

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
FINANCE COMMITTEE  
JOINT MINUTES FEBRUARY 11, 2012  
APPROVED**

**Present:** Anna Eliot, Chairman; George Dillon, Jr., Vice Chairman; Peter Cunningham, Clerk; Joshua A. Degen; Stuart M. Schulman

**Also Present:** Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Patrice Garvin, Executive Assistant; Valerie Jenkins, Accountant; Patricia Dufresne, Accountant in Training; Victoria Smith, Treasurer/Collector; Rena Swezey, Assessor

**Finance Committee Members:** Jay Prager; Peter DiFranco; Steve Webber, Robert Hargraves, Mike Flynn, Joseph Crowley; Gary Green

Ms. Eliot called the meeting to order at 9:00am.

**Library**

Mr. Gerath, Library Trustee along with Nancy Wilder and Owen Shuman represented the Library. Mr. Gerath requested a maintenance budget with the same level services. Mr. Gerath asked the Boards to restore funding of books and materials by the taxpayers. Mr. Gerath asked if this funding could be 1/3 contribution over three years, and at the end of that three years have the library be fully municipally funded and to move away from dependence on the Trust Funds. Mr. Gerath stated that the Trustees see the trust funds as rainy day funds or for capital expenses, not operating funds. Mr. Prager asked if the Trustees were in agreement with the Town Manager's budget. Mr. Gerath stated that he was and that the trust funds were not declining but increasing. Mr. Gerath stated that \$40-\$50k is spent each year from the trust funds to offset the library's books and materials. Mr. Haddad noted that in his budget there is an extended two weeks for Sunday hours, costing approximately \$800. Mr. Haddad noted that the Town Hall Library Union is still in negotiations but hopes to have it wrapped up by Town Meeting in April.

Mr. Gerath stated that there are rules with some trust funds and explained the expendable portions of those funds. Mr. Dillon asked about past accumulated state funds and where the library was with those funds. Ms. Shuman stated that those funds were used for special projects. Mr. Haddad stated that the library is looking to restore municipal funding and that FY13 is a level funded budget.

**IT**

Mr. Bulger reviewed general expenses within his budget. Mr. Bulger explained that there is an active search for a part time IT professional. Mr. Bulger reviewed the IT 5 year Capital Plan and the goal to increase security. Mr. Haddad explained the Capital Line for IT and that \$40k was placed under it last year to buy multiple computer systems at once at bulk for a better deal. Also there was \$31k appropriated at Fall Town meeting for portable radios but recently the Town received a grant to cover this expense. Mr. Bulger noted a savings in the time it has taken to find a part time IT professional. Mr. Bulger explained the general life of the computers. Mr. Haddad repeated it made sense given the life of computers to place this item in the Capital Budget. Mr. Schulman asked if it made more sense to place all data in a cloud. Mr. Bulger stated that there was the possibility of utilizing clouds in the future.

Mr. Bulger went over the challenges with the website and hoped once a new person was in place movement would progress. Discussion occurred with the number of hours needed to show movement on projects due to there being one person in IT. Mr. Haddad stated that currently the position is for 19 hours but that he could look into adding hours to that position, which would benefit the town. The Finance Committee members felt they needed to see a plan from IT to show what was needed in hours. Mr. Bulger stated that he could make a plan but he could not anticipate what comes along. For example, the police received a grant that was not expected therefore his priority changed. Mr. Degen stated that if it was deemed that a higher amount of hours was needed for the second person a warrant article should be written. Mr. Schulman stated that an IT priority list would be helpful.

## **FIRE**

Chief Joe and Ms. Daly stated that their budget asked for an additional full time fire fighter. This additional firefighter would help with weekend coverage, which is a need in the community. This new person would be paid from the ambulance receipts. Mr. Haddad explained that the ambulance rate was set by the selectman and based on Medicare. Ms. Daly stated that a full fire fighter was needed but that the Town is still a call model and call members are critical to their success. Mr. Degen asked about the increase of \$54k. Chief Joe stated that some of that was step increases and that hours were increasing from 40 hours to 42 hours. Mr. Haddad stated that the benefits would be funded by the Town and that money is set aside in the budget for all unions. (Fire Fighters are in process of unionizing) Mr. Haddad stated that the ambulance receipts will offset the additional fire fighter. Mr. Degen asked if the ALS service will increase revenues. Chief Joe stated that the region is committed to building ALS. Mr. Haddad explained the impact of being in the last year of the Safer Grant. In the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the Safer Grant the Town is responsible for 100%, which we are in this year.

## **LAND USE**

Ms. Collette and Mr. Kinney were present to discuss the Land Use budget. Ms. Collette noted that her budget had decreased for FY13. Mr. Haddad stated that the office supply line was taken out and put into Centralized Purchasing as well as the agreement with Boxborough has ceased. The Building Commissioner is part-time, making no net change because the Town was paying the benefits on that position. There was discussion regarding the new permitting system and if it has shown improvements in efficiency. Ms. Collette stated that the system is just beginning but she would know more once it is fully operational. Mr. Prager asked about better efficiency and the need for hours. Ms. Collette stated that there was more that Land Use covers, such as trench permits, sign permits and the addition to Passports. Mr. Cunningham added that the Groton Inn fire created a lot of work that was unanticipated. Mr. Degen asked if Ms. Collette anticipated that the Master Plan be delayed. Ms. Collette replied No.

## **POLICE**

Chief Palma and Lt. Cullen presented the Police budget. Chief Palma provided the Boards with a power point presentation. Chief Palma stated his need for two additional officers and one patrolman to be promoted to a third sergeant. Mr. Haddad stated that the two additional officers helps with the two man minimum and supervision on the third shift.

Chief Palma stated the reasons for the two additional officers: 1. The Department has had 17 officer s since 2003. 2. GPD has been operating at or below the authorized staffing level of 17 for several years. One position that was left vacant restored in 2009. 3. In 2011, activity levels have seen an increase of 23%. Chief Palma reviewed Total incidents over the last five years. Mr. Degen asked to explain the increase in activity. Chief Palma referred to FBI data and that his information was over the last five years. Chief Palma stated that there has been an increase that could be related to the economy. Chief Palma showed activity in proportion to population levels in Town since 1991. Chief Palma showed the GPD staffing levels since 1999 and compared it to staffing in surrounding Towns.

Chief Palma showed that statistically municipal departments staff 2.3 full time officers per 1,000 residents, totaling 23.76 officers for Groton. FBI data shows populations 10,000-24,999 average 1.8 full time officers over 1,000 residents, totaling 19.37 officers in Groton. Currently GPD is operating 1.6 full time officers per thousand in Groton. An additional officer would give flexibility and allow the reduction of some overtime. Plus it would provide for a Sergeant plus two on most shifts, along with an increased investigative capacity.

Chief Palma discussed the future and that trends indicated incidents needing police, for example increased growth in the area. Chief Palma discussed numerous large scale projects in the area will result in increased people and traffic. Chief Palma focused on future growth in Groton, Littleton and Westford. Chief Palma noted that this growth will cause the GPD to have to prepare for this future need. Chief Palma stated that he is actively searching for replacements for the two current vacancies her has and is down to three qualified applicants.

Chief Palma discussed the need for an additional Sergeant. Chief Palma said civil liability to the Town and the Department is always a concern and that the GPD should work to mitigate the risk of a potential lawsuit. The three areas of exposure are failure to properly supervise, failure to properly train and negligent retention. Chief Palma stated that at present 15 to 21 possible shifts are formally supervised by a Sergeant. The additional sergeants are; guidance to overnight shift, lessen opportunity for issues, increased complexity of policing requires commanding officer, Command presence, more professional presence when dealing with outside agencies, ability to monitor and correct deficient behaviors and ability to monitor performance and enhance overall product. Chief Palma presented sergeant staffing in area towns.

Mr. Dillon asked what the status of the Quinn was. Mr. Haddad stated that he is waiting for the SJC ruling on the matter. Mr. Degen asked if Chief Palma would anticipate request for more officers, due to growth that was indicated. Chief Palma stated that yes, in a few years more officers could be needed.

Chief Palma reviewed the lockers that are in the Capital Budget. Chief Palma stated that the existing department lockers are no longer feasible for GPD needs. The lockers are too small for equipment. Full time officers are currently using two lockers, while part-time has one. Additional lockers are scattered throughout station in needed space. The Lieutenant does not have a locker and the Chief's locker is in the woman's room. Chief Palma showed a picture of the new lockers and the need for 36 of them and that their life is 20 plus years.

#### **HIGHWAY**

Mr. Delaney handed out a recycling revenue projection including Dunstable not Littleton or Ashby. Once those town come on the revenue will be updated. Mr. Haddad stated that he is looking into a ½ position between the Water Department and Transfer Station. Mr. Haddad also noted that the Highway/Water Union was still negotiating. Mr. Haddad also noted the snow and ice budget and that the lack of snow only helps. Mr. Delaney proposed using the extra money from snow and ice towards capital items. Mr. Delaney wanted to build a salt shed for \$250k. Mr. Haddad hoped to fill the salt shed at the end of the Fiscal year so they are full for next winter. Mr. Delaney stated that there was FEMA monies from the October storm. Mr. Degen asked about a pickup truck and if the Country Club could utilize. Mr. Haddad stated that were the money for a new salt shed would come room will be discussed.

#### **GENERAL BUDGET**

Mr. Haddad stated that the regional schools are under the 2.5% increase and that coupled with good financial planning of the Town we are under the levy limit. Mr. Haddad showed the impact on the average tax payer, which would be \$220. Mr. Cunningham reminded the group that the teachers are still negotiating their contract. Mr. Haddad stated that the Superintendent has set money aside for contracts.

#### **GROTON POOL & GOLD CENTER**

Mr. Whalen distributed a handout on revenues and expenses. Mr. Whalen stated that they are 6 months into FY12 and breaking even. Mr. Whalen stated that golf fees are under budget and that there were unanticipated costs with the pool and storms in the fall. Mr. Whalen stated that the consolidation of the snack bar and pro-shop reduced expenses and that the club has hosted a number of events. Mr. Whalen stated that in June \$30k was given back to the town. Mr. Whalen showed a good estimate on revenues. Mr. Cunningham asked where the profits were. Mr. Whalen stated that they were in the bar. Golf, pool and camps do not cover their costs. Discussion on the Capital expenses was discussed and where revenues at the club could increase. Weddings seemed to be a big revenue source and the focus should be there. But without capital expenses weddings will not occur. Mr. Prager was more than concerned with the amount of capital being planned for the club and that there was no justification for it. Mr. Whalen spoke to the communities at the club and its value. Mr. Whalen added that if there are no capital expenses there is no club. Mr. Cunningham asked what the alternative was if you don't put the money into the club. Mr. Degen stated that the town should stay away from a Band-Aid approach and wont authorize a Capital expense. Discussion ensued regarding the value and need of the club.

**ADJOURNMENT**

*Mr. Schulman moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:00pm. Mr. Dillon seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned.*

**DOCUMENTS DISTRIBUTED**

1. Levy Limit Calculation, Town Manager
2. Town of Groton FY13 Department Budgets
3. BOS/Finance Committee Meeting 2011 Season Passes Calculations, Groton Pool and Golf
4. Recycling Revenue Calculations
5. Police Presentation
6. Groton Police Incident Reports

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Peter S. Cunningham, Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_ respectfully *submitted*,  
Patrice Garvin  
Executive Assistant to the Town Manager

Date Approved: 2-27-12