

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
MINUTES FEBRUARY 29, 2016
APPROVED**

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

Absent: Joshua A. Degen

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

Mr. Petropoulos called the meeting to order at 6:00pm and reviewed the agenda.

Mr. Green called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:00pm.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Schulman said that tomorrow was Election Day and reminded everyone to get out and vote. Mr. Bouchard said that the polls at the Country Club and Senior Center would be open from 7am-8pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Ms. Gina Cronin of 15 Gilson Road explained that school funding figures were based on multiple factors. She said that the State estimates how much each town can raise and dedicate to the schools adding that the gap between that was filled with Chapter 70 state aid. She said that districts may need to contribute more than the minimum. She said that the needs assessment showed a widening gap. Ms. Cronin said that if an override was needed the wording of the override question would become more important and thought it was only fair that the question include both municipal and school funding. Ms. Cronin offered suggested wording.

Ms. Angela Donahue of 10 Bishop Way said that she and her husband Pat may not attend meetings regularly but try to watch all meetings. She said they would like to see more support for the schools adding they were seeing a lack of conviction from the Town and thought the net spending needed to increase. She said that they had always supported the municipal side thinking the vision was shared on the school side. She explained how the needs budget came too late for her 3 children adding that having them in schools outside the district had shown them what they were not getting here. She said that she and Pat had given so much to the schools and fully supported an override and would like to see more public statements from the Board.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that the Chief of Police's contract ends on June 30, 2016. He said that Section II, Paragraph B of his contract states that "the Board shall vote on or before March 1, 2016 at a Regular Meeting whether or not it intends to renew this agreement for an additional three-year period and shall give the employee written notice of its decision on or before April 1, 2016." Mr. Haddad said that Chief Palma had indicated to him that he would like to continue on as Police Chief and requested that the Board discuss whether or not they intend to enter into negotiations.

Mr. Cunningham said that he had been on the Board for a number of years and thought that the Chief motivates the department to go above and beyond. He said he whole headedly agreed with a new three-year contract. Mr. Schulman said that the Police Department was in better shape now than when he started on the Board nine years ago adding he would like to see that continue. Ms. Eliot said she concurred adding that the department had a great relationship with the Town. Mr. Petropoulos said that he too felt strongly that they should enter into negotiations. Mr. Petropoulos said he would like to see a member of the Board sit in on the negotiations with the Town Manager. Mr. Cunningham said he was happy to do so as the Public Safety liaison.

Ms. Eliot moved that they enter into negotiations with the Police Chief, Don Palma, for a new three-year contract. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Mr. Haddad said that he provided the Board with a redlined copy of their policies and asked the Board to consider adopting the new policies and practices. Mr. Cunningham said that some of discussion centered on Roberts Rule of Order and members feeling they needed to abstain from votes. He said he didn't see a huge issue with this but thought they should retain the right to not weigh in on a matter. Mr. Schulman said that you may abstain if you don't have enough information to vote. He said that he understood the spirit of this but thought there were instances where you may abstain. Mr. Haddad suggested adding wording "pursuant to Roberts' Rules of Order." Mr. Petropoulos suggested wording such as "cast a responsible vote" adding that he also wanted people to explain why they abstain. He said he did a lot of research on this adding he believed there was an ethical requirement to cast a vote. Mr. Cunningham said that he too did a fair amount of research on this and wasn't sure why there was such an emphasis on this. Mr. Petropoulos said that these were their policies and asked that they add it.

Ms. Eliot moved to add a bullet point to include Roberts Rules of Order. Mr. Schulman said that he liked Mr. Petropoulos wording of "cast a responsible vote." Mr. Petropoulos asked for clarification adding he had heard the Board was not in favor of adding language that said they should explain an abstention vote. Ms. Eliot said she didn't think it was necessary.

Mr. Cunningham moved to approve the policies as amended. Ms. Eliot seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Mr. Haddad said that the Board was in receipt of an all alcohol license for the Annual Taste of Nashoba sponsored by the Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce for Tuesday, March 22, 2016 from 5:30pm – 8:00pm and asked the Board to consider approving the request.

Mr. Cunningham moved to grant a one day all alcohol liquor license to the Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce for the Annual Taste of Nashoba event to be held on March 22, 2016 from 5:30pm to 8:00pm at Lawrence Academy. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Haddad said that Ameresco had filed for a building permit for the solar field on the old landfill. He said that the building permit fee was \$60,000 adding that under normal policy because this was a town project they would ordinarily waive fees. He said he wanted to turn this over to the Board for their recommendation. Mr. Petropoulos asked if a discussion about waiving fees had taken place. Mr. Haddad said he had not had a discussion. Mr. Kelly said that discussions had been going on for 2½ years adding that the Town and GELD usually waive each other's fees. He said that they recently found out that the Town had to do another state permit after closing the negotiations on the project. He said that the engineering related to this would cost about \$6,000 for that extra permit adding that Ameresco had agreed to have their surveyors do the paperwork and GELD would eat the filing fee. He said that this was a case where they try to work together all the time. Mr. Kelly said that he had communicated that the fees would be waived to Ameresco. Mr. Cunningham said that he had been fairly involved in this project from the start adding the assumption was that the project would go forward without building permit fees. He said this was a Town of Groton and GELD project. He said he believed it was appropriate to waive fee adding the project needed the building permit to move along very soon. Mr. Haddad said that the Building Commissioner was ready to issue the permit. Mr. Schulman said he had no objection as it was a town project. Ms. Eliot said it was a precedent setting decision adding this was for a for profit company. Mr. Kelly said that all discussion had been based on fees being waived. Mr. Petropoulos said that he shared the same concern adding that other entities were paying fees and were not having them

waived. He said he was concerned about waiving fees for a private entity adding he would like to have heard about this earlier. We are being forced to waive the fee. Mr. Haddad said he brought this to their attention as soon as he found out adding he was not forcing the Board to waive the fees. Mr. Petropoulos said that they have to waive this fee adding one way or another the taxpayers and/or rate payers would be responsible.

Mr. Petropoulos said he would entertain a motion to waive the building permit fees for this permit. Ms. Eliot made the motion. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

JOINT SESSION WITH FINANCE COMMITTEE – BUDGET UPDATE

Mr. Haddad said that two separate votes had been taken by the Board and Finance Committee. He said the only thing that differed was the Finance Committee was salaries and the Finance Committee wanted to see wages at 2.2% and 0% and didn't want him to take the actual health insurance rates into consideration. He said that he adhered to the guidance with only a couple of minor changes. He said that when the Finance Committee took their vote on benefits at 2.2% and 0%, pension was part of employee benefits. He said they have no choice but to pay it this they focused on health insurance at 2.2% and at 0%. He said that unemployment was also part of benefits so it was hard to find a balance.

Mr. Haddad said that based on the revised guidance, the Board of Selectmen on February 18th asked for a new FY17 budget that accounts for all carry over costs that would maintain services, for a second budget that would limit growth to 2.2% and a final budget which limited growth to 0%, which was essentially level funding the FY16 budget.

Mr. Haddad said that the original proposed budget had them at \$73,227 under the levy limit. He said in order to get this to the carryover budget they were suggesting reducing wages in the Assessor's office by \$7,281 (new hours), a reduction in Treasurer's office wages of \$6,613 (new hours), a reduction in police wages (training/traffic) by \$41,881 (new requested wages), a slight reduction in fire overtime wages, a reduction in Council on Aging wages (new hours), a reduction in the library budget (no additional Sunday hours), and a reduction in the health insurance budget of \$62,825 which would have been lowered anyway regardless because of lower health insurance increases than anticipated. He said that he didn't take out the custodian because it was a wash with a position retiring in May. This was a total reduction of \$129,884 which would put them \$203,111 under the levy limit.

Mr. Haddad said that they also took debt out of any equations. He said what was interesting about that was that the big 3 ended up being at 2.2% and just happened that way. Mr. Robertson asked how much of the benefits was due to the rate decrease. Ms. Dufresne said about \$55,000. Mr. Manugian said he thought this was great adding that he was concerned a large chunk of this was for overtime. Mr. Haddad said to not be concerned adding this was for new overtime. He said that there were still increases in contractual obligations and town events. He said that this was for brand new specific targeted overtime. Mr. Manugian asked if he was comfortable that this could be managed. Mr. Haddad said he was comfortable with his original budget. Mr. Petropoulos said he thought Mr. Manugian was asking if Mr. Haddad was comfortable with the overtime at the end of the year and what was in the budget. Mr. Haddad said that the budget they submitted covered obligations for vacation, sick time, etc. He said that god forbid there be a catastrophic event that requires additional time, the Finance Committee had told him that that was what the reserve fund was for. He added that he was comfortable with the overtime budget. Mr. Petropoulos asked for clarification on whether or not contingencies were removed. Mr. Haddad said that part of the direction was no cuts to public safety or response time. Mr. Petropoulos asked about fire overtime. Mr. Haddad said that the Fire Chief asked for \$2,500 in additional overtime in the call department. Mr. Petropoulos said that he would like to see that the Fire Chief would not see this as an impact. Mr. Green asked if this was for overtime or for rate increases. Mr.

Haddad said that he was not touching the 2% rate increase for the call department adding it would lead to a huge moral issue if he did.

Mr. Haddad said that the next budget was the big 3 at 2.2%. He said that he focused on keeping wages at 2.2% adding that municipal growth was under 2.2%. He said that the next reductions were in addition to the above. Mr. Haddad said that he was going to ask them not to cherry pick cuts adding he didn't want to see them make any cuts. He said that a lot of consideration went into not impacting services adding this was done in a thoughtful way. Reductions would be made in Town Manager salaries, the elimination of the PT building inspector which would impact vacation coverage in the office, elimination of Board of Selectmen and Board of Assessor stipends, and elimination of the web developer position in IT. Mr. Haddad added that some would argue eliminating the lifeguards at Sargisson Beach but those are not wages and won't be able to help them get to the 2.2%. Mr. Haddad said that the total reductions were \$208,439 which would put them \$281,666 under the levy limit.

Mr. Haddad said that in order to cut wages down to 0% it would hit the municipal budget hard. He said that this would force them to cut an additional \$215K out of the budget which would start to affect services. He said that unemployment would need to be increased due to layoffs. Mr. Haddad said that he was adamantly opposed to these cuts but given an assignment adding that the only place to look for cuts was Town Hall, Council on Aging and Library since he couldn't touch public safety and roads.

Mr. Haddad said that this would eliminate 1 PT position in the Town Clerk's office. He said that eight years ago they had a 25, 20 and 13 hour employees. They cut hours in 2008 and eliminated a position which forced the Town Clerk at the time to resign. He said that things had only gotten busier in that office and would impact service. He said that they would reduce man hours in the Treasurer's office from 39 to 25 hours. He said that they just increased hours in that office a couple of years ago because of the need and were already cutting 15 hours due to a retirement. He said they would reduce the Accountant's office wages from 30 to 27 hours; eliminate the ZBA Assistant position which would mean added workload to the Land Use Assistants adding they would not be able to pay overtime which would also mean a reduction in counter help. He said they would eliminate the new custodian position which would impact revenues by 12K, and would hurt the transfer station. He said that they would cut the Activities Coordinator position at the Council on Aging. He said that this was another tough one and would be a devastating cut he was adamantly opposed to. He said they would eliminate all Sunday hours in the Library budget. This was their busiest day. Mr. Haddad said that they would eliminate the School Resource Officer which did not eliminate response times. Mr. Haddad said that he called a department meeting that day because some staff had been getting calls from the public telling employees their jobs might be in jeopardy which he did not think was okay. He said he wanted the employees to hear this budget information from him. He said there would be further reductions in health insurance and they would eliminate the lifeguards at Sargisson Beach. He said that they would also eliminate one summer helper from Highway wages. He said that they would have to put more money in unemployment and look at increasing the Reserve Fund by \$25K. He said this would be a total reduction of \$424,340 which would bring them \$497,560 under the levy limit.

Mr. Haddad said that the tax impact on the original proposed budget was \$208; the carryover budget would decrease the tax rate impact from \$208 to \$176; the 2.2% budget would decrease the tax rate impact by \$156 leaving them about \$500K under the levy limit. Mr. Haddad said that the carryover budget would require a \$2M override and the 0% budget would require a \$1.8M override. Mr. Haddad said that his recommendation would be to take the carry over budget which would reduce the original proposed budget by another \$129K. This would allow them to increase the funding to the schools from \$776K to \$900K. Mr. Haddad said that he was carrying \$200K for snow and ice and could free up another \$100K which would allow the Town of Groton, without overriding, to set aside \$1M for school assessment. He said that this would not eviscerate the

municipal budget and why his recommendation would be to go with the carryover budget which allowed for an increase in the assessment.

Mr. Green asked if the debt number was left as originally proposed. Mr. Haddad said that he had left it as proposed and focused on the big 3. Mr. Haddad asked if he had met their guidance. Mr. Cunningham said he had in his opinion. Mr. Schulman said that he was concerned that no matter how many employees you slice off they were not going to get there as far as sustainability goes. He said he supported carry over budget. Mr. Haddad said that because the Board was in the process of developing a sustainability committee, he thought it was premature to make wholesale reductions until they look at the sustainability. Mr. Robertson said that it did make a difference if they cut costs. Mr. Haddad said that under the municipal growth budget they were estimating a 3.55% increase in revenue adding that the carryover had us at 3.51%. Mr. Bacon said that it just covered them adding he understood the whole sustainability issue but thought this was a year to year issue. Mr. Petropoulos said that there were some hard and fast facts adding that the school budget was 55% of their budget. Ms. Manugian said that the school budget increase in spending was 2.5% adding they had a revenue problem created by the state who had been underfunding education. Mr. Petropoulos said they had done a great job in managing their costs if their spending was at 2.5%. He said that 55% of their budget was growing 30% more quickly than our revenues.

Mr. Green said that this was the whole point of a committee to look sustainability. Ms. Manugian said that the 0% budget eliminated the School Resource Officer adding this was a state mandated position. Mr. Haddad said it was recommended but not mandated. Mr. Green said that his interpretation of the chapter of law was that it was mandated. Mr. Haddad asked if it was mandated that the school have the position. Ms. Manugian asked about having a School Committee member on the Sustainability Committee. Ms. Eliot said that she should submit an interest form. Mr. Green said that they needed to focus not on sustainability but coming up with the budget. He said that the Finance Committee would look to the Selectmen to provide input tonight so they may finalize their budget.

Mr. Schulman said that based on the last slide if in fact they propose an override the difference between scenarios was really small. He said his gut reaction was that they don't be too draconian adding he would support the carryover budget. Mr. Manugian asked if it was fair to say that the carryover budget was roughly similar to the needs assessment to the schools. Mr. Haddad said that the carryover budget kept everything where it was now in FY16 and would give \$1M to the schools to meet current obligations and keep them from making further reductions in the operating budget. Mr. Manugian said that now they were seeing the Town's carryover budget which would maintain services, the school needs assessment budget would bring things back to where they were five years ago. Mr. Haddad asked if the schools had reduced their operating personnel by 40 people over five years adding that the schools needs assessment budget was not the Town's carry over budget. Mr. Robertson said that the carry over budget was the budget plus wages. Mr. Petropoulos said that it was hard to have a comparison adding he saw the carryover budget as their current budget. Ms. Manugian said that she agreed. She said that the district had dipped way down since 2010 where the municipal budget has added a few new jobs. Mr. Kubick said that the needs assessment would stop the further decline. Mr. Green said that they asked for metrics on Saturday and if they fund the override, the Superintendent said that it wouldn't stop the decline. Mr. Kubick said it would get them back to where they were. Mr. Petropoulos said that it sounded like it wasn't a return to optimal but would stop the bleeding. Ms. Manugian said that was correct. Mr. Cunningham said that he heard no. It may stop the bleeding but more will be needed adding this discussion didn't include technology. He said that there was clearly another override on the horizon.

Mr. Cunningham said he saw some of the cuts to critical services to the town, including senior citizens. He said that was the fastest growing population. He said that the carryover budget provided additional levy capacity but none of the scenarios eliminated an override. He said that the carryover budget was something

that was respectful of services that all citizens expect. Ms. Eliot said that she concurred with Mr. Cunningham and Mr. Schulman adding that they carryover budget would help provide more for the schools adding she couldn't justify drastic cuts. Mr. Petropoulos said that he didn't think he could responsibly give an answer now without reviewing the information and discussing it further. Mr. Cunningham said that the school committee needed to know. Hr. Haddad said he didn't think cutting the municipal budget to save \$76 on an average tax bill for an override was in the best interest of services the Town provides and recommended that they all work together. Ms. Eliot said that she was not objecting to an override adding it was probably inevitable. She said that she would probably support it for a chance to enhance their school education. Mr. Schulman said that as far as an override went, he would support one if he understood what the years to come looked like. Mr. Petropoulos said that those future years to come were the scariest thing.

Mr. Cunningham said that he had the opportunity to talk to Representative Harrington on Saturday adding it was quite likely this topic will come through on the House Ways and Means budget which could account for about \$50 more per pupil.

Mr. Petropoulos said he wanted to thank Mr. Haddad for all this hard work. He said that there was no way to soften any of this when you were talking about people. Mr. Cunningham said that they were between a rock and a hard place.

MINUTES

Ms. Eliot moved to approve the meeting minutes of February 1, 2016. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Mr. Petropoulos said that he provided Ms. Dunbar with a minor edit and confirmed with Mr. Robertson that the edit to what he said was correct. The motion to approve carried unanimously.

Ms. Eliot moved to approve the meeting minutes of February 8, 2016. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Schulman moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:50pm. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Green also adjourned the meeting of the Finance Committee.

Approved: _____

Stuart Schulman, Clerk

respectfully submitted,
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 3/28/16