

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
MINUTES FEBRUARY 1, 2016
APPROVED**

Present: John G. Petropoulos, Chair; Anna Eliot, Vice Chair; Stuart M. Schulman, Clerk; Peter S. Cunningham, Member; Joshua A. Degen, Member

Also Present: Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager

Mr. Petropoulos called the meeting to order at 6:06pm and reviewed the agenda.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Petropoulos said that the Town had a fire the week prior in which there was loss of life. He said that as a community they hurt as a result of this. He wanted to express thanks to the people that were there that tried to help adding he knew it must be difficult for them. He extended his sympathies to the family and friends of those lost.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that as people were aware, they had been searching for a Land Use Director/Town Planner to replace Ms. Collette when she retired at the end of February. He said that he had previously informed the Board of the process to conduct the search but wanted to explain what it was again. He said they advertised the job in several publications last Fall; appointed a search committee made up of himself, HR Director, Planning Board Members Perkins and Barringer, the Building Commissioner, Personnel Board Member Robertson, Selectman Eliot and Ms. Dunbar. He said they received 13 applications and interviewed five candidates. He said that was then narrowed down to three finalists to be interviewed by the Planning Board. He said one candidate dropped out and the Planning Board interviewed two. Based on their interviews, the Planning Board informed Mr. Haddad they would be comfortable with either candidate. He said he then asked the Department Heads to interview the finalists as well and based on both unanimous recommendation, he wanted to recommend Laurie Connors Bonavita as the Land Use Director/Town Planner effective March 1, 2016. He said Ms. Bonavita was currently the Director of Planning and Development/Town Planner for the Town of Millbury, a position she has held for eleven years. He said that this was a very thorough process and was pleased with the outcome. He respectfully requested that the Board consider rarifying the appointment.

Mr. Cunningham said that in looking at her resume she had a good base line of experience in the position adding there were a lot of commonalities in the positions and welcomed her to Groton. Mr. Degen welcomed Ms. Bonavita. He said that he reviewed her resume and thought her qualities and characteristics were very similar to what she would be doing. He said he thought the process followed was done well and was glad to have her come on board. Ms. Eliot said that the caliber of what she would bring to Town Hall was impressive and thought that the meetings with the Planning Board and Department Heads were very revealing. She said that the comfort level with other departments was there. She said that she look forward to working with her. Mr. Petropoulos said that he hoped she understood what big shoes she had to fill. Ms. Bonavita said that she did adding that she met Ms. Collette when she worked for the MRPC when she did Groton's buildout analysis back in 1999. She said that Ms. Collette had a fabulous reputation and knew she had big shoes to fill. Mr. Schulman said that he wished her luck and looked forward to working with Ms. Bonavita.

Ms. Perkins said that Ms. Bonavita was definitely their choice adding they found her to be very qualified. Important to have someone with experience and have seen projects go from start to finish. Pleased to have someone as qualified as Laurie.

Ms. Eliot moved to ratify the appointment of Laurie Connors Bonavita as Land Use Director/Town Planner beginning March 1, 2016. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Mr. Degen asked what grade the position was. Mr. Haddad said that he was unsure adding that it was not changing from what it currently was. The motion carried unanimously.

FRIENDS OF PRESCOTT SCHOOL

Ms. Mary Jennings introduced herself as Chair of the Friends of Prescott School adding that they had been before the Board several weeks ago with CPA application. She said that since then things had changed and the reason they were back with a revised application. She said that they were made aware in early January about requirements that the school district wished to have for immediate attention. She said that they also became aware through the municipal committee of the Bargmann report which also suggested upgrades. She said that the Board had also heard from the municipal committee their vision for the Prescott School. Also, since then, the CPC has reviewed their application and provided feedback. She said they were present that night to seek a letter of support for code and safety improvements to the Prescott School. She said that they were filing an application in conjunction with the Town and the Committee.

Mr. Halsey Platt said that there were 11 items that they felt were most important to get done and focus on life safety and handicap accessibility. He said that the first 5 items were to install a sprinkler system, water service for fire suppression, removing and rebuilding stairs off gym, and handicap parking signs. He said that these items would survive and be part of a long term plan for the building. Mr. Platt said that there were also some code non-compliance issues that they needed to address adding that the Building Commissioner would agree and would like to see that life safety and handicap issues be handled first. Mr. Platt said that the first thing they need to do to prepare their final application is get actual cost estimates. He said that there was likelihood that the Town could self-perform some of this work and he had a meeting scheduled to discuss some of these items with Mr. Delaney the following week.

Ms. Jennings said that they wanted to provide feedback about CPA application process. Mr. Bruce Easom, speaking as member of Friends of Prescott said that the CPC had reviewed draft applications the previous Monday. He said that he recused himself from this application discussion because of potential conflict of interest. He said that based on their feedback, there was only one outstanding item which was a letter of support from the Board of Selectmen who held control and custody of the building. He reminded the Board that he was before them 2-weeks ago requesting that letter and at the time the Board was unable to support the request. He said that the Friends decided to submit the application anyhow. He said that the next steps included a public hearing on February 8th in which the CPC would hear comments from the public and provide written feedback to the applicants with final applications due on March 11th. Mr. Easom said that the Friends of Prescott would like to reach out to other organizations and committees in town for letters of support but thought it was important to receive one from the Selectmen before asking others. He said that this project could be pulled at any time by submitting a letter of close out if the Board were to choose not to move forward with the project. Mr. Easom added that they had received a letter of support from Municipal Building Committee for Prescott School.

Mr. Sheldon said that the Committee had met the week before and voted to support this application. He said that the vision had been completed and they were in the process of drafting the final report which they hoped to have completed in early March. He said that they would be crafting a 5-year development plan that would incorporate most of these items. Mr. Petropoulos asked if the letter of support was unanimous. Mr. Sheldon

said yes. Mr. Schulman said that it might be useful to go over the issues that were raised by the three of them that voted against supporting a letter of support initially. Mr. Cunningham said that some of his initial questions were answered last week. He said that a report had not yet been provided by the Committee about their vision. He said that the Board had also just adopted an ADA compliance policy since that vote was taken. He said that these items help push this application along toward support. Mr. Degen said that he understood they had an obligation to make Prescott handicap accessible. He said that in looking at the list provided and in particular the sprinkler issues he still felt the same way about it. He said that based on the ultimate use of the building certain aspects might be premature adding he was not saying it was not needed. He said that he would like to see them amend their CPC application after they meet with Mr. Delaney and take out the things they don't need at this time. He said that he could not support the overall number of \$170K. Mr. Cunningham asked if that as part of application process the amount requested could go down if funding were approved by Town Meeting. Mr. Easom said that it was his understanding that up until the warrant article was written the amount was negotiable. He said that Chapter 44B allowed Town Meeting to vote to approve the amount requested, vote on a lower the amount or reject it all together. Mr. Cunningham said it sounded as though there was time to vet this a little further. Mr. Easom said that the deadline for submitting a final application was March 11th. Mr. Platt said that given the fact the Mr. Haddad would be the purchasing agent for this project, his expectation was to bring the project in under budget. Mr. Degen said that he was concerned that if they wrote a letter of support and the CPC were to approve the application and it was to be further approved at Town Meeting, those funds would be encumbered based on that. He said that the funds would be further tied up until the project was completed and only at that time would any remaining funds be returned back to the bucket in which they came from. Mr. Easom said that was correct adding that the CPC would need to issue a project close out letter upon request to return any funds.

Mr. Haddad reminded everyone that when the Friends came in with their initial request, this was just an application to sprinkler the building. He said that they had since come back with a larger list for the same amount of money that addresses a lot of their concerns. He said that these were all items that could be done regardless of the future use of the building. He said that his recommendation would be to support this application.

Ms. Eliot said that she was on the committee and reluctantly voted in favor of the letter of support. She said that she was concerned that this project would become a political football like the Country Club had been. She said that she had stated all along that this building should make money for the Town not cost the Town. She said that the committee was working very hard to see that this become a revenue generating source for the Town adding they were a long way away from convincing her that that was being done. She said that her voting in favor of support of this letter was not her voting in favor of this project. Mr. Degen agreed that they had come a long way on this. He said that he had done a quick analysis of this and was not going to be able to support a sprinkler system or water service adding the figured that would takes \$60K off the top right away. He said that he also could not support the removal of the partitions between the boys and girls rooms and estimated that would take another \$10K off. He said that he could also not support replacement of the handrails adding he understood they were child size height didn't mean they couldn't be used right now. He said that the other items made a lot of sense and added up to around \$61K with contingencies. He said that he would be willing to support this request if they amend their application and request.

Mr. Petropoulos said that he thought it was financially useful to spend CPC dollars today rather than 5 years from now adding he was encouraged to hear that the Prescott Committee's vote was unanimous. He said that the list the Committee had made included well over 70% of retained costs. He said that a lot of this was to bring the building up to code. He said that the biggest issue they had was a tenant in a building that was in flux. He said that they should want to show their commitment to the tenant that they want to fix the building so

that it was adequate for them. Ms. Erickson said that he thought the safety issues needed to be addressed in order to protect the people that work in that building.

Mr. Schulman said that the original quote was for just sprinklers and asked why that had changed. Mr. Haddad said that they decided to only sprinkle the 3rd floor and not the entire building like originally stated. Mr. Sheldon said that their committee had reached out to the Superintendent and her business manager and a meeting was had January 27th to learn from them on what their plans were. He said they asked the administration what their long term needs were and were told they would like to see a sprinkler system installed. Ms. Eliot said that most of this priority list has come from the tenant and wanted to make that known. Mr. Degen said that they had spent a lot of money on this building over the last 7-10 years including new windows, a new roof, heating system, etc. and the town had borne a bulk of the cost already. He said that there was not a whole lot of added value as they had seen from trying to sell the building. He said that didn't mean they should do more than they absolutely needed.

Mr. Cunningham moved to offer a letter of support for the CPA application submitted by the Friends of Prescott for a fire suppression system and ADA compliant upgrades to the Prescott School. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion.

Ms. Pine said that all improvements to be done were enhancements to a property they as a Town own adding that the rest of the issues were code compliant issues.

The motion carried 4-1-0 in favor with Mr. Degen voting in opposition.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

2. Mr. Haddad said that he wanted to provide the Board with an update on the budget. He said that Governor Baker had submitted his proposed budget to the legislature and suggested that State Aid be level funded. He said that was very good news. He said last Friday a few officials attended the Nashoba Tech breakfast and heard their proposed budget. He said that Groton's assessment was \$570,080 down from over \$600K due to a reduction in enrollment. He said that the Finance Committee had provided them with a proposed charge and makeup of a Budget Sustainability Committee. Mr. Haddad said that he supported the mission of the Finance Committee; however asked them to consider the fact that the Town Manager was not included in the make-up of the Committee and should be involved in any budget discussion of the Town as the CFO. He said that he would like to see the Board adopt the charge and add the Town Manager as a member. Mr. Green read a letter submitted to the Board of Selectmen Chairman about the reasons behind the creation of this Committee. Mr. Green said that this was debated and discussed at their last meeting quite a bit adding that most of the debate was around what the committee should be focusing on such as benefits and wages and their sustainability. He said that the other topic that took up the most debate was the makeup of the committee. He said that some members wanted to see the Town Manager on the committee adding he personally had him on his committee makeup list. Mr. Cunningham said that it would make sense to include the Town Manager adding that his participation in the process was important and to exclude him made no sense. He said that he liked the draft and the charge but needed to see it amended to include the Town Manager. Mr. Schulman said that he agreed with Mr. Cunningham adding that he was baffled that the Town Manager was not on the committee list. He said that he would like to hear from that didn't think the Town Manager should be on there. Ms. Eliot agreed.

Mr. Prest said that he thought Mr. Haddad should be on the Committee and suggested that it be made up of nine members not seven and should include two member at large not one. He said that Mr.

Haddad should be on the committee as the CFO for the Town. Mr. Prest said that that comments had been made at their meeting that the town employees asked to serve on the Committee would be intimidated by having the Town Manager on the committee. He said he has yet to meet an employee that feels that way. Mr. Hartnett said that they (the employees and Town Manager) share mutual respect. He said that in his entire municipal financial career he had not met anyone that understands municipal finance better than Mr. Haddad. He said that they employees were not intimidated by Mr. Haddad and would not be if serving on this committee together.

Mr. Petropoulos said that he thought this committee should be made up entirely of citizens of the Town. He said that there was a real constituency issue here and didn't believe there was a need to exclude real influences here. He said that he would like the vote to come from the Town of Groton and might mean that some need to be moved off this list to include those residents. Mr. Green said that Mr. Petropoulos did bring this up at their meeting and their consensus was that this committee not make hard decisions but rather gather facts and present those options. He said that they wanted those that had the best knowledge of the budget involved to make sure they discussed the facts and discussed them correctly. Ms. Eliot said that the experts were the people that were on the Finance Committee adding that they were committed to the financial issues of the Town. Mr. Robertson said that he agreed with Mr. Green about having town employees on the committee. He said that he was one that supported having Mr. Haddad being on the committee. He said that it would be his recommendation to add the Town Manager and make it an eight person committee. Mr. Schulman countered the recommendation by making it a nine person committee adding the Town Manager and a second Finance Committee member. He said that a majority of the committee would be Groton residents to Mr. Petropoulos's argument. Mr. Degen suggested adding Mr. Haddad and a second citizen at large. He said that they could also remove the Board of Selectmen member as the Town Manager would serve as BOS representative. Mr. Petropoulos said that a tax payer might offer an alternative perspective. Mr. Frank Kolak agreed adding that citizens would offer a fresh set of eyes.

Mr. Cunningham moved to adopt the charge presented by the Finance Committee to create a committee to study sustainable municipal growth and that we adopt it as an Advisory Committee with 9 members including the Town Manager and another citizen at large. Ms. Eliot seconded the motion.

Mr. Haddad said that he wanted to comment on the point of citizens of the Town should be making budget recommendations. He said that at the time that the Charter was adopted the Town debated whether or not the Town Manager should be a resident of the Town. He said that just because he was not a resident of the Town it didn't mean that he didn't care about the Town. He said that he knows a lot more about this Town than the one he lives in adding that he genuinely cared about the Town. He said that based on the argument made by the Chairman, he should not be putting together the operating budget. Mr. Petropoulos said that sustainability was not just the budget it was the willingness to support the budget. He said that this group may find that its recommendation is that if they want what they want, they may have to pay for it and spend more adding it was only a perspective that Town people could make. Ms. Eliot suggested that the second citizen be a School Committee member.

Mr. Cunningham called for a vote on the motion he made that was seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Haddad said that he wanted to clear up some confusion their appeared to be on his proposed plan on debt service. He said that he wanted to make clear that he was not balancing the budget while deferring debt service. Mr. Haddad said that in FY16 the Town appropriated \$1,383,590 in debt

service. He said that when they established the FY16 budget in December of 2015, they carried the amount of \$125,000 for short term interest to cover the costs associated with Capital Projects being requested at the 2015 Spring Town Meeting. He said that when the budget was established, they had no idea what the costs would be for interest and established a very conservative budget. He said that in reality, when they finally borrowed the money, the actual cost was \$8,113 or \$116,887 under budget. Mr. Haddad said that this money would not be spent in FY16 and would be turned back as free cash. He said that in FY17 they were appropriating \$1,282,713 or \$108,877 less than FY16. He said that while they over-appropriated Short Term Debt in FY16, they actually increased the \$48,222. He said that they had not deferred debt to balance the budget. Mr. Haddad said that because they were looking to permanently bond projects in future years they decided to wait until then. If they were to bond money every year, it wouldn't look good to the bond companies and it costs \$50K every time you bond. Mr. Haddad said that they were not deferring debt to balance the budget but in fact plan for the debt service.

Mr. Haddad said he knew it was confusing but again they didn't put off the debt service. He said that the legislature allows them to rollover debt for six years before permanently financing it because of things like this. Mr. Hartnett said that he ran it by their bond counsel and they recommended that the Town do it this way. Mr. Degen said that when they were provided with preliminary budget projections in November there was \$108K in principal in that budget. He said that he understood that this was being deferred out to 2020 when the pension liability was exhausted and gone. Mr. Degen said that by deferring the principal and paying the interest only was it actually 2.2% or did the growth grow by 3.1%. Mr. Haddad said that when he put together the preliminary budget they had not provided him with budget yet and wished he hadn't done that. Mr. Haddad said that if he didn't give them a preliminary budget and they gave him 2.2% he would have still done what he did. He said that it just so happened that it came out to 2.2%. Mr. Degen asked if they were not to pay the debt principal until subsequent years and you were to look at the overall budget, he asked if the savings rolled into total municipal growth was saving any money. Mr. Haddad said that he could argue that he carried an artificially high number for Nashoba Tech and the assessment came in lower due to a drop in enrollment. Mr. Haddad said that they were not rolling over all debt, some of it was being paid. Mr. Degen argued that some of the budget costs may have been unknown but they did know what the debt budget was. Mr. Haddad said that he did not have the final numbers from Mr. Hartnett as they hadn't received those numbers from their financial advisor yet. Mr. Petropoulos said that he was disappointed that they achieved 2.2% by deferring debt.

Mr. Robertson said that he agreed with Mr. Haddad in that the preliminary budget was a best guess. He said that they wanted to see 2.2% and in that guestimate municipal spending without debt was going up by 2.2%. He said that he, not knowing what the debt line was, assumed it was fixed. Mr. Robertson said that debt saves money adding he didn't disagree with Mr. Haddad. He said that he was hoping the wage and benefits lines would be reduced along with other expenses. He said that Mr. Degen was correct in the sense that what they looked at went up. Mr. Green said that they had an entire day planned on the 13th where they were going to debate these things. He said that he appreciated his updates but invite those attend or watch at home.

Mr. Haddad asked if there was anyone else they wanted to invite to the budget meeting. Mr. Degen said that he would like the Town Clerk to be there. Mr. Green asked if there was anything specific to have the Town Clerk there for. Mr. Degen said that they would all receive his proposed budget cuts in the next couple of days.

3. Mr. Haddad said that at their last meeting he had presented the Board with a proposal to adopt M.G.L. c.60, §3D that would provide a fund for people to donate money to help with low-income seniors and disabled residents with their property tax bill. He said that Selectmen Degen requested that they reach out to the Town of Littleton to find out their experience with the law. He said that they contacted Littleton Town Treasurer Steve Venuti for this information. He said that Littleton's program is called T.R.E.A.D (Tax Relief for Elders and the Disabled). The program was authorized at their 2015 Fall Town Meeting adding that by statute the Treasurer and Chair of Board of Assessors are on the committee by default. He said that Littleton had not gone through the application review process yet, but the Council on Aging was taking the lead on compiling the applications. He said that Littleton set up an online transaction link through UniBank on the same page at the R/E tax transaction, but most of their donations had come in via checks to the COA. He said that since the tax bills had gone out at the end of December, Littleton had taken in a little over \$3,000 in donations; more than they expected right out of the gate. He said that Littleton would decide whether to give it all out each year or disperse a partial amount and start to grow some base dollars. He said that he was glad they were putting this forward.
4. Mr. Haddad said that he would like to provide the Board with the second quarter financial update but defer the other items on his Town Manager's Report to next week. Mr. Petropoulos said that he would prefer deferring the financial update till next week also.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Degen said that four of them attended the school committee 2-day conference where they discussed the future visioning for the district. He said that over 80 individuals attended and thought it was a good brainstorming session.

Mr. Petropoulos said that he was under the impression that they regularly review their selectmen's policies adding it appeared that was not the case. He said that he had a couple of things he would like to see included and asked if they should discuss this in a special session or a working group. Mr. Haddad said that he would recommend discussing them at work session and at the same time have a workshop on board relations adding it was one of their goals to do that. Mr. Degen suggested that they wait until after the annual election adding they may be new members. Ms. Eliot said that they could do it now and again if need be. It was decided to set up a meeting now and address it again at a future date if they felt the need.

Mr. Haddad said that there was a request to provide a State of the Town at Town Meeting. He said that he received a phone call that day that a State of the Town was really in the form of the annual report. Mr. Petropoulos apologized adding he was unaware that he had to write this. He said that he thought it might be nice to speak up at Town Meeting about what has been going on over the last year adding that a verbal discussion might be more meaningful than leaving it up to people to read in a book. Mr. Degen said that they would have to check with the Moderator as it was his meeting. Mr. Cunningham said that some think that Town Meeting is already too long and might suggest that if a report were to be made that it be kept short. Mr. Degen suggested that the report be read at a selectmen's meeting instead of Town Meeting. He said that the reporters could report on it and people could watch it on Vimeo. Mr. Cunningham agreed.

MINUTES

Ms. Eliot moved to approve the minutes of January 11, 2016. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Degen moved to exit regular session and enter into Executive Session pursuant to M.G.L. c30A, §21, Clause 2 "to conduct strategy session in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel or to conduct

collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with non-union personnel and not return to open session adding this was relative to Town Manager contract negotiations. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion. Roll Call: Cunningham-aye; Degen-aye; Eliot-aye; Petropoulos-aye; Schulman-aye.

Approved: _____

Stuart Schulman, Clerk

respectfully *submitted*,
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 2/29/16