

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
MINUTES JANUARY 3, 2017
APPROVED**

BOS Members Present: John G. Petropoulos, Chair; Joshua A. Degen, Vice Chair; Barry Pease, Clerk; Anna Eliot, Member; Peter S. Cunningham, Member

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

Mr. Petropoulos called the meeting to order at 7:00pm and reviewed the agenda.

The Finance Committee called their meeting to order at 7:02pm.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chief McCurdy introduced Lt. James Crocker of Groton Fire Department, Firefighter/ Paramedic John Tuomi of Westford Fire and Westford Fire Chief Joseph Targ. He said while Mr. Crocker and Mr. Tuomi were attending a Patriots game, they noticed a man in distress a few rows in front of them. He said that the two gentlemen performed CPR on the individual who was in cardiac arrest until Foxboro Fire transported him to a local hospital. He said that the gentleman was released from the hospital two days later. The Chief provide Lt. Crocker and Mr. Tuomi with accommodations for their efforts that day.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that he met with Mr. Cunningham and his Finance Team along with receiving written feedback from Mr. Sjoberg on the financial policies of the Town. He said that everyone felt as though they were in good shape adding that they cleaned up some of the typos and date changes. He said that the only substantive changes were made to the OPEB section where they had proposed that an additional \$200K each year from free cash be used to bring the annual contribution amount to \$400K. Mr. Pease said that he had concerns about not having money in free cash and suggested that wording be inserted to cover that. Mr. Degen suggested adding the words "up to" an additional \$200K from free cash. Mr. Haddad said that he would make that change and place in on the next agenda for approval. Mr. Green asked about a free cash policy and having it added to their financial policies. Mr. Haddad said he thought that would be a separate policy and would bring something forward in the near future.

7:10PM - PUBLIC HEARING - LIQUOR LICENSE

Mr. Haddad read the public hearing notice into the record.

Mr. Cunningham moved to open the public hearing. Mr. Pease seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Haddad said that the Board had held a public hearing last June and approved the transfer of the two (2) liquor licenses from the Town's name to Blackbird Café, Inc. He said that the ABCC said that they didn't need to notify the abutters but did need to advertise the hearing in the newspaper. He said that the period of the license upon transfer would be calendar year 2017 and asked the Board to consider approving the transfer that night.

Mr. Degen moved that they approve the transfer of the two (2) liquor licenses from the Town of Groton to Blackbird Café Inc. as described in the legal notice. Mr. Pease seconded the motion and asked about the sprinklers.

Mr. Haddad said that the Fire Marshall had conducted an inspection that day and wanted to see one inch wall board installed throughout basement adding that would satisfy all concerns.

The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Cunningham moved to close the public hearing. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

7:15PM – TOWN MANAGER’S PROPOSED FY18 BUDGET PRESENTATION

Mr. Haddad said that he received a call that afternoon from a Finance Committee member who questioned he got to 2.4%. Mr. Haddad said that the budget included excluded and included debt and said that there was a question about whether or not debt should count toward the numbers. Mr. Haddad said that the municipal budget came in within the guidelines.

Mr. Haddad said that this was the 9th budget he had submitted as Town Manager and the 2nd year he had been provided guidance by the Board and Finance Committee. Mr. Haddad said the direction that had been voted was that spending not increase by more than 2.4% and that they develop budgets that would be sustainable for years to come. He said that he was also directed to come up with two other budget scenarios for 1.2% and 0% increases. Mr. Haddad said that it was his goal to not make any cuts to services while staying within the 2.4% guideline. Mr. Haddad said that all departments had come in with budgets that met the guidelines. Mr. Haddad said that the departments budget had come in at 1.6% which did not include benefits.

Mr. Haddad said that the FY18 budget anticipated \$15M in new growth and would add \$273,900 to the FY18 levy limit. He said that they had level funded state aid and that neither Groton-Dunstable Regional or Nashoba Tech had completed their budgets adding that he had put placeholders in there for now. Mr. Haddad added that Nashoba Tech’s enrollment had increased from 37 to 39 students. Mr. Haddad said that they were using all their unexpended tax capacity this fiscal year and were submitting a balanced budget adding he could not submit a budget that required an override. Mr. Haddad said that excluded debt had come down by about \$50K, which included both school and town debt. He said that the it was anticipated that the Town would see an increase of 6.96% or \$249,988 in employee benefits in FY18. He said that the Light Department was paying for a study to see if they were covering their share of the pension benefits.

Mr. Haddad said that the total expended levy limit projected was \$29,129,180 and reviewed with the Board and Finance Committee other revenue projections totaling \$4,982,132. He said that a budget highlights was that there were no new services being added adding that current services were being level funded. He said that one item that came up during the Fire Chief’s budget deliberations was a proposed pilot program in FY18 to provide compensation to on call EMT’s and officers as an incentive to sign up for call shifts. He said that funding for this program was estimated at \$73K and would hopefully come from free cash. Mr. Haddad said that funding it this way would give Town Meeting an opportunity to see if they want to move forward with this. If the program was successful, they could look to add it to next year’s budget. Mr. Haddad said that if they were unable to keep the call department active, they would have to add more full-time fire fighters to cover shifts. Chief McCurdy said This had been done elsewhere adding that it had mixed results. He said that he thought it might help their department to try it out.

Mr. Haddad said that they needed to start addressing their ARC OPEB liability adding he would like to start funding that more in FY18. Mr. Cunningham asked about their inability to rollback an amount once established. Mr. Haddad said that they changed the law adding that they were not tied to a set amount. Mr. Degen said he understood that paying down their ARC would help them with their favorable bond rating. Mr. Haddad said that was correct. Mr. Haddad said that the Country Club budget was not expecting a tax payer subsidy in FY18. He said that this was part of their three-year plan adding that the General Manager thought he could cover their budget 100%. Mr. Robertson said he believed that the course could make its revenue projections. Mr. Degen commended Mr. Haddad and Mr. Campbell for digging them out of a whole. Mr. Degen questioned capital expenses over the next 5-years. Mr. Haddad said that it was projected that revenues would cover those expenses as part of their plan.

Mr. Haddad said that all seven (7) unions were entering the final year of their agreements. He said that five of the agreements called for a 2% cost of living increase adding he was asking for the same increase for the three (3) bylaw employees. He said that the performance increases was still a savings over the automatic steps that had been

removed from the agreements a couple of years ago. Mr. Haddad said that they had come in with at 2.29% including debt like last year. He said that in that, they had proposed a \$750K increase in the GDRSD assessment, not including debt, or a 4.08% increase. Mr. Haddad said that he was also going to be asking Town Meeting for \$50K to fund the school's technology capital budget as a Spring Town Meeting warrant article for FY18. Mr. Haddad said that since FY14, the Town had increased the school spending budget by 26.7% or an additional \$4,030,094 while at the same time, municipal spending had gone up 9.9% or \$1,343,367. Mr. Petropoulos asked how Mr. Haddad came up with \$750K for the schools. Mr. Haddad said that the school budget was 56% of their operating budget so he took 56% of their expected increased revenue and rounded that up to \$750K. Mr. Haddad said that the school budget numbers were just a placeholder as the schools were just starting to look at their budgets.

Ms. Gilbert asked about free cash spending and whether or not that had evened out. She said that they were not looking at budgets apples to apples if free cash wasn't taken into consideration. Mr. Haddad said that the schools were not a department of the Town. He said that a lot of what made up free cash was money turned back from the municipal budgets like their E&D was money not spent from their own budgets. Mr. Degen said that the Town also used about 50% of their free cash to replenish their Cap Stab and Stabilization funds and thought it was important for the School Committee to adopt a capital plan and start funding their capital needs.

Mr. Haddad said that the capital budget was \$1.7M of which \$1M is for a ladder truck. Mr. Robertson said he read in the budget message that the Town's portion of the Debt Service for the Pepperell Sewer upgrade equaling \$27K was something that the sewer rate payers were covering again this year. He said that this was something that the Town agreed to pay and something they needed to think about in the future.

Mr. Haddad said that he reviewed the expenditure breakdown, including debt and was at 2.29%. If you added benefits, they were at 2.67%. Mr. Pease asked if the 11% in benefits could be broken out by department. Mr. Haddad said that they could do that. Mr. Haddad reviewed what the tax impact would be on a home valued at \$425K adding that values had gone up because of the revaluation. He said there would be a tax increase of \$208 on the average tax bill if this budget is passed as presented. Mr. Haddad said that reducing the budget to 1.2% and zero was difficult. He said they needed to decrease the proposed budget by \$157,981 to get to 1.2% adding he was adamantly opposed to any of these cuts. Mr. Haddad said that in order to get to an FY17 level budget there would be further reductions including personnel cuts in all departments including police, fire and DPW. He said that he didn't touch the Council on Aging as their budget was too small to cut and they had shown there was a need for services there. Mr. Haddad said he was really opposed to any of these cuts adding he had no choice but to look at public safety. Mr. Haddad also reviewed the 5-year projection sheet. Mr. Petropoulos asked if it was doable to keep expenses as 1% every year. Mr. Haddad said that their workers comp and liability insurance accounted for most of the increases adding that workers comp and liability were unknown's year to year. He added that he would not have provided them with this data if he didn't think it was doable.

Mr. Degen thanked Mr. Haddad and his team for putting together this budget adding that the tough part was about to begin. Mr. Cunningham echoed Mr. Degen's comments adding that this really made their process easier. Ms. Manugian, speaking as a member of the School Committee, said that she thought this was great work adding she had heard a lot of good things. She said she was encouraged to hear that importance was placed on current programming and services.

Mr. Green said that Monday night, there was a joint meeting of the Finance Committee, School Committee and Dunstable Advisory Board at the Dunstable Town Hall at 7pm. He said that this was a meeting to update each other. The Boards then choose Saturday, January 28th at 9am as their annual Saturday joint budget meeting.

Mr. Kubick took a minute to introduce Bill Ryan, the Interim Superintendent. Mr. Ryan said that Groton Dunstable had good schools and good kids based on his recent visits to all the schools. He said that he was working on the budget and looking forward to working here.

Mr. Sjoberg moved to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting at 8:30pm. The motion carried unanimously.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

2. Mr. Haddad said that he, Mr. Petropoulos and Mr. Degen met to review his goals and asked the Board to consider adopting them that night. Mr. Petropoulos asked how critical it was to finalize the goals that night adding he had one more item he would like to see added. Ms. Eliot said that she would like to hear what that additional item was. Mr. Petropoulos said he would like to discuss it first with the Town Manager to see if it was viable.

3. Mr. Haddad said that it was time to initiate the Town Manager's evaluation. Mr. Haddad said that Mr. Petropoulos had talked to him about concerns he had over the form that they used. Mr. Petropoulos thought the form only allowed the Board to talk about negatives, not positives. Mr. Haddad said he called a few other towns and incorporated some portions of their forms into Groton's adding he had not problem using this new form. He said that the Board would have to amend their policy as it stated using the same form as the department heads. Mr. Petropoulos asked if Mr. Haddad could use this new form with the department heads. Mr. Haddad said that he would have to make some changes as it was tailored for a Town Manager and negotiate it with the union. Mr. Degen asked if they could take a week to review it as per their policy. Mr. Cunningham said he liked the revised form adding that he would be comfortable using it.

4. Mr. Haddad said that the opponents to the Tennessee Gas Pipeline were asking municipalities to sign on to a letter that would repeal a pipeline tax and asked if the Board wanted to take this on. Mr. Degen said it was not anticipated for this agenda but thought it was worthy of a discussion at their next meeting. Mr. Petropoulos asked for GELD to provide some feedback on this.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Haddad said that he and Mr. Petropoulos had met with the Police Chief, Superintendent, and citizens of town about the All Are Welcome initiative. Mr. Petropoulos said that there had been an idea to place at one or more roads leading into town a monument with the words Town of Groton All Are Welcome adding this was something they wanted to bring forward to the Spring Town Meeting. He said that asking Town Meeting to pay \$1 would demonstrate their willingness to accept this. He said that they had also discussed asking students to enter an essay contest about what all are welcome means to them, and take an essay from each school and bury it under the signs. Mr. Pease liked this idea. Mr. Cunningham said that it played on the theme of the Big Book for Peace and like getting the children involved. Ms. Eliot asked if other town were doing this and if they were looking at refugee status also. She said she was open to having a discussion. Mr. Petropoulos said that they contemplated these things adding that other towns had done initiatives for no place for hate but each idea was unique to each town. He said that there were eight possible places to put these stones adding that they could reach out to the other eight towns and see if they wanted to have the other side engraved to say the same thing. Mr. Degen said he would be willing to donate some of the stones required.

LIAISON REPORTS

Ms. Eliot said that the Planning Board was meeting to discuss Indian Hill's special permit conditions that Thursday.

Mr. Haddad said that they were holding an interview on Friday for the Municipal Audit.

MINUTES

Mr. Cunningham moved to approve the Regular Session Meeting Minutes of December 12, 2016. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Petropoulos adjourned the meeting at 8:55pm.

Approved: _____
Barry Pease, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted,
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 01/23/17