

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
MINUTES MARCH 26, 2018
APPROVED**

BOS Members Present: Joshua A. Degen, Chair; Barry A. Pease, Vice Chair; Alison S. Manugian, Clerk; John G. Petropoulos, Member

Members Absent: Rebecca H. Pine, Member;

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

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

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that he had six members of the Groton Police Department apply to fill a Sergeant's vacancy. He said that the six candidates were Nicholas Beltz, Robert Breault, Omar Connor, Kevin Henehan, Michael Lynn, and Rachael Mead. Mr. Haddad said that in order to administer a competitive process, Chief Palma hired Public Safety Consultants, LLC out of Pocasset, MA to administer an Assessment Center for the six Police Officers. Each Officer was given a Written Tactical Exercise, a Panel Interview, a Citizen Interview and an Employee Interview. They were scored on each area and ranked accordingly. The scores during the Assessment Center were very close and each Officer excelled in different areas. After the Assessment Center, each Officer came before an Interview Panel made up of himself, Human Resource Director Melisa Doig, Fire Chief Steele McCurdy and Executive Assistant Dawn Dunbar. He added that Deputy Police Chief Cullen attended the Interviews but did not participate in the questioning. Mr. Haddad said that each Officer was instructed to prepare a presentation outlining their accomplishments to date; what they had done to further the mission of the Groton Police Department; what they had done to further the Community Policing concept; and what their vision for the Groton Police Department for the next five (5) years was. Mr. Haddad said that after interviewing these individuals, he had never been prouder to be the Town Manager of Groton and more importantly, the Town Manager associated with the Groton Police Department. He said that each of them was exemplary employees and outstanding Police Officers. He complimented Chief Palma and Deputy Chief Cullen for doing an outstanding job of recruiting, managing and leading the Officers. Mr. Haddad said that for him to sit and listen to their accomplishments, volunteerism and love of community was a testament to the Leadership of the Police Department. He explained how very fortunate the Town was to have these Officers in their employ. Mr. Haddad said that making a decision on who to promote to Sergeant was not an easy one adding he only wished he could appoint all six. He said that based on the Assessment Center and Panel Interview, he had decided to promote Officer Rachael Mead to the position of Groton Police Sergeant effective March 26, 2018 and asked the Board to consider this as official notification of the appointment and respectfully requested that the Board consider ratifying the appointment.

Mr. Degen said it sounded as though this was a great process and a great department. Mr. Petropoulos said that he had done some research on SRO's in various towns and could not believe the feedback he had received about Officer Mead in her role as Groton's SRO. Ms. Manugian said she shared Mr. Petropoulos's opinion adding it was rare to find a person that was beloved by everyone in their community.

Mr. Pease moved to ratify the Town Manager's appointment of Sergeant Rachael Mead effective March 26, 2018. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Mr. Haddad said that the Economic Development Committee was recommending that Robert Foley be appointed to the Committee to fill a vacancy. He asked the Board to consider making that appointments. Mr. Petropoulos said he was very encouraged to have Mr. Foley contribute to their town.

Ms. Manugian moved that they appoint Robert Foley to the Economic Development Committee term to expire June 30, 2018. Mr. Petropoulos seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Mr. Haddad said that the Financial Policies had been updated and asked the Board to consider adopting the policies that night. Mr. Degen said he thought the red lined version looked good but was hesitant to vote on them without the

Finance Committee's recommendation. Mr. Haddad said that the change included their recommendation adding the Finance Committee would be voting on them on Thursday. Mr. Pease said he was going to vote no on these adding he didn't like that they were using percentages. He said that this was something he had asked be changed before and maybe the only way he would see a change was if he voted no. He further explained how he would like to see an established cap and not a percentage. Mr. Petropoulos asked if they could amend these when they got to that point. Mr. Haddad said he could agree with implementing a cap and not a percentage on the capital stabilization fund but because the stabilization fund was their rainy-day fund, he would prefer to stay in line with DOR's recommendations and guidelines especially when those were reviewed by the bond rating companies. Ms. Manugian said that she was finding herself thinking more along the lines of what Mr. Pease has just said. She said that her concern was as part of a regional school district, they were also setting up funds adding there was a disconnect. She thought that the citizens needed to understand what the amounts in the various accounts meant. Mr. Degen said he understood what was being said but didn't think they had achieved a level where the DOR guidelines should be ignored. Mr. Robertson said that there was a reason the capital stabilization moved citing movement in inflation. He said he would not want to cap anything right now adding they were still going to need to help the schools even though they had set up their own account. Mr. Degen said he was hearing this could potentially be a 2-2 vote which means it would be defeated and wondered if they should hold off voting. He added that to have this in placed for Town Meeting would further help funding various accounts. Mr. Robertson said that the Charter stipulated that this needed to be approved once a year.

Mr. Petropoulos moved that they approve the most recent financial policies for 2018 subject to approval by the Finance Committee. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried 3-1 with Mr. Pease voting against.

7:15PM - IT PRESENTATION

Mike Chiasson, IT Director was present.

Mr. Chiasson said that they currently had internal back office software to manage committee memberships and post meetings. He said that he and the Town Manager had discussed upgrading this for a while now. He said that they looked at private vendors but ultimately decided to do this inhouse. Mr. Chiasson introduced portal.grotonma.gov and reviewed its features and capabilities. Mr. Haddad said he was very pleased with what Mr. Chiasson had done adding he was very excited for this to go live. Mr. Petropoulos thanked Mr. Chiasson for what he had done. Some suggestions were made to Mr. Chiasson as design of the system evolved.

Mr. Petropoulos left the meeting at 7:40pm.

Mr. Pease expressed appreciation for the presentation and for working to make the Town more transparent as requested by the Board.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT - Cont.

4. Mr. Haddad explained how the Finance Committee had voted to recommend that the Rooms Tax be set at the Spring Town Meeting at 3% to become effective July 1, 2019 and to be increased on July 1, 2020 to 6%. Mr. Degen said he had asked Town Counsel if they could begin by establishing the rooms tax at the Spring Town Meeting at zero percent to allow the Town Meeting to decide if they want to implement this. He said they could set the rate at a subsequent meeting. Town Counsel's response was although it was unusual to do it that way, he didn't see anything that prohibited the approach. Town Counsel suggested setting the tax and deferring it begin at a time certain. He said it was just a suggestion and was fine with either approach.

Mr. Amaral said he was thankful for all the support the Inn had received and knew this had been a large undertaking. He explained how they were seeking and asking for time to get a foot hold with the Inn and compete with surrounding hotels. He said that the Inn would employ more than 100 people, with benefits, adding that some lived in or would be moving to Groton. He said that the Inn would be promoting local businesses adding this was the philosophy of the Migis Hotel Group. Mr. Amaral said that he had been speaking with the Principal Assessor who had estimated that the annual property tax and personal property taxes for the Inn would be around \$220k. He

said that this would make them the largest tax payer in town once they were up and running. He said that with a rooms tax of 6%, the Inn would generate about \$166k annually on just the rooms tax. Mr. Amaral said that comments had been made that the rooms tax was just a 'pass through tax' but according to Peter Twachtman of Migis Hotel Group, the tax would in fact have a negative impact on the Inn. He said that a brief period with no rooms tax would allow the Groton Inn to establish themselves against hotels that had been around for 10+ years. Mr. Amaral said that the Board had approved TIF's for other local businesses adding things like that helped to see that local businesses succeeded. He said that they relied on Migis and if they were saying that this could be a problem they had to listen. He said they were okay with the phased in approach being recommended by the Finance Committee. He said he hoped the Board would consider this request.

Mr. Petropoulos returned to the meeting at 7:56pm.

Mr. Pease said he thought the rooms tax should be less directed toward the Inn and more directed toward what Groton wanted to do with businesses. He said if they could generate money off a hotel with a lower rate that would be more inviting for businesses to come to town. He said that an establishment that would be hosting people and events would benefit them as a town. He said that decisions they make on this would send a message for what they want for the future of the Town. He added he was surprised to hear the Inn say they agreed with Finance Committee's recommended 3% and 6% tax increment instead of 2%, 4% and 6% as he was thinking. Mr. Petropoulos said he believed they should implement the rooms tax as early as they could at the full 6%. He said that anything else provided a break to a vendor that would not be able to be allowed for everyone. Mr. Prest said that the Finance Committee talked long and hard about this before making a recommendation. He thought that hearing that the Inn accepted the recommendation was fair. Mr. Degen said he understood Mr. Petropoulos's reason why he wanted to go right to 6% but did not think it gave the Inn a competitive edge. He said that anyone else that would consider opening a hotel in Groton would see that a tax plan had been implemented and be able to include it in their proforma immediately. He said that a rollout was fair and equitable adding he could support a 3% and 6% rollout. Ms. Manugian asked if the Finance Committee discussed lesser rates to keep them at a competitive advantage with other towns. Mr. Robertson said that the recommendation was based on what made sense for this hotel. He said that the Inn had to be the best of the best when they were up and rolling and at that point that taxes wouldn't matter. He said they didn't see any reason Groton should be lower than surrounding towns. He said the Committee thought this rollout would assist the Inn in the short term to help them get through the initial tough times and to get them off their feet. Mr. Petropoulos said he didn't think anyone in town was qualified to answer Ms. Manugian's question adding one would have to understand the hotel business. He said he didn't think a hotel tax would make an ounce of a difference. He said that people didn't look at taxes when shopping a hotel. Mr. Amaral said that they were very comfortable with 3 and 6% over 2 years adding this would help them get through the initial startup. Ms. Manugian said that she was comfortable with 3% on July 1, 2019 but was not comfortable with putting 6% in the summary. Mr. Degen said that they could say there would be a potential increase of up to 6% on July 1, 2020.

Ms. Manugian moved that they approve the warrant article to include a 3% rooms tax effective July 1, 2019. Mr. Pease seconded the motion. The motion carried 3-1 with Mr. Petropoulos opposed.

5. It was decided to wait until the continuation of the public hearing on the warrant the following week for the Board to take positions.
6. Mr. Haddad said that he would be meeting with the Finance Committee on Thursday at 6:30pm and would be recommending some final reductions to the budget. He said that he was going to be recommending a \$20k reduction in the legal budget and \$5k reduction in Selectmen's expenses (the request made by the Sustainability Commission). Mr. Pease asked about the SRO. Mr. Haddad said that they currently had a commitment from a private school and GDRSD had reduced their assessment to the Town of Groton by \$20k. He said they were within \$15-20k of the funding necessary. He said he wanted to have a full commitment from others before they include this in the budget. He said if they were unsuccessful, he was going to suggest they stay at least \$20k under the levy limit for the money that GD had agreed to. Mr. Pease asked if he was seeing obstacles from Dunstable. Mr. Degen explained how he had reached out to the Dunstable BOS chair and TA. Mr. Petropoulos asked if they had determined how they would

handle the citizens petition if the Town voted in the affirmative at Town Meeting. Mr. Degen said that the citizens petition was advisory. Mr. Petropoulos said that he could consider this a mandate and thought they should talk about how they would deal with that. He said if Town Meeting told them to do something he thought they needed to do it. Mr. Degen said he believed there would be a motion to table this if it was funded in the budget and also thought the Finance Committee needed to be involved in this. Mr. Haddad agreed adding it was the Finance Committee's budget. Mr. Robertson said he disagreed with having to fund it if it passed at Town meeting if they didn't have the money to do so. He said he also thought this needed to be funded equitably by all including Dunstable. Mr. Degen asked if Dunstable had a citizen's petition on their warrant to fund this at their spring town meeting. Mr. Haddad said he was not sure. (Ms. Manugian later informed the Board that Dunstable did not have a similar citizens petition on their warrant.) Ms. Manugian said she thought a citizen's petition was an inappropriate first step. She said she also thought the petitioners should have had a meeting with the Finance Committee, Town Manager and Board of Selectmen to educate people on what they were putting forth. She said there was no funding mechanism for any and all citizens petitions that come forward with their priorities. Mr. Degen said he thought they should discuss this on Thursday night with the Finance Committee. Mr. Pease said that this petition had done what it was intended to do in that it had brought the discussion to the forefront. Mr. Pease asked Mr. Haddad if he was asked on June 1 to fund a new DPW position, as an example, what he would do. Mr. Haddad said he would not be able to do so without appropriating funding by reducing other budgets at the fall town meeting. Ms. Manugian said that another potential mechanism was to add it as an override.

7. Mr. Haddad said that the Board had completed their individual meetings with Mr. Roach and it was now time to schedule a work session with everyone. It was discussed and decided to schedule the work sessions for Sunday, April 22nd and Sunday, April 29th at 8am at Legion Hall.

LIAISON REPORTS

Mr. Degen said that the Sargisson Beach Cleanup had been tentatively scheduled for April 7th at 8am.

MINUTES

Mr. Pease moved to approve the regular session meeting minutes of March 5, 2018. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Manugian moved to approve the regular session meeting minutes of March 12, 2018 as amended. Mr. Pease seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Degen adjourned the meeting at 8:52pm.

Approved: _____
Alison Manugian, Clerk

respectfully submitted,
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 4/2/18