

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
MINUTES MARCH 13, 2017
APPROVED**

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

Members Absent: Peter S. Cunningham

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.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Haddad said that due to the snowstorm forecasted for the next day, the Town Hall, Library and Senior Center would be closed. He said that the DPW and public safety officials were ready to go. He announced that all meetings scheduled for Tuesday evening would also be cancelled. Mr. Pease said that the schools had closed also.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said he didn't have an update on the warrant as nothing had changed since the week before. He said that Mr. Prest had asked for an article to be added related to the sewer SRF payment that the Sewer Commissioners voted against covering this year. He said it would be discussed at the Finance Committee meeting on Wednesday.
2. Mr. Haddad said the Agricultural Commission requested that he appoint Shelley Sullivan to the Commission adding he had made that appointment. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to consider ratifying the appointment.

Mr. Degen moved to ratify the Town Manager's appointment of Shelley Sullivan to the Agricultural Commission term to end June 30, 2017. Ms. Eliot seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Mr. Haddad said that special acts within the communities of Sudbury and Hamilton had been brought to their attention a couple of weeks ago. He said that this special legislation provides for tax breaks for persons over 65 year of age. He said that under the Sudbury law, qualifying seniors would receive an abatement on their tax bill based on income and value. That amount abated would be spread among the rest of the taxpayers. He said that Hamilton set a cap whereas you would not have to pay more than 10% of your property tax bill based on your income. The Town's built up overlay would be used to offset that amount. Mr. Haddad said that he and Mr. Petropoulos wanted to provide the Board with this information and would bring it back for discussion at a meeting after Town Meeting.
4. Mr. Haddad said that Mr. Petropoulos would also like the Board to consider requiring any vote on a potential Senior Center be placed on the ballot for a town-wide vote in addition to a Town Meeting Vote. He said the only way to do this would be by making any expenditures exempt from Proposition 2 ½. He asked the Board to start thinking about it and they could discuss it more next week.
5. Mr. Haddad said that the School Committee had voted their budget and he wanted to let the Board know where things stood. He said that at the Finance Committee meeting on Wednesday night, the Board will see that the municipal budget increase by 2.14% or 3.48% with benefits included. He said that the schools were looking at a 3.68% increase. He said that the estimated tax rate, if the budget was approved as presented would be \$18.68 or \$179 increase on the overall tax bill. This would put them at \$121,348 under the levy limit. Mr. Degen asked if based on the revaluations if the average home value had gone up from \$400K. Mr. Haddad said it had gone up to \$425K and that was the number he was using.

JOINT SESSION WITH GROTON MEMBER OF REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE TO DISCUSS VACANCY

Mr. Kubick, Ms. Gilbert, Ms. Donahue and Mr. Cronin were in attendance.

Mr. Kubick called the School Committee to order.

Mr. Haddad said that they had a vacancy they needed to discuss filling until the next election. He said Ms. Alison Manugian was the sole applicant and asked the Boards to consider making that appointment.

Mr. Kubick moved to appoint Alison Manugian to fill the current vacancy left by Alison Manugian to the School Committee effective today with a term to expire at the May 2017 election. Mr. Pease seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously between the Selectmen and School Committee members.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Pease said that one of their goals was to review the Municipal Modernization Act (MMA) and try to identify things useful to them. Mr. Pease briefly outlined a few of those items.

1. Property Assessment could be done every 5 years now, not every 3 years.
2. The Town Treasurer has been given a lot more power than before.
3. A single overlay was something new and allowed for the potential for extra money in the account because all these accounts could now be combined into one.
4. One item on the Spring Town Meeting Warrant was to take all revolving accounts and set the levels once.
5. Bond premium reimbursements could now be applied right back to the bond as they would see within the consent agenda this spring.
6. Something to consider in the future was year-end transfers. Right now anything over 3% had to go to Town Meeting. The law now said there was no limit adding that the Selectmen and Finance Committee had to agree but could handle it within a meeting not Town Meeting.
7. Affordable housing abatements agreement could be handled in the same manner as brownfield abatement agreement. Mr. Pease suggested a possible joint meeting to talk about implementing this.
8. There were changes to the OPEB Trust Fund, rental revolving fund, stabilization fund amendment; and injured on duty fund. Mr. Pease said that these were all items he would like them to discuss and consider for the Fall Town Meeting. Ms. Eliot thanked him for looking into these changes. Mr. Pease thanked the Finance Team, Town Clerk and Town Manager for their time going through this with him.

UPDATE FROM NVTHS SUPERINTENDENT DENISE PIGEON

Ms. Pigeon started by saying she had just completed her first year as Superintendent. She said NVTHS had a 14-member school committee adding that Mr. Rob Flynn was a member and Ms. Patricia Madigan served as an alternate. She said that the district was made up of 8 district towns and the school offered career and technical programs. She said they had a full academic program and extracurricular activities including athletics. She said the school was above state average in english, math and science and they had a low dropout rate. Their one year post graduation follow-up showed very positive placement of students and she took a minute to highlight some of Groton's students currently attending the school.

Ms. Pigeon said that Groton made up 5.78% of their student population with enrollment trends leveling off right now. She said they received a \$500K capital grant last year which allowed them to renovate what's now the advanced manufacturing program. She said their new veterinary program was going very well and they had also renovated their early childhood center. She added they had just received word they received another \$500K in grants. Ms. Pigeon said that their budget was increasing overall by 3.3%. She said that they continue to keep a 5-year capital plan which allowed them to stabilize costs over time. She said that they spend \$200K per year on capital adding they were using all their E&D this year to balance the budget. She said they would be holding off on funding stabilization this year. As far as Groton's increase, the Town had a slight increase in their assessment due to a slight increase in enrollment.

Mr. Petropoulos said that he visited their open house adding their student reps blew him away. He said that their accomplishments were unbelievable. He said that their budget growth was impressive keeping in mind that chapter 70 was flat. Ms. Pigeon said it was not easy but that they do their best to keep it stable to help the towns. Mr. Degen commented on how their capital stabilization was highly successful. Ms. Pigeon said that they put \$200K into their capital stabilization last year but that this year they decided to put \$300K into OPEB instead. She said they currently had a healthy balance in their stabilization of \$1.4M. Mr. Degen asked if Ms. Pigeon was comfortable using all their E&D this year. Ms. Pigeon said she was. Mr. Pease asked how often the regional agreement was reviewed. Ms. Pigeon said it was not common to look at it adding they had just done it in 2012 when Ayer was added to the district. Mr. Pease asked if a student from a member town could participate in a tech program if they were not enrolled in the school. Ms. Pigeon said she would always be interested in discussing options like that.

Mr. Rob Flynn said he thought it was important they made this presentation. He said it was a good format for the people in the community to see what the Tech school does and has to offer.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Pease said that he had put together a best practice for a Mission Statement whereas the goal was to develop a mission statement to put on the town's website. He thought the first step should be to ask all town employees to complete a short questionnaire on what they do, whom they do it for, how they would get it done along with a proposed mission statement. He suggested an incentive to participate whereas 3 entries chosen at random would receive a \$30 Amazon gift card personally funded by him. She said of those entries submitted, the "elite 3" would be announced to the town and media and the Board would discuss them at a meeting. He said that once the mission statement was chosen, it would be placed on the website and other digital print where appropriate. He said he thought this would be a good project and he looked forward to delivering the final results to the Board. Mr. Haddad said he liked the inclusiveness of proposal. Mr. Degen thanked Mr. Pease adding he was doing a great job on items he had taken on as part of their goals and objectives. He said he thought this was a good idea.

Mr. Haddad said that the Board had received a request for the Park Commission to consider taking on the Memorial Day parade organization. He said that the Commission discussed it but didn't think they could give it the rightful time. He said that Mr. Don Black was asking that the Board consider setting up a Commemorations and Celebrations Committee to cover the Memorial Day parade, 4th of July, Labor Day and Christmas tree fire activities to include as members Chief Palma, Chief McCurdy, Bob Johnson, Evan Boucher and Don Black. He said he was very excited that there were volunteers that wanted to take this on and asked the Board to consider looking at a committee like this. He said that they currently had a \$500 budget right now and may need to look at increasing it. Mr. Degen said he thought it was a great idea but didn't like having committee individuals named before the public could hear about it. He said he would like to have 2 at large citizens added. Mr. Petropoulos asked that a charge be brought back that talks about representation members of the committee not specific individuals. Ms. Eliot said that they had 5 people who had stepped forward and commended them. Mr. Pease said that he was hearing that some members of the public may feel left out and suggested waiting until they knew who wanted to be involved. Mr. Degen stressed the urgency of this adding Memorial Day was right around the corner.

Mr. Petropoulos said that they had a request to review a discussion at a recent School Committee meeting and comments from one of the Board of Selectmen members. He said this was not listed on their agenda and therefore was reluctant to go too deep into this. He said he thought the misunderstanding could be cleared up quickly by reviewing what was said. He said he personally lost all concern about what some thought they heard after watching the video. Mr. Pease asked Mr. Petropoulos not to frame a conceptual bias for the Board and the public before they watched the video and had time to make their own interpretation. Ms. Eliot thanked the School Committee for being present. Mr. Petropoulos said he was trying to avoid a rathole. He went on to say, despite Mr. Pease's efforts to move ahead to watching the video, that Mr. Degen at the School Committee meeting suggested that capital costs be removed from the overall budget and be voted on separately at Town Meeting as he was concerned that inclusion of one time capital items would create a base for next year. The video clip of this discussion from the School Committee meeting from 3/8/17 was shown.

Mr. Degen said he clearly stated that this was in his opinion, these onetime capital expenses would be remembered by them (meaning himself) when it came time to put together the next year's budget. He stated again that the "we" he was referring to was himself adding he was the only Board member present at the meeting.

Ms. Gilbert said, speaking for herself, that this came about because of the minutes she posted of the meeting. She said she didn't name Mr. Degen in her minutes and didn't want to make it personal. She said her first concern was not the fact that Mr. Degen voiced concern with the budget but accused them of improper budgeting. She pointed out that he was not involved in the budget hearings and added that their budget was a zero-based budget and would be next year. She said she knew the \$375K in capital was not a given but thought they also needed to understand they made a commitment to fund the needs assessment over 5 years. She said she took Mr. Degen's comments as though he was speaking on behalf of the entire Finance Committee and Selectmen. She said that she personally preferred to see capital funded outside the budget. She apologized for misquoting him but really didn't understand it still. Ms. Donohue said that what bothered her was also the mention of improper budgeting. She said that they chose and voted to put the capital in there based on Superintendent Ryan's recommendation based on meetings with Groton and Dunstable. She said a lot of assumptions were made and how they resonated was not accurate. She added that they worked very hard to work collaboratively.

Mr. Degen said that he said it was in his opinion that onetime expenses should not be included in the budget. He said that they made their decision and he personally didn't agree with it. He said that if he caused them angst and caused them to think he was speaking on behalf of their boards, he was providing his opinion and his only. Mr. Pease said it was challenging for all of them in these meeting when they were all so passionate about things like money. He said as a School Committee member they had one constituent, education; as a Board of Selectmen, they were responsible for the entire town. He said he hoped they understood that he valued the work and communication adding it was very easy to take words out of context. He said he also understood why he may not have. He said that there needed to be discussion like this and that they needed to act like adults.

LIAISON REPORTS

Mr. Haddad said that the Audit Review Committee would be meeting on March 20th to finalize a couple of surveys that would be going out.

Mr. Petropoulos asked if the Town could set aside dollars as a "bounty" for individuals that might want to write grants for the Town. Mr. Haddad said he spoke to Town Counsel who said they could do this but would have to be through a competitive bidding process. Mr. Degen said there was danger in that but thought it was a great idea.

Mr. Petropoulos adjourned the meeting at 8:32pm.

Approved: _____
Barry Pease, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted,
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 3/27/17