SELECT BOARD/FINCOM MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2026
Location: The Groton Center, 163 W. Main St. Groton, MA
APPROVED 11/23/26

Select Board Members Present: Peter Cunningham, Chair; Becky Pine, Vice Chair; Nick Degaitas Jr., Clerk; John Reilly;
Select Board Members Absent: Matt Pisani;
Finance Committee Members Present: David Manugian, Chair; Bud Robertson, Vice Chair; Gary Green; Scott Whitefield; Kristina Lengyel; Nancy Muller;
Finance Committee Members Absent: Jamie McDonald;
School Committee Members Present: Lacey McCabe, Chair; Rosanna Casavecchia, Vice Chair; An Hee Foley; Rebecca Weksner;
School Committee Members Absent: Christina Andriole; Justin Owens; Rohit Bhasin;
Also Present: Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant; Sherry Kersey, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Business Manager; Dr. Geoff Bruno, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Superintendent; Tammi Mickel, Principal Assessor; Melisa Doig, Human Resources Director; Katie Kazanjian, Treasurer/Tax Collector; Diane Hewitt, Groton Resident; Charlotte Weigel, Sustainability Committee Representative and Amirtha Chennakesavan, Groton Intern.

Mr. Manugian opened the FinCom meeting at 6:30 pm

Review of Agenda

Mr. Manugian noted that the group would use this meeting to receive a presentation from the Municipal Energy Manager (Andres Correa) as well as reviewing and approving minutes.

Municipal Energy Manager, Andres Correa (Year One Summary Presentation Document Attached):
Mr. Correa introduced himself to the group and provided highlights of his previous work in Panama with greenhouse gas emissions certifications. He explained that he has worked as the Regional Energy Manager for the towns of Groton, Harvard, Ayer & Shirley for one year now and is helping these municipalities (particularly with respect to their school buildings) to increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. He is working under the auspices of a Mass Saves grant that covers his salary and benefits for three years. Thus far, for Groton he has secured a $250k Green Communities grant used for weatherizing the Police Station and LED lighting at the Middle School. He assisted with the GDRSD and Municipal Decarbonization Roadmap and Grant awards, as well as a retroactive commissioning feasibility study with the potential to save Groton $40k in utility costs.

His work in other Towns has secured almost $202k in Green Communities grants for Harvard to fund their Library HVAC project as well as $140k for the Town of Shirley to be used for weatherization, LED and HVAC upgrades. For the Town of Ayer, he has completed three comprehensive building assessments with a potential to save the town $153k. Mr. Correa pointed out some smaller grant awards he has secured for this regional partnership as well. When taken all together the four towns have received total grant funding

of approximately $735k, energy and maintenance savings of $60k, and future potential savings opportunities of $193k due to additional studies currently being implemented.

Ms. Muller asked whether any of this funding was from Federal sources, noting that there can be extra strings attached to federal money as well as fewer opportunities for local influence. Mr. Correa replied that some of his grant awards were federally sourced (for instance the $138k Decarbonization Grant) and agreed that there are additional requirements to be aware of. In response to a question from Mr. Robertson, Mr. Correa assured him that he is expecting to continue receiving grant support in future years and is already preparing for the next round of Green Communities Grants. He noted that the process of applying for these grants is made easier and quicker when there is a regional Energy Manager to take the lead. The group briefly discussed the amount of Town funds for feasibility studies that typically must be expended to secure this type of grant funding. Mr. Correa agreed that while grants may not always cover the full cost of a project, the studies themselves have value. Ms. Lengyel asked whether he takes care of all the grant deliverables. Mr. Correa confirmed that he is responsible for all the detail reporting that takes place after the grant is awarded and during the administration period. The group questioned the process of tracking grant revenue and spending. Ms. Dufresne replied that the Fund Accounting software used by the Town is specifically geared toward isolating and tracking these types of projects as well as the associated revenue and expense activity. Ms. Muller asked whether efforts were made to coordinate activities with other energy management representatives. Mr. Correa said that he meets regularly with other Energy Managers to discuss common challenges and reduce replication of effort. Mass Saves encourages this kind of cooperation and communication amongst colleagues performing similar roles in various municipalities. Ms. Lengyel asked what kind of advertising was being done to promote this undertaking. Ms. Weigel mentioned that they are working to increase public awareness of the energy management program. Mr. Robertson agreed saying that it was advertised in the Groton Herald and the presentation was provided to the Select Board. He stressed the importance of monitoring all the operational savings derived, as this is justification to extend the regional agreement into the future. Ms. Weigel agreed that the goal is to sustain the program beyond the initial three years, and that feedback from the town departments has been helpful.

Approval of Minutes:

- On a motion by Ms. Lengyel, seconded by Mr. Robertson, the Finance Committee voted to approve the meeting minutes from 9/21/26 as drafted. (The Vote: 6-0-0)
- On a motion by Mr. Robertson, seconded by Ms. Muller the Finance Committee voted to approve the meeting minutes from 10/20/26 as amended. (The Vote: 5-0-1 Mr. Green Abstained)

Other Business:

The members briefly discussed the budget guidance memo previously received from the Town Manager and the implications of associated budget cuts and/or tax override scenarios. Mr. Green said he would not favor a tax override for FY28 until a solution for the budget deficit pattern has been found. Regarding Fire staffing, Ms. Muller remarked that adding the one additional Firefighter/EMS position to allow all four shifts to be similarly staffed was crucial. Mr. Robertson and Ms. Muller agreed that until the new UMASS Emergency Center opens in Groton, it will be hard to determine its full effect on whether Groton can justify adding additional Fire positions in the next fiscal year (provided a tax override is approved). Ms. Muller

went on to say that a multi-year override is going to require a coordinated public relations and education campaign. Mr. Haddad agreed.

At this point in the meeting (7pm) the Finance Committee joined the Select Board meeting already in progress in the Community Room.

7:00 P.M. in Joint Session with the Finance Committee- Pursuant to Section 6.4.1 of the Groton Charter- Determine Budget Guidance for the Town Manager to develop the Fiscal Year 2028 Proposed Operating Budget

Mr. Haddad distributed a memo titled "Fiscal Year 2028 Budget Guidance to the Boards." He explained that he and Jason Silva, Dunstable's Town Administrator, had formed a Town Manager's/Town Administrator's Budget Working Group. Over the summer, they met with representatives from Dunstable, Groton, and the School District to better understand the financial challenges facing both towns. He reviewed anticipated increases in the Groton Dunstable Regional School District (GDRSD) assessment and the municipal budget with the Boards, noting that the figures were preliminary and would continue to be refined. Mr. Haddad said at this stage, the projected FY 2028 deficit was $2,163,592. The projection reflected a 9.24% increase in the GDRSD assessment, 3% contractual COLAs, a $132,115 pension increase, an estimated 10% placeholder for health insurance, an anticipated $180,000 for regional dispatch, and an anticipated $23,490 increase for Nashoba Tech. Mr. Haddad said the preliminary analysis projected significant Fiscal Year 2028 budget deficits for both Groton and Dunstable. Although the projections would be refined as more financial information became available, the anticipated shortfalls were large enough that the communities needed to begin addressing the challenges immediately. He emphasized the need for a shared understanding that resources for municipal operations and public education are limited. Balancing these competing needs would require difficult decisions, meaningful cooperation, and a commitment from all parties to develop fiscally responsible, sustainable budgets. Mr. Haddad said the GDRSD has cut 40 positions from its budget over the past three years.

Mr. Haddad explained that, based on the Working Group's discussions and financial analysis, Groton and Dunstable face two options in FY 2028: pursue a Proposition 2½ override or make significant reductions to the operating budgets of both municipalities and the Regional School District. He noted that neither option is without considerable challenges. However, given the projected deficit, he believes the towns must seriously consider an override to preserve the essential services residents expect from the Town and School District. The Budget Working Group reviewed how other towns, including Marblehead, Melrose, and Grafton, pursued overrides and examined the factors behind their success. Mr. Cunningham said communication was key. Mr. Haddad emphasized the importance of the Select Board, Finance Committee, the Town of Dunstable, and the Groton Dunstable Regional School District working together and proceeding transparently so residents understand the Town's financial challenges and the consequences of not securing the revenue needed to maintain services.

Based on the Town Manager's/Town Administrator's Budget Working Group's review of projected revenues and expenditures, the anticipated structural deficits in both communities, and the successful experiences of other municipalities with Proposition 2½ overrides, Mr. Haddad recommends that the Select Board and Finance Committee adopt the Fiscal Year 2028 Budget Guidance outlined in his memo. He also reviewed

and discussed Alternatives One and Two. (Refer to the included Budget Memo with these minutes for the Proposed Guidance). But first, he emphasized the importance of being transparent with residents about the Town's financial challenges and the consequences of not obtaining the revenue needed to maintain services.

Comments/Questions

Ms. Pine proposed changing Level Two in Alternative Two from "Restoration Investment Override" to "Restoration Protection Override." Mr. Haddad and the Boards agreed to the amendment.

Mr. Haddad reviewed the recommendations for the Proposed Override Funding Levels and explained the strategy for voting on a multi-tiered override:

Question #1- Maintain Level Services- $6,450,000
Question #2- Restoration Protection Override- One Additional FF/EMT- $7,900,000
Question #3- Restoration Protection Override- Five Additional FF/EMT- $8,530,000

Chair Manugian presented the Finance Committee's findings and will proceed as follows: they will review each level in the memo, and he made clear that there is no intent to separate the school and the town's override requests; they will be presented as one. He also said that once the School Committee certifies its budget in March 2027, the figures will remain unchanged unless a donation or grant is received to fund a service. Mr. Haddad added that once the school certifies its budget, the override numbers will be locked in and the Select Board will vote on an override. Mr. Manugian said the Finance Committee will continue discussing the proposal to add firefighters.

Chair Lacey McCabe called the School Committee to order.

Ms. McCabe proposed that the School Committee work with the Boards to agree that any additional state funding would be applied to the budget to reduce the amount of the override used in a given year. She also proposed a public Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) among the three Boards documenting these commitments. Mr. Haddad thought it was a great idea and hoped an MOA would give voters confidence. He further explained that Dunstable will have two tiers, not three like Groton. Ms. Pine said people are lining up to advocate for the override, which she said was a great sign. Mr. Cunningham emphasized they need to be clear in their message regarding the override.

Finance Committee Vote

Mr. Roberton moved to adopt the Fiscal Year 2028 Budget Guidance Memo, with Ms. Pine's amendment changing Level Two in Alternative Two from "Restoration Investment Override" to "Restoration Protection Override." Ms. Lengyel seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. 6-0-0

Select Board Vote

Mr. Degaitas moved to adopt the Fiscal Year 2028 Budget Guidance Memo, with Ms. Pine's amendment changing Level Two in Alternative Two from "Restoration Investment Override" to "Restoration Protection Override." Ms. Pine seconded.

Discussion

Ms. Pine thought it would be useful to give the top override scenario a specific title so they all have different names.

The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Haddad outlined the next steps: He will draft the Budget Instructions memo for the Board to review at their November 2nd meeting. The Department Head Budget Kick-Off is on Wednesday, November 4th, with department budgets due to the Town Manager's Office by November 30th. Budget reviews with the Town Manager will begin on December 7th, and on January 31, 2027, the FY 2028 Town of Groton Proposed Operating Budget will be delivered to the Select Board and the Finance Committee.

Resident Diane Hewitt said it was heartening to hear that everyone was on the same page and working hard to address this difficult problem, and she thanked everyone. She reported that a small advocacy group was forming in support of an override. She asked what the group's key communication link would be for receiving accurate information. At each Monday Select Board meeting, Mr. Haddad will provide a budget update and advised Ms. Hewitt to follow these updates closely. Ms. Hewitt expressed interest in learning how other communities were getting the word out. Mr. Haddad said he would connect her with someone from the Town of Grafton, and Ms. McCabe said she would forward information about the towns of Marblehead and Melrose.

Chair Cunningham thanked the Finance Committee.

The Select Board adjourned at 7:51 p.m.
The Finance Committee adjourned at 7:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager and Patricia Dufresne, Assistant Finance Director/Town Accountant

Municipal Energy Manager Year One Summary

Andres Correa

September 24, 2026

Outline:

- **Background** Energy Manager Grant (3 years)
- **Year One Summary** by Town
- **Year One Total Grant Income**
- **Position Value Calculator**

Background:

- Municipal Energy Management Grant by

mass save Energy savings that matter nationalgrid

- 3 Years ($360k)
- **2 Years Remining**

- **Regional partnership** (Groton, Harvard, Ayer, Shirley) w/ support from School District, Groton Sustainability Commission, and the Harvard Climate Initiative Committee

- Purpose *(focus on k-12 school buildings):*

Help municipalities hire a dedicated resource to manage
-Energy Use
-Energy Efficiency
-Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from facilities

Background:

- Groton as hiring entity
- Time to be split equally
- Grant awarded in June 2025
- Andres Correa started in August 2025

Year One Summary:

Groton

- Green Communities **$250k grant**
  - Awarded March 2026
  - To fund Police Station weatherization ($40k) (completed)
  - To fund LED lighting and building controls Middle School ($210k)

Estimated to save $51k in O&M costs

First maximum award for Groton

- Assisted with application for Regional School District Decarbonization Grant **$138k**
  - Awarded July 2026
  - Federal funding (Dept of Energy Resources admin)
  - Electric ovens for Middle School

- Assisted completion of Municipal Decarbonization Roadmap
  - Requirement for Climate Leader Certification ($1.15M in TA and Decarb grants)

- Retro commissioning Feasibility Study: **$40k** *Potential Utility Savings*

Year One Summary:

Groton

- Assisted with implementation of $15,000 retro commissioning grant Awarded in July 2025

Recommendations have an expected payback period of 2-4 years, expected to save $40,000/year in O&M costs and $30,000 in incentives from Mass Save.

Year One Summary:

Harvard

- Green Communities **$201,851 grant**
  - Awarded March 2026
  - To fund Library's HVAC (coil retrofit/ replacement of equipment)

- **$25k** Municipal Energy Technical Assistance Grant
  - Awarded October 2026
  - Procurement (scope, design & eng. documents)

- Green Communities Annual Report
  -To maintain Green Communities status

Year One Summary:

Shirley

- Green Communities **$140k grant**
  - Awarded March 2026
  - To fund weatherization, LED and HVAC upgrades in multiple buildings

Year One Summary:

Ayer

- 3 Comprehensive Building Assessments (N. Grid): $153k *Potential Utility Savings*

Year One Total Grant Income

- Across all towns, total grant funding: **$734,851**

Position Value Calculator

Position Annual Cost: $120,000 (Salary and Benefits)

Position Value (First Year):

- Grants and Incentives: **$847,593**
- Estimated Annual Energy and Maintenance Savings: **$60,286**
- 4 studies implemented

⬇

- Estimated Potential Future Energy Savings Opportunities**$192,835**

TOWN OF GROTON
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Select Board

Peter S. Cunningham, *Chair*
Rebecca H. Pine, *Vice Chair*
Nicholas J. Degaitas, Jr., *Clerk*
John F. Reilly, *Member*
Matthew F. Pisani, *Member*

Town Manager
Mark W. Haddad

To: ***Select Board***
Finance Committee

From: ***Mark W. Haddad – Town Manager***

Subject: ***Fiscal Year 2028 Budget Guidance***

Date: ***October 14, 2026***

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information and a recommendation on the Fiscal Year 2028 Budget Guidance. Section 6.4.1 of the Groton Charter requires the Town Manager to meet with the Select Board and Finance Committee to determine budgetary guidance for the subsequent fiscal year. This guidance will be used by the Town Manager and Finance Team to develop the Town Manager's Proposed Fiscal Year 2028 Operating Budget that is due by January 31, 2027. As the Select Board and Finance Committee are aware, the Town of Groton is facing significant financial challenges in Fiscal Year 2028. Given the anticipated budget deficit for FY 2028, we initiated the budget development process considerably earlier than in previous years. This proactive approach is intended to provide sufficient time to thoroughly evaluate projected revenues and expenditures, identify the factors contributing to the anticipated shortfall, and develop a responsible and sustainable financial plan that addresses the Town's fiscal challenges while continuing to provide essential municipal and educational services.

Understanding that the financial challenges facing Groton are closely tied to the financial circumstances of the Town of Dunstable and the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District, Dunstable Town Administrator Jason Silva and I established the Town Manager's/Town Administrator's Budget Working Group. The purpose of this Working Group is to bring together representatives from all three entities to collaboratively review projected FY 2028 revenues and expenditures, assess the anticipated financial pressures facing each community and the School District, and develop a common recommendation to address the deficit during the development of the Fiscal Year 2028 Proposed Operating Budget. The Working Group consists of the following representatives:

Town of Groton: Town Manager Mark Haddad, Select Board Member Nick Degaitas, and Finance Committee Member Bud Robertson.

Town of Dunstable: Town Administrator Jason Silva, Select Board Member Ron Mikol, and Advisory Committee Member Matthew Naughton.

Groton-Dunstable Regional School District: Regional School Committee Chair Lacey McCabe, Superintendent Dr. Geoff Bruno, and Director of Business Sherry Kersey.

In addition to the members of the Working Group, members of Groton's Finance Team, including Patricia DuFresne, Katie Kazanjian, Tammi Mickel, Melisa Doig, and Kara Cruikshank, have participated in the meetings, providing valuable support throughout the process.

To date, the Working Group has held several meetings during which we have conducted a comprehensive review of anticipated revenues and expenditures for FY 2028 for the Towns of Groton and Dunstable, as well as the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District. These discussions have focused on identifying projected revenue growth, anticipated increases in operating expenses, and the financial implications of the Regional School District's budget on both member communities. The collaborative nature of these discussions has been particularly important, as decisions made by one entity will inevitably have financial implications for the others.

Based on our preliminary analysis, it is clear that both Groton and Dunstable are facing significant projected budget deficits in Fiscal Year 2028. While these projections will continue to be refined as additional financial information becomes available, the magnitude of the anticipated shortfalls requires that we begin addressing these challenges immediately. It is equally important that we approach this process with a shared understanding that the financial resources available to support municipal operations and public education are limited. Balancing these competing needs will require difficult decisions, meaningful cooperation, and a commitment by all parties to developing budgets that are both fiscally responsible and sustainable over the long term.

With that background, I believe it is important for the Select Board and Finance Committee to have a clear understanding of the Town's anticipated financial position before establishing formal budget guidance for FY 2028. The following chart summarizes the Town of Groton's preliminary projected revenues and expenditures for Fiscal Year 2028 and shows the anticipated budget shortfall that will need to be addressed as we move forward with the budget development process:

Category		**FY 2028**
Unexpended Levy Capacity	$	37,714
Anticipated FY 2028 Levy Increase ($18 Million in New Growth)	$	1,302,821
Anticipated FY 2028 Local Receipts Increase	$	-
Anticipated FY 2028 State Aid Increase (2.5% Estimated Increase)	$	31,690
Available New Revenue for Fiscal Year 2028	**$**	**1,372,225**
Initial Set Aside for Municipal Budget (40%)	**$**	**548,890**
Initial Set Aside for GDRSD Operational Assessment (60%)	**$**	**823,335**
Anticipated Increase in GDRSD Assessment (9.24% Increase)	**$**	**2,721,757**
Anticipated Increases in Municipal Budget		
Salaries/Wages - All Union Contracts Call for 3% COLA	$	293,877
Pension - (Estimated Increase of 6.54%)	$	132,115
Health Insurance - (Estimated Increase of 10%)	$	184,578
Anticipated Increase Patriot RECC - Communications Budget	$	180,000
Anticipated Increase in Nashoba Tech (2½% Increase)	$	23,490
Total	**$**	**814,060**
Anticipated FY 2027 Preliminary Surplus(Deficit)	$	(2,163,592)

A projected budget deficit of this magnitude cannot be overcome without making significant reductions to both the Town's municipal operating budget and the operating assessment of the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District. The financial challenges facing both communities are substantial, and there is simply no realistic scenario in which we can close the anticipated budget gap through minor spending adjustments, operational efficiencies, or modest reductions in departmental budgets. Without a significant infusion of additional revenue, both the Town and the School District will be forced to make difficult decisions that will have a direct and lasting impact on the level and quality of services provided to our residents.

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has not proven to be a reliable partner in helping municipalities address these growing financial challenges. While the FY 2027 State Budget provides for the establishment of a Committee to study the Chapter 70 education funding formula, I do not believe that the Committee's work will be completed in time to result in any meaningful increase in education funding for the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District in FY 2028. Furthermore, despite a significant lobbying effort by the Massachusetts Municipal Association to increase Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA) in FY 2027, the Town of Groton received an increase of only $84,871, or 7.1%. While any increase in state aid is appreciated, this amount does very little to address the escalating costs of providing municipal services. I have no reason to anticipate a substantial increase in unrestricted state aid in FY 2028. Simply stated, depending on the Commonwealth to provide the additional financial resources necessary to resolve our FY 2028 budget deficit is neither a realistic nor a responsible budget strategy.

Based on the Working Group's discussions and financial analysis, it is clear that we are facing two choices in Fiscal Year 2028. We can either seek an Override of Proposition 2½ in both Groton and Dunstable for FY 2028 or make significant reductions to both municipal operating budgets and the Regional School District's operating budget. Neither alternative is without considerable challenges. However, given the magnitude of the projected deficit, I believe we have no choice but to seriously consider pursuing an override as a means of preserving the essential services that our residents have come to expect from both the Town and School District. I fully recognize that pursuing a Proposition 2½ override in Groton will be a difficult undertaking. The Town has not successfully passed a Proposition 2½ operating override since 2004, and our history demonstrates that obtaining voter support for additional property taxes is far from certain. Nevertheless, the financial circumstances we are facing in FY 2028 are significant, and I do not see a viable alternative that would allow us to maintain our current level of municipal and educational services without seeking additional revenue. The reductions necessary to balance the budget without an override would be severe and would detrimentally reduce the level of services we are able to provide. In my opinion, we need to fully explain the magnitude of the problem and identify the exact reductions/impacts if we fail to address it. This will provide an opportunity for residents to determine the level of services they are willing to support.

Making this even more difficult is the fact that the Town of Groton is also facing a significant staffing shortage within the Fire Department that must be addressed as part of the FY 2028 budget process. The Fire Staffing Working Group has been reviewing the Department's staffing needs and is recommending, at a minimum, that the Town hire one additional Firefighter/EMT as soon as possible. This would bring each group to three Firefighter/EMTs. However, the ultimate goal is hiring a total of five additional Firefighter/EMTs, which would bring each group to four Firefighter/EMTs. These staffing needs are not simply a matter of enhancing existing services. As presented to the Select Board and Finance Committee at your joint meeting of September 28th, they are directly related to the Town's ability to provide adequate fire protection and emergency medical services to our residents. Addressing this critical public safety need will require additional financial resources at precisely the same time that we are struggling to

maintain existing municipal and educational operations. This further reinforces the need to consider an Override of Proposition 2½ in Fiscal Year 2028.

Recognizing Groton's history with Proposition 2½ overrides, the Budget Working Group determined that it would be beneficial to learn from other Massachusetts communities that have recently faced similar financial challenges and successfully obtained voter approval for additional operating revenues. To that end, members of the Working Group met with officials from the Towns of Grafton and Marblehead and the City of Melrose. Each of these communities successfully pursued and passed multi-year, multi-level overrides to address structural budget deficits and avoid significant reductions in municipal and educational services. The discussions with these communities were extremely valuable and provided important insight into the challenges associated with developing, communicating, and ultimately obtaining voter support for an operational override. While each community approached its financial challenges somewhat differently, each community outlined the importance of clearly demonstrating to residents the financial realities facing their community, the specific services that would be impacted without additional revenue, and the long-term benefits of establishing a sustainable financial plan. These communities recognized that simply presenting voters with a request for additional funding was not sufficient. Residents needed to understand why the additional revenue was necessary, how it would be utilized, and what the consequences would be if the override were unsuccessful.

Another important takeaway from these discussions was the value of considering a multi-year approach to addressing structural budget deficits. Rather than seeking additional revenue to address only a single fiscal year's shortfall, these communities developed strategies intended to provide greater financial stability over multiple fiscal years. This approach requires careful financial forecasting, clearly defined spending priorities, and a commitment to managing future expenditures within the additional revenue authorized by the voters. It also requires transparency and accountability so that residents can have confidence that the additional tax dollars are being utilized for their intended purposes. I believe the experiences of Grafton, Marblehead, and Melrose provide a useful framework as we consider our options for FY 2028. While there are important differences between these communities and Groton, their experiences demonstrate that voters may be willing to support additional operating revenues when presented with a clear, credible, and well-documented explanation of the community's financial needs. Equally important, these discussions reinforced that a successful override effort must begin well in advance of the actual vote and must be grounded in accurate financial information, realistic expenditure projections, and a clear understanding of the services that are at risk.

I believe it is crucial that the Select Board, Finance Committee, along with the Town of Dunstable and the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District approach this challenge together. An override should not be viewed as an opportunity to expand government spending without restraint, but rather as a way to preserve essential services, address critical public safety needs, and establish a more sustainable financial foundation for the future. At the same time, we must recognize that any request for additional taxpayer support must be accompanied by a demonstrated commitment to controlling costs and ensuring that every available tax dollar is spent responsibly. This was a hallmark to the strategy used by the Town of Marblehead. The Finance Committee and School Committee entered into an agreement outlining the terms and commitment by both Boards on budget growth over the course of the projected override length. Ultimately, the decision to pursue an override will rest with the Select Boards of both Groton and Dunstable, and the final decision on whether to authorize additional property tax revenue will rest with the voters of Groton and Dunstable. However, given the severity of the projected FY 2028 deficit, I believe we have an obligation to fully explore this option and develop a comprehensive plan that allows our residents to make an informed decision about the future of municipal services and public education in Groton and Dunstable.

Based on the work undertaken by the Town Manager's/Town Administrator's Budget Working Group, including our review of projected revenues and expenditures, the anticipated structural deficits facing both communities, and the experiences of other municipalities that have successfully pursued Proposition 2½ overrides, I am recommending that the Select Board and Finance Committee adopt the following budget guidance for Fiscal Year 2028. I believe it is essential that we approach this process with complete transparency and provide our residents with a clear understanding of the financial challenges facing the Town and the consequences of not obtaining revenues necessary to maintain services. Please consider the following:

Alternative One: **Develop of a Balanced FY 2028 Budget Without a Proposition 2½ Override**

The Select Board should direct the Town Manager to prepare and submit a balanced Fiscal Year 2028 Operating Budget that does not rely on the passage of a Proposition 2½ override. This budget must be developed using available revenues within the Town's existing levy limit, together with other reasonably anticipated revenue sources. The Town Manager shall identify the specific reductions necessary to bring the municipal operating budget into balance. In addition, working collaboratively with the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District, identify the reductions in the School District's operating assessment that would be necessary to achieve a balanced budget without additional property tax revenue. This budget must clearly identify the positions, programs, services, and operational capabilities that would be eliminated or reduced. Residents deserve to understand precisely what a balanced budget without an override would mean for public safety, public works, general government, and the educational services provided to our children. While this will require difficult decisions, I believe it is a necessary first step. Regardless of whether the Town ultimately pursues an override, I am legally required to provide a Balanced Budget. In addition, developing this Budget will establish a clear baseline against which residents can evaluate the benefits and costs of any proposed override.

Alternative Two: **Consideration of a Three-Year, Multi-Level Proposition 2½ Override**

The Select Board, with the support of the Finance Committee, should consider seeking voter approval of a multi-year Proposition 2½ operating override designed to address the Town's financial needs over Fiscal Years 2028, 2029, and 2030. Based on our discussions with officials from Grafton, Marblehead, and Melrose, the Working Group believes that a multi-year financial strategy, coupled with multiple override questions offering different levels of service, provides a reasonable approach for consideration. In particular, the Towns of Marblehead and the City of Melrose utilized multiple override questions to provide voters with choices regarding the level of municipal and educational services they wished to support.

I believe this approach is especially appropriate for Groton. Rather than presenting voters with a single take-it-or-leave-it override proposal, we should provide them with clearly defined funding alternatives that distinguish between maintaining existing services and making targeted investments to restore services and address critical staffing deficiencies. The Working Group has developed three potential override funding scenarios for consideration.

Level One – Maintain Level Services Override

The first proposed override level would provide the funding necessary to maintain the current level of municipal and educational services over the next three fiscal years. Based on the projected Municipal Budget and Operating Assessment from the School District over the next three years, we have estimated that the three-year override requirement would be **$6,450,000.**

This funding level is intended to stabilize municipal and School District operations and avoid another round of significant service reductions over the three-year planning period. It is important to emphasize that this is not a restoration budget. It does not seek to replace positions eliminated during previous budget cycles, restore every program that has been reduced, or address all of the Town's identified staffing needs. Instead, this scenario is designed to provide the additional revenue necessary to maintain the level of services currently being delivered to our residents and students. Given the reductions that have already occurred in both municipal government and the School District, I believe this represents the minimum additional investment necessary to preserve our existing operations.

Level Two – Restoration Investment Override

The second proposed override level would build upon the Maintain Level Services scenario by providing additional funding for targeted staffing restorations and critical service needs within both the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District and the Town's municipal departments. Unlike the first scenario, which is intended solely to stabilize existing operations, this level recognizes that reductions made over the last several fiscal years have had a meaningful impact on the Town's and School District's ability to deliver services. However, this proposal is not intended to restore every previously eliminated position or expenditure. Instead, it focuses on carefully selected investments that would have the greatest impact on core municipal services, public safety, and educational programming.

Over the past three fiscal years, the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District has reduced staffing by more than 40 full-time equivalent positions (FTEs). These reductions have been significant, and the District has made clear that it is not seeking to restore every position eliminated during this period. Rather, the District has undertaken a review of its educational and operational needs and identified approximately 7.6 FTEs that it believes are necessary to support the continued delivery of a quality educational program. I will defer to the School Committee and District Administration to provide the specific details of these proposed restorations and explain their educational and operational importance. The estimated additional funding required for the School District's proposed restoration is approximately $1,140,000, of which Groton's anticipated share is approximately $855,000.

On the municipal side, I have reviewed the staffing reductions implemented during the last two fiscal years, as well as the operational needs identified by our Department Heads. Based on this review, I am recommending the restoration of three previously eliminated positions: One Police Officer, eliminated from the FY 2027 Operating Budget and Two Department of Public Works employees, eliminated over the last two fiscal years. The total estimated FY 2028 cost of restoring these three positions is $356,893.

I believe these are reasonable and targeted restorations that would directly improve the Town's ability to deliver essential municipal services. The Police Department and Department of Public Works provide fundamental services that our residents rely upon every day. Restoring these positions would help address operational pressures resulting from previous staffing reductions and strengthen our ability to meet existing service demands. In addition to these restorations, we must address the significant staffing deficiencies identified through the Fire Department Staffing Study and the work of the Fire Staffing Working Group. The Fire Department's staffing needs present a particularly important challenge because they directly affect the Town's ability to respond to fires, medical emergencies, and other public safety incidents. The staffing recommendations can be viewed as two distinct stages.

The first stage calls for the immediate addition of one Firefighter/EMT. This would bring staffing to three Firefighter/EMTs assigned to each of the Department's four shifts. The second stage would provide for the addition of four more Firefighter/EMTs, bringing the total proposed increase to five positions and resulting

in four Firefighter/EMTs assigned to each shift. Given the financial implications of these recommendations, I believe it is appropriate to present voters with two versions of the Restoration Investment Override, allowing them to determine the level of additional investment they are willing to support.

Restoration Investment – Version One: Three Firefighter/EMTs Per Shift

This scenario would include the funding necessary to maintain existing services, together with the following targeted investments:

-Restoration of approximately 7.6 FTEs within the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District. **($855,000)**

-Restoration of one Police Officer. **($195,493)**

-Restoration of two Department of Public Works employees. **($161,400)**

-Addition of one Firefighter/EMT (three Firefighter/EMTs on each of the four shifts.) **($147,474)**

This option would restore several critical municipal and educational positions while addressing the Fire Department's most immediate staffing recommendation.

The estimated three-year override requirement for this scenario is $7,900,000.

Restoration Investment – Version Two: Four Firefighter/EMTs Per Shift

The final scenario would include all of the funding and staffing investments identified in Version One, with the additional commitment to implement the full staffing recommendation contained in the Fire Department Staffing Study. Specifically, this scenario would provide funding for four additional Firefighter/EMTs **($589,896)** beyond the initial position included in Version One, resulting in a total increase of five Firefighter/EMTs and bringing each of the Department's four shifts to four Firefighter/EMTs. I believe this option deserves serious consideration because it addresses not only the immediate staffing deficiency within the Fire Department but also establishes a more appropriate long-term staffing model for the delivery of fire protection and emergency medical services in Groton.

The estimated three-year override requirement for this scenario is $8,530,000.

Summary of Proposed Override Funding Levels

Based on the Working Group's preliminary analysis, the following three-year override funding framework is recommended for further consideration:

Question #1 – Maintain Level Services - $6,450,000
Question #2 – Restoration/Investment – One Additional FF/EMT - $7,900,000
Question #3 – Restoration/Investment – Five Additional FF/EMT - $8,530,000

These three scenarios represent progressively greater investments in municipal and educational services. The first would provide the resources necessary to maintain current operations. The second would preserve existing services while restoring targeted positions and addressing the Fire Department's immediate staffing need. The third would provide those same restorations while implementing the full Fire

Department staffing recommendation. It is important to emphasize that these figures represent preliminary three-year funding targets and will continue to be refined as we finalize revenue projections, School District assessments, staffing costs, and other expenditure assumptions. The precise annual override amounts, the structure of the ballot questions, and the estimated impact on residential property taxes will need to be developed as part of the Final Town Manager's Proposed Fiscal Year 2028 Operating Budget. Any multi-year override proposal must also recognize that voter-approved levy capacity becomes part of the Town's ongoing property tax base.

The following Chart shows the potential impact on the Average Tax Bill over the next three fiscal years:

Override Level	FY 2027	FY 2028	Increase	FY 2029	Increase	FY 2030	Increase
Balanced Budget - Without Override							
Estimated Tax Rate	$ 15.44	$ 15.81	$ 0.37	$ 16.11	$ 0.30	$ 16.38	$ 0.27
Estimated Average Tax Bill	$ 11,756	$ 12,038	$ 282	$ 12,266	$ 228	$ 12,472	$ 206
Level Services - $6,450,000							
Estimated Tax Rate	$ 15.44	$ 16.55	$ 1.11	$ 17.49	$ 0.94	$ 18.52	$ 1.03
Estimated Average Tax Bill	$ 11,756	$ 12,601	$ 845	$ 13,317	$ 716	$ 14,101	$ 784
Estimated Tax Rate Increase for Override			**$ 0.74**		**$ 0.64**		**$ 0.76**
Estimated Tax Bill Increase for Override			**$ 563**		**$ 488**		**$ 578**
Restoration - One Firefighter/ EMT $7,900,000							
Estimated Tax Rate	$ 15.44	$ 16.99	$ 1.55	$ 17.96	$ 0.97	$ 19.01	$ 1.05
Estimated Average Tax Bill	$ 11,756	$ 12,936	$ 1,180	$ 13,675	$ 739	$ 14,474	$ 799
Estimated Tax Rate Increase for Override			**$ 1.18**		**$ 0.67**		**$ 0.78**
Estimated Tax Bill Increase for Override			**$ 898**		**$ 511**		**$ 593**
Restoration - Five Firefighter/ EMTs $8,530,000							
Estimated Tax Rate	$ 15.44	$ 17.19	$ 1.75	$ 18.16	$ 0.97	$ 19.22	$ 1.06
Estimated Average Tax Bill	$ 11,756	$ 13,088	$ 1,332	$ 13,827	$ 739	$ 14,634	$ 807
Estimated Tax Rate Increase for Override			**$ 1.38**		**$ 0.67**		**$ 0.79**
Estimated Tax Bill Increase for Override			**$ 1,050**		**$ 511**		**$ 601**

I believe this proposed Budget Guidance provides the Select Board and Finance Committee with a responsible and transparent path forward. By first developing a balanced budget without an override, we will clearly establish the consequences of attempting to address the FY 2028 deficit solely through expenditure reductions. By simultaneously developing three distinct override funding scenarios, we can provide residents with meaningful choices about the future level of municipal and educational services in Groton. It is also important that we approach this process with the understanding that an override, regardless of the amount ultimately proposed, is not a substitute for continued fiscal discipline. Every department, including the School District, must remain committed to controlling expenditures, identifying efficiencies, and ensuring that available resources are utilized effectively. Any additional revenue approved by the voters must be supported by a credible, sustainable, multi-year financial plan.

I look forward to discussing this in more detail with the Select Board and Finance Committee during your Joint Meeting scheduled for Monday, October 26, 2026 at the Groton Center in West Groton. In the meantime, please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns prior to the joint meeting.

MWH/rjb

cc: Dr. Geoff Bruno – Superintendent, Groton Dunstable Regional School District
Sherry Kersey – Director of Business, Groton Dunstable Regional School District
Lacey McCabe – Chair, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Committee
Jason Silva – Dunstable Town Administrator
Patricia DuFresne – Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant
Katie Kazanjian – Treasurer/Tax Collector
Tammi Mickel – Principal Assessor
Melisa Doig – Human Resources Director
Kara Cruikshank – Executive Assistant to the Town Manager