

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING  
MINUTES FEBRUARY 24, 2014  
APPROVED**

**Present:** Peter S. Cunningham, Chairman; Anna Eliot, Clerk; Stuart M. Schulman; John G. Petropoulos

**Absent:** Josh A. Degen

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

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Cunningham said that he would like to take a moment to recognize a couple of individuals. Mr. Cunningham read aloud a proclamation given to Jen and Lauren Thorburn for their hard work and dedication towards the establishment of a fund for donations to the Groton Dog Pound as a project for their Silver Award in Groton Girl Scout Troop #6650. Mr. Tom Delaney, Animal Control Officer, said that the work Jen and Lauren did was phenomenal adding that the amount of donations they collected was greatly appreciated. It was more than the Pound had ever had before. Mr. George Moore, Animal Control Officer, said that what Jen and Lauren had done to collect donations for the Pound made things better for animals that needed help.

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

Mr. Haddad said that the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee met that Saturday to continue their budget discussion. He said that the Finance Committee set a goal of cutting \$500K out of the municipal budget and tried to find ways to do that without impacting services. They were able to come up with \$300K in cuts. Proposed cuts included things like reduction in the health insurance budget, reduction in library wages, reduction in the Town Counsel budget, elimination of a proposed Communications Officer, to name a few. He said that the original Groton Dunstable Regional proposed budget was looking for \$1.9M from Groton. Mr. Haddad said that he could come up with \$1.5M which included a positive vote to exclude the fire station debt which would require Dunstable to come up with \$300K. He recommended that the Board call for a Special Election on April 1<sup>st</sup> to exclude the fire station debt of \$448K. He said that if they taxed to the max, the average tax bill (on a home valued at \$400K) would increase approximately \$408. Mr. Haddad said that Mr. Bouchard was going to try to put together some information so to better educate residents on what all of this means. Mr. Haddad said that by having a Special Election on April 1<sup>st</sup> they would not have to have a contingent vote at Town Meeting on the operating budget. Mr. Bouchard had 35 days to call for a Special Election and the 35<sup>th</sup> day is April 1<sup>st</sup>. This would also allow them to make any necessary changes to the warrant before it goes to the printer the week after. Mr. Haddad said that the cost to hold the election would be around \$5K. Mr. Cunningham said there didn't seem to be a perfect approach.

*Mr. Schulman moved to call for a Special Election to have the Town vote on whether or not to exclude the debt on the new Fire Station to defray costs to the school district. Ms. Eliot seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

**TOWN MEETING REVIEW COMMITTEE**

Mr. Collins said that the Committee had held meetings over the last 12 months. The Committee distributed a survey throughout Town and other Town Clerks were talked to about their communities' town meetings. Mr. Collins said that the principal concern raised was that of accessibility issues at the current meeting space. He said that the school district had been very responsive to recommendations for improving the accessibility of the space. He said they had also looked at ways in which transportation could be provided to those who could not otherwise get to Town Meeting. Mr. Collins said they looked at remote participation. They found out that the law didn't allow for it but the technology was there. Voting privately was also brought up as part of the survey. Onsite electronic voting could take care of that. He said it was nice to see there wasn't an outcry for a representative Town Meeting.

Mr. Pease said that according to the surveys returned, the number one reason for people don't attend Town Meetings was conflicts. Most residents felt as though holding Town Meeting on a week night was still the preferred option. Most residents also felt as though that having the opportunity to debate and vote was important. Residents felt as though there was ample time given to voice their opinions but also felt as though Town Meeting could be long and boring. Another suggestion was to offer on-site childcare so parents of younger children could attend.

Mr. Collins said that discussions had with other Town Clerks showed that we compare favorably and that we were doing things well. He said there was always room for improvement. Mr. Collins said that he believed the next step would be for the Board of Selectmen to take action on what they have found. Mr. Cunningham thanked the Committee for their time adding that they had tried to integrate some of the suggestions prior to the Fall 2013 Town Meeting such as accessibility issues and different means of providing additional information to the voters prior to Town Meeting. Ms. Collette said that the Commission on Accessibility had meetings with the Council on Aging Director, Kathy Shelp who was very willing to help out with transportation to and from Town Meeting.

Mr. Schulman echoed Mr. Cunningham thanks adding that a lot of work had been done by the Committee and it seemed as though everyone learned a few things. Mr. Petropoulos asked what the cost of electronic voting would be. Mr. Collins said that they would have the option of purchasing it or leasing it with the devil being in how many were needed. Mr. Harker said that one of the Town's he contacted had electronic voting and the cost could run from \$10K-50K. Mr. Petropoulos asked why childcare stopped. Mr. Collins said that it stopped because it wasn't being used.

#### **MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING – STATION AVE LAND SWAP**

Mr. Haddad said that GELD was ready to construct their building and therefore they needed to discuss and vote whether or not to execute the Station Ave land swap as per the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Mr. Cunningham asked Mr. Kelly of the Light Department how it was determined that the land the Town was to receive was the .7 acre parcel. Mr. Kelly said that the land was of no benefit or value to the Light Department. Ms. Eliot said that she would like to see where the property line will be when developed. She asked if Mr. Kelly had a site plan. Mr. Kelly said that he didn't bring it with him adding that nothing had changed on the plans since the MOU was drafted. Ms. Eliot asked if there was a provision for a thru road. Mr. Kelly said that he hoped not to be involved in that discussion. Ms. Eliot said that the plan presented was not part of the original MOU. Mr. Haddad said that the Light Commissioners wanted to recoup the \$350K they spent on the Downes property. Mr. Haddad asked if the Light Commissioners had taken a vote to restore the PILOT program. Mr. Kelly said they had not. Mr. Haddad asked if the Light Commissioner would take a vote to restore the PILOT program. Mr. Kelley said that they would take a vote.

*Mr. Petropoulos moved to ratify the Memorandum of Understanding with the Groton Electric Light Department for the Station Ave Land Swap. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion. The motion carried 3-0-1 in favor with Ms. Eliot abstaining.*

#### **TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT CONT.**

Mr. Haddad said that the process everyone went through to make necessary cuts in order to help the schools budget issues went very well. He said that the Library really stepped up to the plate with their proposed cuts as did the Police and Fire Chief. Mr. Haddad said that everyone thought it made sense to fill the HR Director position adding that he was planning to do that unless he heard from the Board not to. Mr. Cunningham said that contracting out the position to a firm was would not give the employees the same level of service adding that he was in support of filling the position. Mr. Haddad added that no positions were slated to be eliminated as part of the \$300K in cuts. Mr. Schulman said that he was pleased they could squeeze out \$300K in cuts and not eliminate positions or employees. Ms. Eliot said that it was a painful job and was impressed that people came to the table.

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to ratify the following appointments of the Town Manager:

1. Warren Gibson - Insurance Advisory Committee
2. Nadine Bishop – Election Worker
3. Carole Clark – Election Worker
4. Gail Chalmers – Election Worker

*Mr. Schulman moved to ratify the appointment of Warren Gibson to the Insurance Advisory Committee and Nadine Bishop, Carole Clark, and Gail Chalmers as Election Workers. Ms. Eliot seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Mr. Haddad said that the Board and Town Meeting, last fall, voted to accept the layouts of both Ridgewood Avenue and Cow Pond Brook Road. He said that one final vote is required by the Board so that the layouts can be recorded at the Registry of Deeds.

*Ms. Eliot moved to accept the layout of Ridgewood Avenue. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

*Ms. Eliot moved to accept the layout of Cow Pond Brook Road. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

#### **MINUTES**

*Ms. Eliot moved to accept the Regular Session minutes of January 27, 2014. Mr. Petropoulos seconded the motion adding that there was a correction he would like made on page 3 of 4. The motion carried 3-0-1 in favor with Mr. Schulman abstaining.*

*Ms. Eliot moved to accept the Executive Session minutes of January 27, 2014 and not release. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion.*

Mr. Petropoulos asked why the minutes couldn't be released. Mr. Cunningham said that they should not be released because of future strategy.

*The motion carried 3-0-1 in favor with Mr. Schulman abstaining.*

#### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Petropoulos said that the fundraiser to assist the Blood Farm employees would be held on Thursday at 7pm at Gibbet Hill Grill. They were asking for a \$20 donation at the door and local entertainment by Gary Wilson as well as local desserts would be provided.

Ms. Eliot said that the Groton Community Dinner would be held on Friday night at 5:30pm. The event was free of charge.

*Ms. Eliot moved to adjourn at 8:30pm. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Anna Eliot, Clerk

Date Approved: 3/24/14

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respectfully submitted,  
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant