEM TRANSFERS FOR YEAR END 2025

FUNDING NEEDED *(Line Items in Deficit)*