



TOWN OF GROTON
173 Main Street
Groton, Massachusetts 01450
Tel: 978.448.1111
Fax: 978.448.1115

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
John G. Petropoulos, Chairman
Anna Eliot, Vice-Chairman
Stuart M. Shulman, Clerk
Peter S. Cunningham, Member
Joshua Degen, Member

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES

Date: Monday, April 4, 2016
Time: 6:00 PM
Location: Selectmen's Meeting Room, First Floor, Groton Town Hall
Members Present: John G. Petropoulos, Chair; Anna Eliot, Vice Chair; Peter S. Cunningham, Member; Joshua A. Degen, Member
Members Absent: Stuart M. Schulman, Clerk
Remote Participation: None
Others Present: Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Robin Eibye, Executive Assistant

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Petropoulos stated that the editor of the Groton Herald was recording the meeting.

Mr. Degen noted the passing of former middle school teacher, Betsy Sawyer. On behalf of the Board of Selectmen, Mr. Degen sent condolences to Ms. Sawyer's family and students.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

No comments were provided.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

First Parish Church: Mr. Haddad stated that because the First Parish Church is required to obtain a building permit from the Town for their CPA funded improvement project, they requested that the Town waive the \$2,000 building permit fee.

Al Collins, Old Meeting House Project Manager said the \$2,000 permit fee would be better used toward the project rather than going into the Town's operating budget.

Mr. Cunningham said he supports the project as the structure is historic and would like to see the monies put into the project.

Mr. Degen asked Mr. Collins to confirm the total amount of the grant awarded. Mr. Collins confirmed the grant totaled \$203,333.00. Mr. Degen questioned if the building permit fees were originally included in the proposed budget. It was confirmed that the fees were not included in the proposed budget. Mr. Degen noted that although the cost to the town is minimal, asking to waive the permit fee is asking a lot of tax payers and went on to state that he's not inclined to waive fees as it's a bad precedent to set. Ms.

Eliot disclosed that she is a member of the church. Ms. Eliot noted her concern with setting a precedent of waiving fees then asked if we have waived similar fees in the past. Mr. Haddad replied that he could not recall what was done when the CPA funded the Grange project. Mr. Collins noted that the fees for the Boutwell House project were waived. Mr. Haddad stated that fees for GELD were waived. Mr. Petropoulos asked if CPA monies is funding the entire project to which Mr. Collins responded and said that the CPA is funding roughly two-thirds of the project with one-sixth coming from the Mass. Historical Commission and the remaining one-sixth from private donors.

Mr. Petropoulos stated that he felt the money would be better spent on the project rather than returned to the town and he would like to see the permit fees waived for this project.

Mr. Cunningham noted that the Town has waived building fees in the past for the church.

Member Cunningham moved to waive the permit fees for the First Parish Church renovation project. Vice Chairman Eliot seconded and the motion carried 3:1 with 1 opposition (Member Degen, against; Stuart Shulman, absent)

Consider the Appointment of Olin Lathrop to Conservation Commission: Mr. Haddad stated that the Conservation Commission requested that the Board appoint Olin Lathrop of 55 Sunset Road to the Commission to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Rena Swezey, whose term was to expire on June 30, 2018. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to consider the appointment. Mr. Cunningham stated that Mr. Lathrop has been very involved with the Town's conservation and that he would be an excellent addition to Commission. Mr. Degen noted that he would whole heartedly support Mr. Lathrop joining the Conservation Commission. Ms. Eliot thanked Mr. Lathrop for coming forward to volunteer. Mr. Petropoulos thanked Ms. Swezey for her service and Mr. Lathrop for stepping forward to join the Commission and that he would whole heartedly support Mr. Lathrop's appointment.

Takashi Tada noted that the Conservation Commission members were unanimous in their support of Mr. Lathrop joining the Commission. Mr. Haddad confirmed that Mr. Lathrop's appointment would go through June 30, 2018.

Member Cunningham moved to appoint Mr. Lathrop to the Conservation Commission through June 30, 2018. Vice Chairman Eliot seconded and the motion carried unanimously 4:0 (Stuart Shulman, absent).

Review and Approve Final Draft of 2016 Spring Town Meeting Warrant: Mr. Haddad presented the 2016 Spring Town Meeting Warrant final draft to the Board for review and requested that the Board provide recommendations or changes to the document. Mr. Haddad stated that the Warrant is scheduled to go to the printer tomorrow morning so that it could be delivered to residents this weekend. Mr. Haddad confirmed that because Article 20 was removed from the warrant, there are now a total of 30 articles. Mr. Haddad requested that the Board approve the warrant as presented.

Mr. Degen asked if there was a change in the capital budget on the vote. Mr. Haddad stated that the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen have not made a final determination and as a result, he had not changed it because they have not made their final determination. He also noted that it may change; however, the motion will be correct going into Town Meeting.

Mr. Petropoulos asked if there's a potential change due to costs to patrol the lakes region. It was noted that Chief, Palma met with residents and talked with some members of the Finance Committee and is considering withdrawing the request. Mr. Petropoulos and Mr. Degen stated they wanted to stay deferred until town meeting.

It was confirmed that Planning Board Zoning Articles 21 & 22 are moving forward. All member noted they recommend Article 21. Mr. Petropoulos asked for a high level, simple to understand summary of Article 22.

Planning Board Member, Russell Burke provided an explanation on Article 22 and non-conforming structures. The Article would eliminate the provision that if you had a structure on a lot it would be treated equally moving forward. Mr. Burke stated the Article would eliminate the provision for single and two-family homes that if you had a structure on a lot it would be treated equally moving forward. It was confirmed that the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals voted unanimously to approve Article 22. Mr. Degen asked if Town Counsel had weighed in on the matter. It was confirmed that Town Counsel had been involved in the process. All Board members present confirmed their support of the article.

A brief discussion ensued about the Groton Dunstable Regional School budget. Mr. Petropoulos stated that he was 110% convinced that the needs assessment accurately assessed the need today for services and additional resources. He went on to note that his only reluctance to move forward is in regards to the implementation.

Mr. Degen confirmed his support of the needs assessment for FY2017 and noted that he's working to reconcile the needs and the tax increase over one year.

Mr. Haddad confirmed that the Dunstable CPC is currently considering an application to jointly fund the track project. Mr. Degen asked the amount that Dunstable is considering to fund. It was determined that the amount is unknown at this time. Mr. Degen inquired as to who is the Board of Selectmen liaison for the Groton CPC. A brief discussion ensued. Mr. Degen said he felt it would be prudent to attend Dunstable's next CPC meeting to better understand the status of the application. Mr. Degen said he would be willing to attend Dunstable's next CPC meeting. It was noted that Mr. Cunningham voted in favor of the article while Ms. Eliot, Mr. Petropoulos and Mr. Degen remained deferred.

Chairman Petropoulos asked if any permit fees would be required for the track project. A brief discussion ensued and it was determined that permits would probably not be required.

Member Cunningham moved to support the warrant as submitted. Vice Chairman Eliot seconded and the motion carried unanimously 4:0 (Stuart Shulman, absent).

Final Determination of Location for Second Night of Town Meeting: Mr. Haddad confirmed that the PAC is available on Monday, May 23, 2016, to host the second night of Town Meeting pending Town Meeting approval.

Review and Approve Amended Selectmen Policy: Mr. Haddad stated that per Selectman Degen's request, he drafted language to amend the Board of Selectmen's Policies and Procedures and added a section that would require all contracts be sent to Town Counsel for approval before being presented to the Board for acceptance. Mr. Haddad said he drafted the following language and asked the Board to consider adopting it:

"CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS: According to the Charter of the Town of Groton, it is the responsibility of the Town Manger to negotiate all contracts in which the Board of Selectmen is a party, with the one exception being the contract of the Town Manger, which is negotiated by the Board of Selectmen, it shall be delivered to Town Counsel for his review and approval. Once Town Counsel approves the contract, it shall be presented to the Board of Selectmen for final approval."

Member Cunningham moved to amend the Board of Selectmen's Policies and Procedures by adding the language above as submitted. Vice Chairman Eliot seconded and the motion carried unanimously 4:0 (Stuart Shulman, absent).

Update on Posting of Minutes on Town's Website: Mr. Haddad stated the Town has been working to develop a records policy and expects to have the final policy for the Board of Selectmen's approval within the next couple of months. He noted that currently there is no written requirement that minutes be

posted to the Town website. He said 30 active committees are current on minutes; including several who submitted updates as a result of this exercise. He stated that the minutes were available, but not filed with the Town Clerk or posted on the website. Mr. Haddad also stated that after the Town Clerk's review of minutes, it was determined that there are several committees listed with which Groton has a representative, but is not responsible to maintain the minutes and they are: Lowell Regional Transit Authority, MBTA Advisory Board, Minuteman Nashoba Health Group, Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee, Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, Nashoba Valley Technical High School, and the Devens Regional Hazardous Products Oversight Committee.

Mr. Haddad went on to note that the following committees keep minutes on their own website or in their office files: Water Commission, Sewer Commission, GDRSD, GPL, GELD, Groton Housing Authority and Groton Electric Co-op. Mr. Haddad went on to state that there are currently 16 inactive committees listed on the Town's website.

Mr. Haddad said that although there's a list of committees which appear to be in arrears, we are in good shape overall. He stated that the Board of Health is complete and in process of posting the minutes; the Commission on Accessibility is complete through April 2015; the Community Preservation Committee is behind and working to determine where they are with minutes; both the Conductor Oversight Committee and Economic Development Committee have yet to respond; HDC and Historical Commission are in process; the Old Burying Ground Commission have no minutes on file; the Sign Committee, Sustainability Commission and Sargisson Beach Committee are in process; the Scholarship Committee and Town Forest Committee have not responded; the Underground Utility Study Committee and the Weed Harvester Committee have no minutes on file.

Vice Chairman Eliot replied that many of these committees are run by volunteers and she does not want to criticize committees as she values the volunteers' time.

Mr. Cunningham said that compliance was better than he had thought and asked where the minutes are stored if they are not sent to the Town Clerk's office. Mr. Haddad replied that the minutes are kept in committee files. Mr. Petropoulos questioned why we do not require the minutes be filed with the Town Clerk's office. Mr. Haddad explained that the goal is to provide the public with easy access to records and he is working with the IT department on how to improve the process. Mr. Petropoulos asked if we could provide links to the minutes that are not kept by the Town Clerk. Mr. Haddad replied stating that the IT Department is working on such.

GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE PRESENTATION

Mr. Petropoulos stated that Jeff Kubic, Chairman of the Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee was invited to help residents better understand the concept of the School Department's Proposed Budget.

Jeff Kubic, Chairman of Groton Dunstable School Committee stated he'd like to correct the record as he misspoke and stated that Acton was a town that has gone through and passed annual overrides.

Mr. Kubic stated that in his presentation he assumed that state aid will not increase. Mr. Kubic explained the General Fund – Operating Budget (w/o Debt) chart.

Mr. Kubic noted the town assessments are growing at a faster rate relative to the overall budget, which is the result of the lack of increases in state aid. He noted that if the state aid portion grew, the town assessment would decrease.

Mr. Kubic clarified that salaries are projected to grow at 3%. Mr. Petropoulos asked Mr. Kubic to confirm that fact that the Town's portion is greater because state aid is flat. Mr. Kubic said that the school is in line with the state and referenced the operating portion is at 4.7% and growth rate is at 3.3%.

Mr. Cunningham asked Mr. Kubic at what point would declining enrollment play a role in savings. Mr. Kubic responded stating that even with declining enrollment, you still have a high fixed cost. He went on to explain that if you see a 3% decrease in students, you will not necessarily see a 3% decrease in the budget.

Ms. Eliot wondered if the operating costs could be correlated with reduction in debt costs over time.

Mr. Kubic stated that because the school district has operated without a strategic plan for a few years, the intent is to have a plan completed and out next month.

Mr. Haddad made mention that the debt service, with the exception of the middle school roof, is outside of the levy limit.

Mr. Petropoulos noted that the fact that personnel costs and benefits are growing at 3% each year is impressive and it appears to him that the school is doing its best to control costs.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Petropoulos brought forth the question of whether or not the Town should be run like a business. Mr. Cunningham said although there are some similarities, there are fundamental differences between municipalities and businesses. Member Degen said he feels that every town/municipality is a business that provides a service, and the town's ability to provide excellent service will ultimately retain residents. Vice-Chairman Eliot noted that there many parallels between business and government. Chairman Petropoulos agreed that although we do not make a profit, the town should follow the basic principal in the form of providing services. Art Prest, member of the Economic Development Committee and Finance Committee agreed with Member Degen's opinion.

A discussion ensued about running the town as a not for profit organization and the important role that innovation plays in being successful. Vice-Chairman Eliot noted that the Planning Board has been very successful and gives credit to Groton's proactivity to grow.

Russell Harris disagreed and stated that the town should not be run as a business.

Connie Sartini stated that there are "best business" practices that may be applied to municipalities. She went on to say that she's never been asked as a taxpayer what key items she's willing to invest in.

Member Degen said the Town offers direct services and polling the masses would help the town better understand what taxpayers consider to be lower priorities and what they are willing to support.

SELECTMEN LIASION REPORTS

Mr. Cunningham noted that he attended a COA meeting this morning. He went on to state that the movie, Spotlight will air in May and the movie program is going well.

Ms. Eliot said that the Prescott Committee is in the process of drafting their report for the Town and hopes to also distribute it to the residents. Mr. Haddad noted that he expects to have the report on Friday and he would like to schedule a joint meeting with the BOS and the Prescott Committee on Wednesday, April 20, 2016, at 6:00pm before the Charter Review Committee.

Mr. Petropoulos noted that GELD conducted a survey with their customers and the results were very impressive. Mr. Petropoulos stated he would like to run an annual or maybe a bi-annual survey to track performance.

Member Degen noted he received a handout in his electric bill stating it was an op-ed piece regarding the gas pipe line and felt it was one-sided and somewhat self-serving.

Vice-Chairman Eliot moved to approve the Board of Selectmen's portion of the minutes of February 27, 2016. Member Cunningham seconded and the motion carried 3:1 (Josh Degen, abstained; Stuart Shulman, absent).

Member Cunningham moved to approve the regularly scheduled meeting minutes dated March 7, 2016. Member Degen seconded and the motion carried unanimously 4:0 (Stuart Shulman, absent).

Vice-Chairman Eliot moved to approve the regularly scheduled meeting minutes dated March 14, 2016. Member Degen seconded and the motion carried unanimously 4:0 (Stuart Shulman, absent).

Vice-Chairman Eliot moved to approve the joint executive session meeting minutes dated March 24, 2016, and not to release them at this time. Member Cunningham seconded and the motion carried unanimously 4:0 (Stuart Shulman, absent).

At 7:45 p.m., Mr. Degen moved to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by Executive Assistant, Robin G. Eibye

Approved on 5/2/16