

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES JANUARY 13, 2014
~~UN-APPROVED~~**

Present: Josh Degen, Vice Chairman; Anna Eliot, Clerk; Stuart M. Schulman; John G. Petropoulos

Absent: Peter S. Cunningham

Also Present: Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant;

Mr. Degen called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Petropoulos announced that he would be holding office hours on Wednesday at the Senior Center.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that the Finance Committee had set a date of Saturday, February 1, 2014 as the date to discuss the budget and meet with department heads.
2. Mr. Haddad said that there was a vacancy on the Conservation Commission. Nadia Madden was hired to be Shirley's Conservation Administrator and her new schedule meeting schedule made her unavailable to attend Groton Cons Com meetings.
3. Mr. Haddad said that it was that time of year for the Board to schedule the date for the 2014 Spring Town Meeting. He said that the bylaw governing Town Meeting stated that the Spring Town Meeting shall be held on the last Monday in April, unless the Board selected another date in the months of March, April or May. Mr. Haddad recommended that the Board call for the 2014 Spring Town Meeting on Monday, April 28, 2014.
Mr. Schulman moved to hold the 2014 Spring Town Meeting on April 28, 2014. Mr. Petropoulos seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.
Mr. Schulman moved to open the warrant for the 2014 Spring Town Meeting on Tuesday, January 14, 2014 and close it on Friday, February 28, 2014. Mr. Petropoulos seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.
4. Mr. Haddad said that the Finance Committee had recommended that Norman "Bud" Robertson be appointed to the Committee to fill the vacancy left by Peter DiFranco's resignation. Mr. Schulman said that Mr. Robertson was a great candidate. Mr. Petropoulos agreed.
Mr. Schulman moved to appoint Bud Robertson to the Finance Committee with a term to end on June 30, 2015. Mr. Petropoulos seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.
5. Mr. Haddad said that he met with the Prescott School Re-Use Committee who voted in favor of asking the Board to issue an RFP for the Prescott School leaving it open without housing as an option. Mr. Petropoulos asked why they wanted to leave housing out as an option. Ms. Eliot said that the survey conducted by the Committee had come back overwhelming not in favor of housing. The survey respondents wanted to see it occupied by commercial use. Mr. Petropoulos said that he would prefer to see everyone's ideas without limitations. Mr. Schulman said that he saw Mr. Petropoulos's point but thought that they should follow the recommendation of the Committee appointed to determine the best re-use of the building. Mr. Degen said he thought housing would be a good use but respected the Committee's recommendation. Art Campbell of the Groton Line said that there were at least 2 housing developments in process (134 Main Street and 128 Main Street) and wondered if the market was looking for housing adding that he thought the RFP should be issued without limitations. Bud Robertson said that they should follow the recommendation of the Committee.
Mr. Schulman moved that the Board authorize the RFP with the exclusion of housing as recommended by the Prescott School Re-Use Committee. Ms. Eliot seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.
6. Mr. Haddad said that because the Fire Chief had announced his intention to retire, he wanted to discuss the process to search for a new chief. According to Section 3-2(d) of the Groton Charter, in part, "the Board shall also appoint, consistent with paragraph (d) of Section 4-2...a fire chief". Under the authority of the Town

Manager, Section 4-2(d) states, in part, that “whenever a vacancy occurs in the office of...fire chief...to select and present at least 2 qualified candidates to the board of selectmen for appointment by the board to the office, as provided for in section 3-2(d).” Mr. Haddad said that he wanted this process to be open and transparent. He said that he would like to set up a meeting on Monday, January 27th at 6pm at the Lost Lake Fire Station to meet with members of the Fire Department to hear what they have to say about the process and any ideas they may have. Mr. Haddad said that he had thought about having himself, a couple of Selectmen, members of the Fire Department, a Chief from another town, and a resident or 2 to serve on the search committee. He said that those were his ideas and welcomed input. Mr. Schulman asked if there would be an assessment center and who would run it. Mr. Haddad said that the Board of Selectmen would do the assessment center. Mr. Petropoulos said that he would like to see a representation from both the call and full-time departments adding that he would like to also see them appoint a representative themselves. He also suggested having a member of the Personnel Board serve on the committee. Mr. Haddad said that it was one department made up of call and full-time members and would rather say representation of the Fire Department. Mr. Degen said that the search committee should be no larger than seven (7) members as it would be difficult to accommodate everyone’s schedules. Ms. Eliot said she supported an outside Chief sitting in on the search as it provided an outside perspective. Mr. Degen said that he liked the idea of the department electing their own representatives. Mr. Haddad said that he had no problem with that.

Bill VanSchalkwyk of 288 Lost Lake Drive introduced himself as a member of the Fire Department. He said that he was happy to hear that the search process was going to be open and transparent and thought that having two (2) members selected by the department was a good idea. Chief Bosselait said that he thought having an outside chief was a good idea and thought it should be someone with combination department experience. Mr. Robertson said that he agreed with Mr. Petropoulos adding that the Personnel Board should be represented. He added that that same person could also serve as the town resident. Tyler Shute of Graniteville Road said that there were a lot of fire department aspects that needed to be considered.

7. Mr. Haddad said that he had received a letter from Halsey Platt and Chris Brown proposing to extend their offer to purchase Squannacook Hall until May 25, 2014 if the Board supported and covered the costs associated with starting the permitting process to address concern raised with parking by the West Groton Christian Union Church. Mr. Schulman asked how much the expenses were. Mr. Haddad said around \$2K. Mr. Degen said that the Affordable Housing Trust was scheduled to meet with Mr. Platt and Mr. Brown to discuss the possibility of buying down one (1) unit and make it affordable. He requested that the discussion be brought back after the Affordable Housing Trust met as it wasn’t time sensitive. Ms. Eliot suggested that they extend a letter of acceptance and wait until the end of the month to further discuss this.
8. Mr. Haddad said that he had appointed Dana Freeman as the Part-time Mechanic at the Groton Pool & Golf Center and requested that the Board vote to ratify the appointment.

Mr. Schulman moved to ratify the appointment of Dan Freeman as the Part-time Mechanic at the Groton Pool & Golf Center. Ms. Eliot seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Petropoulos said that it had come to his attention that cuts were made to coverage at the Fire Department Monday through Friday which in his opinion jeopardized public safety. Mr. Petropoulos said that Groton’s Firefighter/EMS staffing model included 4 firefighters on duty from 8am-4pm Monday-Friday. He said that on October 21st the Town requested a budget modification to pay for projected increases in FY14 costs. Town Meeting approved those requests. According to Mr. Petropoulos, on November 12th the Fire Chief was directed not to fill vacancies with overtime staff unless coverage fell below 2 full-time firefighters. He said that the Town Manager said the cuts were necessary as part of responsible fiscal management. He said that between November 13th and today, the department had operated with unfilled shifts and in his opinion jeopardized public safety.

Mr. Petropoulos said that EMS medical response required two (2) personnel and that in 2009 Groton Town Meeting funded a 4th full-time firefighter position in order to allow for a staffing model of 4 on duty Monday-Friday 8am-

4pm. He said that this model allowed for two (2) concurrent EMS calls to come or a combination of EMS/Fire calls to be staffed adding that 45% of calls come in between 8am-4pm Monday through Friday. Mr. Petropoulos said that they had promised the Fall Town Meeting that overtime and retroactive pay due to a new Fire Union Contract would be covered. Mr. Petropoulos said that on November 12th, according to information told to him, the Town Manager instructed the Fire Chief to refuse overtime Monday-Friday 8am-4pm unless full-time staffing went below two (2). Mr. Petropoulos said that consequently the Mon-Friday 8am-4pm shift had run below staff 69% of the time and delays ranging between 9-21 minutes had occurred. He added that one EMS call had to rely on mutual aid. Mr. Petropoulos went on to talk about the August EMS call at Lawrence Academy and how a delay of 9-21 minutes could have meant a different outcome for the unresponsive student. Mr. Petropoulos said that he was very concerned about the impact this decision had on public safety and asked the Board to allow the Fire Chief to return staffing to levels necessary.

Mr. Degen asked Mr. Petropoulos where he received his data from. Mr. Petropoulos said that he worked closely with the Fire Chief to find out response times, where vehicles were located, etc.

Mr. Haddad said that he wanted to clarify. He said that last spring (2013) they had gone to the Spring Town Meeting requesting \$45K to fund fire wages. He said that the Finance Committee had issues with the Fire and Police budgets and asked that the numbers/overtime be watched. On September 30th, Mr. Haddad said that he had asked the Fire Chief to control overtime due to the numbers over the first 90 days of FY14. On October 21st, \$58,472 had been approved by Town Meeting to fund the 2% COLA in the firefighters contract. Mr. Haddad said that this was not for overtime. It was for the COLA and retroactive pay. Mr. Haddad said that he had been looking at the budget and wages was averaging \$23,600/payroll through the first 13 weeks. This left \$21,000 available for payroll moving forward. If payroll stayed at \$23,600 every pay period, they would be looking at a \$35K problem at the end of the FY. He said that because of this situation, he had done what he thought was best for budget reasons and not anything that would affect public safety. He added that the same directive had been given to the Police Department. Mr. Haddad said that during the FY15 budget process, the Fire Chief has addressed this shortfall. Mr. Haddad added that as the Town's CFO he had to make a decision and stands by that decision.

Mr. Degen said that it Mr. Petropoulos was looking at the hours while Mr. Haddad was looking at the budget. He thought it made sense to defer to Chief Bosselait to hear his recommendation. Chief Bosselait said that public safety was number one to all of them. He said that there was concern over the past few budgets and they required additional funds for wages. He said that this directive this early on had affected their ability to respond and had increased their response time. Chief Bosselait said that he wanted to sit down and come up with another way.

Ms. Eliot said that part of the issues had come up as union issues also and had come up since the union was formed. One issue had been whether a per diem could be used to fill a full-time shift. She said that she was not voting on anything that night and wanted to see the numbers. Mr. Schulman agreed with Ms. Eliot. He asked Mr. Petropoulos what time period the 69% of unfilled shift was. Chief Bosselait said that the time period was over 42 weekdays during the time the directive had been given. Mr. Schulman said that he had heard during an 8am-4pm shift Monday-Friday normally 4 department members were schedule (3 full-time and 1 per diem) at which time during those 42 days 69% of the time shifts scheduled were not filled. Mr. Petropoulos said that during that time of year one firefighter had taken four (4) weeks' vacation time. Mr. Schulman said that he wanted to see more realistic numbers and thought the example used was atypical. He said that 69% would be 2/3 of the days adding that it was no wonder they had a monetary issue. Mr. Schulman said that this was "unfair and baffling." Mr. Haddad agreed adding that it was unfair to use this time period as a snapshot. Mr. Degen said that because they didn't have a full board and because they needed additional information, they should form a subcommittee to look into this further. He asked the Board to consider a hybrid for the next two (2) weeks. Mr. Petropoulos said that they had been operating at below levels promised to their citizens. Mr. Haddad said that the presentation should have made clear the fact that 69% of those shifts were unfilled due to high vacation time. Mr. Haddad agreed that a subcommittee

should be formed as soon as possible. Ms. Eliot said that they only have five (5) full-time Union employees. She said that they can't cover all those hours with only five (5) full-time firefighters without supplementing with per diem department members. She asked why they were paying overtime when the per diem employees were able and willing to cover shifts. She thought this was a combination of budget and union obligations. Mr. Haddad didn't have a problem with the Chief staffing shifts over the next two (2) weeks as long as the matter was looked into. Mr. Schulman said that he had more questions than answers but was okay with the proposal. Mr. Petropoulos said that he didn't think he would have time to serve on the subcommittee and nominated Mr. Degen as he had a good handle on the budget. Mr. Degen said that he was happy to do it.

LIASION REPORTS

Ms. Eliot said that the School Committee would be interviewing the 2 finalists for the Superintendent position at 5pm that Wednesday and Thursday at the High School Library.

MINUTES

Mr. Schulman moved to accept the Regular Session minutes of December 11, 2013. Ms. Eliot seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Eliot asked that the Executive Session minutes of December 16th be separated and brought back to a future meeting.

Mr. Petropoulos moved to adjourn at 8:25pm. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Approved: _____

Anna Eliot, Clerk

respectfully *submitted*,
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 2/17/14