

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES DECEMBER 3, 2007
APPROVED**

Present: George Dillon, Jr., Chairman; Joshua A. Degen, Vice Chairman; Stuart Schulman, Clerk; Peter Cunningham; Mihran Keoseian

Also Present: Jeff Ritter, Interim Administrative Officer; April Iannacone, Office Assistant

Mr. Dillon called the regular meeting of the Board to Order at 7:00 p.m. and reviewed the agenda for the public.

Shubhada Kambli, RE: Environmental Protection Agency “Community Energy Challenge”

Mr. Ritter stated that a guest from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) was going to attend, however weather became an issue. He and Kevin Kelly were there to present where this program is heading. Over the past several months they had been trying to analyze opportunities to save money. This Community Energy Challenge is intended to save the town money. Kevin then informed the Board that this was a group effort between GELD and the Town. To this point they have put in the history of all Town buildings to track energy usage for electric and gas. The theory is that if you are tracking the energy usage you will watch a little closer and try to bring it down. GELD is also paying for a complete audit of the library that was done last Friday. They are looking at all possible ways to save money. They intend to take a look at what the potential energy savings will be vs. the capital costs of putting things into place, and then they can look into in other buildings. Mr. Ritter then stated that all of the buildings square footage and heating were entered as a benchmark to measure which are least efficient to then put a plan into place to fix them. The goal is to try to reduce the energy consumption of each building by 10%. The third step is to embrace a concept of educating people in the community of the benefits of conserving energy. If the Town were to adopt this challenge then Groton would be 53rd community and there would be State and Federal funding opportunities. Mr. Cunningham asked if this is concurrent with the Regional School Buildings. Mr. Ritter replied that during their original meeting in the summer, Tim Sheehan fully embrace the program and they have given information on their buildings as well. This is an opportunity for GELD, the School District and the Town to try to save money. Mr. Schulman stated that the Library and Town Hall had fairly recently gone through renovations, in 1999 and 2000, and asked if any of the renovations took any of this into place at the time. Kevin replied that they needed an audit of a building that was large. They wanted the options of a good size building with a good amount of energy usage, and the middle and high school are both new. Mr. Ritter gave congratulations to Chris from the Water Department for identifying an opportunity to save. There was an event that took place in the Town Hall, and when the Fire Department responded they were able to see an energy escape. Mr. Dillon noted that Chris was supposed to be there this evening but was unable to attend. He then asked Kevin about the outlook for the electrical costs and if the worst case scenario was that they were to stay the same. Kevin replied that if things stay relatively stable then at least one year would remain the same. He stated that in New England the electric rates are set by the natural gas price which is pretty stable. Mr. Dillon then asked Kevin about the tree lighting. Kevin replied that GELD had replaced all of the tree’s lights with LED lighting. He stated that even with the lights only being on for 8 hours a day the cost will be repaid in 60 days due to lower electric use. Therefore within 2 years the energy savings alone will pay for themselves. The LED Light is very different, but they use very small amounts of electricity, and they make compact fluorescents look high use. The Selectmen gave thanks to Kevin for being there and for all of the work he is doing towards this.

Finance Committee (FINCOM), RE: FY09 Budget Guidelines – 3 yr financial projections

Mr. Dillon stated that there were members of FINCOM there to go through the 3 year financial projections for revenue and expenses, and to discuss the guidelines for department heads to use in preparing their FY09 budgets. He stated that the projections were refined quite well at this point, but noted that things could still change. Jay Prager, Chairman of the Finance Committee, then addressed the Board to recommend that they use the same process that was tried last year in working on the budgets. Last year a series of 2 Saturday meetings took place that combined the BOS, FINCOM, and the Capital Planning Committee so that everyone was

getting the same information at the same time and working through it together. Department Heads were asked to look at their actual spending for FY07, not what was budgeted, and then subtract any one time expenditures. They were asked to come in at or below that number. If there were any one time expenditures that they had coming up then they need to put it in writing. Mr. Dillon stated that the basis for this 3 year budget projection came from the decreases in the Free Cash balances over the past few years. He then noted that the deficit that is calculating at just under \$300,000 did not include any contractual obligations from union negotiations which would increase the number significantly. Valerie Jenkins, Town Accountant, stated that the projections were created started with fiscal year 2008 as a baseline, where she knows what the Town has assumed to have spent and budgeted after the fall Special Town Meeting. She then listed the estimates for State Aid as level funded, but she has concerns that with other State issues the aid might even be lower. She is assuming that new growth and local receipts will be declining. Building Permits were estimated low for FY08 and we still are not meeting that figure. Included in this draft, #5, some adjustments were made for step increases, but this does not include COLA for the Union employees or the Bylaw employees. New employees coming in throughout the year could either raise the costs, or lower them and help. No additional money was planned for the salary of a Town Manager. Employee benefits were estimated at a 15% increase, however she hopes it will come in lower than that between 12 and 15%. The senior plans for retirees will also be going up but she does not have that figure yet. She is estimating 15% which is on the conservative side and could be higher. General expenses were estimated at an increase of 2.5%. Mr. Dillon asked about the allocation of funds to the schools. Val replied that she had included in this 3 year projection what has historically taken place. Historically the schools have received 58 – 63% of the new revenues. This year she drew the line at 60% and used that for the operational increase. There is usually a 3.4% year to year increase. The funds that they will be receiving will be far less than they have in the past. Mr. Dillon then stated that last year the Town received 75% of new revenues. If that figure were to stay the same, between 60% of the projected new revenue to the schools, and the health and retirement benefits, all of the new revenue is gone. Val then stated that if things continue on this path this \$300,000 deficit could turn into a million dollar deficit. Mr. Dillon stated that department heads needed to look at job needs when vacancies occur to try to cut back hours and wages, rather than having to look at laying off people who are currently in the department in order to try to help keep this shortage from getting worse. Mr. Degen suggested that the BOS and FINCOM do a full needs assessment of every department in town and urge them to cutback their budgets as much as possible. Jay stated that if the Town employee head count stays where it is today the Town will be in serious trouble because the bulk of the budget is wages and salaries. Mr. Ritter stated that the 90's growth going up encouraged all renovations and staff level hiring's. However all of the things brought about from the growth are still hanging around while new growth is going down. Mr. Schulman stated that if you downsize government then at some point you will need to start downsizing the services that the government provides. The Town needs to educate people that these things may change. The Selectmen then consented that they would like to see full cooperation from all department heads and any suggestions that anyone may have are welcomed. They then thanked Valerie and Jay for coming in and for all of their hard work and information.

OTHER BUSINESS

Annual Town Report FY09 Budget

Mr. Ritter informed the Board that the current practice is to print 700 copies of the Annual Town Report and he would like to suggest cutting that number back to 500. He suggested that the Town try to more aggressively post information to the Town's website and then keep one copy of the Town Report at the reference desk in the Library. He then stated that there are certain reporting requirements, but there is no requirement that one be printed for every citizen or resident. The town typically has a number of copies left every year and this cutback in printing will save \$1000.00 in the budget.

Mr. Degen moved to approve and refer to the Town Accountant and the Finance Committee the FY09 Annual Town Report Budget. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

Class II License Renewals

Mr. Ritter informed the Board that there were 4 renewals of licenses that were to expire at the end of December 2007. They will be renewed to the end of 2008 contingent upon the review of the Building Inspector. These are Class II used cars dealerships. Mr. Dillon stated that there was a fee of \$100 per license.

The BOS had received the ok from the Tax Collector and the Police Chief, and also from Patrice on the Workers Compensation.

Mr. Schulman moved to approve the renewal of the following Class II Licenses, to expire December 31, 2008: Town Line Auto Sales, located on 11 Town Line Road; Groton Towing Inc., located on 445 Main Street; Miller Classic Cars, located on 1025 Lowell Road; and Piper's Classic Import Inc., d/b/a Piper's Import & Domestic Auto, located on 15 Elm Street. Contingent on final approval of the Building Inspector. Mr. Cunningham seconded. Unanimous vote.

Race and Place Dialogue Series

Mr. Ritter informed the Board that he was approached by the Housing Partnership looking for a location to hold a series of 4 educational seminars. They were looking to access either the Town Hall or the Library. An agreement was made with the Library to hold the seminars there. They have also asked the Board to consider writing a letter of support for this educational program. After some discussion the Board consented that they had no problem supporting this request.

Mr. Schulman moved to authorize the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen to sign a letter to the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston demonstrating Groton's support for the Race and Place Dialogue Series. Mr. Cunningham seconded. Unanimous vote.

Streetlight FY09 Budget

Mr. Dillon stated that the FY08 appropriation was \$28,520 and Groton Electric is estimating that the figure will stay the same for FY09. Mr. Degen stated that there is a need for the street lights at certain curves and intersections, but suggested that the Board look into the elimination of some lights that might not be as necessary. Mr. Schulman agreed and also suggested looking into more modern lighting technology, such as LED light, to save money as well. Mr. Ritter replied that he would check with Kevin to look into any options. The Board consented to keep the appropriation the same and then look into ways to change things.

Mr. Degen moved to approve and refer to the Town Accountant and the Finance Committee the FY09 Streetlight Budget. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

REPORT OF THE INTERIM ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Mr. Ritter informed the Board that he was working with Carolyn Perkins from the CPC on the Affordable Housing project and the CPC would be meeting tomorrow night. There would be a Team Building Exercise held on Thursday morning at the Town Hall for employees and the members of the Board are welcome to attend. There will be a Jenkins Road Project Meeting on Tuesday. The State will make a presentation this Friday on changes to the Construction Reform Law. Lastly, the Interviews for Temporary Town Clerk will take place on Thursday and he anticipates that there will be interviews before the Board on Monday December 10th.

SELECTMAN LIAISON REPORTS

Mr. Schulman stated that he had participated in the walk of the bounds on Saturday morning to mark each of the 24 Pepperell and Dunstable markers with '07', and make sure that they were in the right place. Mr. Dillon stated that Martin Beck who had attended the walk with the Board was very knowledgeable and had the history behind almost every marker. Mr. Cunningham noted that this practice is done every 5 years and has historical significance. If any one of the boundary markers is off even a little the error magnifies over the entire line and becomes much greater at the other end. There were 2 boundary markers that have been relocated in manholes underground on North Main Street, and one of the stones was an original from 1777. There had been one stone that was disturbed, so the two towns would coordinate to make sure it was reset properly.

Mr. Cunningham stated that the Squannacook River Rail Trail Committee met last week and will be meeting again on December 18th and they are scheduled to kick off with FST about their work and time frame. He also presented the proclamation for Jay Geils on Saturday night. It was a great event and a DVD will be recorded to be released.

Mr. Schulman stated that he had met with the Country Club Board and staff. The Board of Directors has been meeting on weekly basis to work through issues, as well as the annual contract renewal. Mr. Cunningham

asked if a lease was out for the catering function and when a new person would be in. Mr. Schulman replied that it is being advertised, and he did not know when they would get someone in. Mr. Keoseian asked why Currier & Chives was not renewing. Mr. Dillon replied that the sense that he got was that they were part of a larger entity and the return on their investment was not there.

Mr. Dillon stated that he had attended a meeting on Jenkins Road last week. Also he attended and EQA Audit meeting with Dr. Genovese and two auditors on Wednesday to go over more financial areas. Last night he presented the opportunity to light up the Christmas tree to Adelaide Luca who was very happy and proud to be able to do so. This is a relatively small event, but the level of warmth and community spirit is amazing.

ADJOURN

Mr. Schulman moved to adjourn at 8:25 p.m. Mr. Cunningham seconded. Unanimous vote.

Approved: _____
Stuart Schulman, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted,
April Iannacone
Office Assistant

Date Approved: *February 4, 2008*