

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
MINUTES MARCH 4, 2019
APPROVED**

BOS Members Present: Barry A. Pease, Chair; Alison S. Manugian, Vice Chair; John R. Giger, Clerk; Joshua A. Degen, Member; Rebecca H. Pine, Member

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

Mr. Pease called the meeting to order at 7:00PM and reviewed the agenda.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Don Black for the Cemetery Association asked for a letter of support for their CPA application for the restoration of the Groton Cemetery. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to authorize him to draft a letter so that it could be submitted with the final application next week. Mr. Degen said he was fine waiving their policy to not take action on an item before them for the first time adding he was in favor of restoring the cemetery. Mr. Giger was in agreement. Ms. Manugian said she was in agreement but was frustrated with the difficulty of meeting deadlines and timing.

Mr. Degen moved that they send a letter to the CPC in support of the Groton Cemetery Restoration project. Mr. Giger seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Peter Cunningham said that there would be a fundraising event on April 6th at the Groton Inn put on by the Friends of the Elders for the Senior Center. He said that tickets for the Gala Event were \$50.

Ms. Marlena Gilbert said that the Destination Imagination competition was this past weekend and students from Groton Dunstable were going to state finals at the end of March. She said that the School Committee was going to be discussing their budget further this week and would be looking at using E&D to help Dunstable this year which would help both towns.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that there was a draft letter in their packet about the Housing Production Plan and the Board's support of it. He asked the Board to consider authoring the Chair to sign off on the letter on behalf of the Board.

Mr. Degen moved to authorize the Chair to sign the letter of support for the Housing Production Plan to the CPC. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Mr. Giger suggested they add the CPC application number of 2020-01 and offered a friendly amendment. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Mr. Pease announced that he would not be seeking re-election this year to the Select Board.
3. Mr. Haddad said that he added an article regarding the Charter as the Board had requested last week. He said that he had also redrafted some of the summaries as requested by the Board. He said that on March 18th at 7:15pm, they would be meeting in Joint Session with the Finance Committee to discuss the warrant.
4. Mr. Haddad said that he talked about the debt exclusion questions last week concerning the Highway Garage Facility and the Library Roof project. He asked the Board to consider voting to add these to the warrant that night. Mr. Degen said that by means of an update, he had met with the Town Clerk and Town Manager to discuss adding what a yes and no vote would mean and to put before the voters in advance of a ballot vote. Ms. Manugian asked if any of the other capital projects would be delayed to accommodate these. Mr. Haddad said that these would be funded by a debt exclusion and would be outside of the capital plan. Mr. Giger said he was happy to see the questions in two parts and thought if they didn't add them, they would have to hold a special election.

Mr. Degen moved that the Select Board authorize 2 ballot questions as worded before them that evening for the election in May 2019. Mr. Giger seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

7:15PM - FIRE DEPARTMENT TASK FORCE PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Task Force Committee Members Ryan Monat, Peter Myette and John Kane were present. Mr. Myette called the Task Force to order.

Mr. Haddad said that two reports had been provided to the Board; a report from the Task Force along with a report from the Call Department. Mr. Degen asked the Committee to give them a high-level overview of their recommendation. Mr. Myette said that they voted 4-1 to recommend moving to a 24/7 department. Mr. Kane said that they had a second recommendation on call recruitment adding it was a national problem not just a Groton problem. He said that it was their opinion that on call recruitment was a larger town problem and not just a problem for the Chief. He suggested that they needed to double down and use their resources and thought they needed to recruit more women. He said that they were suggesting that a Select Board member, Finance Committee member and Human Resources member look at financial incentives to address retention. He said that a marketing plan spanning several years needed to be developed to find volunteers also. Mr. Myette said that this committee took a life of its own. He said that they could have probably taken another year and this report was based on where they were. He said that they needed to do what they thought Groton needed and not what the country needed. Mr. Giger said that he wanted to put in a vote for putting forward efforts to getting people to volunteer. Ms. Manugian said that she was a little concerned that some information was not gathered as outlined in the Committee's charge. She said that a larger financial discussion also needed to occur.

Mr. Robertson said that if they were to go to outside EMS, he thought they might save more than \$73K in on-call pay. He said he thought this discussion was about hiring 2 full time employees. He asked what would happen to the on-call staff if they outsourced. Chief McCurdy said that there was no simple answer to those questions. He said that until they knew what outsourcing might look like and what effect it might have on volunteers, it was difficult to answer those questions.

Ms. Pine called into the meeting at 7:31pm.

Mr. Robertson said that this recommendation wasn't getting rid of anything essentially. He said it was going to cost them \$150K for 2 firefighters and \$100K to outsource EMS. Mr. Giger said that the estimate of bringing in a contractor to do ambulance runs at night was a loose estimate at this point. He asked where equipment was going to be kept and about training for both in addition to losing EMS expertise on their own department. Mr. Robertson pointed out that the community recommendation was based on feedback from 50 people who attended a forum. Mr. Myette said that that was the only forum they had. He said that the desire of that group was to move to 24/7 coverage. Mr. Degen said that when they look at the savings to outsource EMS, an ambulance service wouldn't be sitting at the station at night. He said they would be losing the response time by not going 24/7 within their own department. He said that they also had a growing population which needed an increase in public safety. He said that one member of the Task Force was not sure how much a life was worth. He said that they had had 2 fires within the past couple of weeks including one earlier that day where response times really mattered. He said that were at a point where they needed to better protect the public and understood the need.

Mr. Green said that in looking at the facts and statistics he cautioned them adding that nobody would say that adding personnel was bad. He said that his concern was knowing what the right number of people needed was. He said he was not sure that adding 2 was the answer. Ms. Manugian said that she agreed with what she had been hearing from the Finance Committee adding she was not sure all items in the Committee's charge had been checked off. She said she was also not entirely clear what the long-term need was. She asked if adding the 2 additional personnel what they would get them in terms of time. Mr. Kane said that they were trying to find the interval for adding more. He said that they needed to bolster their on-call department. Ms. Manugian said she wasn't sure that was viable. She asked about the information requests that were not received. Mr. Monat said that they spent half the meeting time getting up to speed on various standards. Chief McCurdy said that his department learned during this process that they needed to track mutual aid data better and felt that what they had was not sufficient enough to discuss or use. Mr. Monat said that they discussed communities around them and those similar in size. There was no official request for information from those communities. Mr. Prest said that he agreed with Mr. Degen. He said that he attended the community forum and counted 65 people there including residents and members of the department. He said that they took an informal vote at that time where 90-95% of people were willing to have an additional approximate \$80 added to their tax bills to fund this. Mr. Prest said that the Committee was looking at the averages when they should have been looking at the medians adding that averages were misleading.

Mr. Giger asked if they would find themselves in a different place a year from now if they had allowed the Committee additional time. He said that people learned there were a lot of complexities here. He said he placed heavy weight on what the Fire Chief told him and thought that it was positive input in what they should do. He said that a lot of good work had been done by the Committee. Mr. Degen said that he wanted to thank the Committee for their work. He said that they were pushed and met the timeframe given to them. He said that the Committee was established because of a request from both the Police Chief and Fire Chief a year ago for additional personnel. He said they decided to split the requests and look at the needs of the individual departments. He said that the Fire Chief had come forward for 4 consecutive years with requests for additional personnel. He said that the Committee had verified what the professional Fire Chief had said.

Mr. Pease asked for clarification from the Fire Chief about what chart B.3 labeled Average Response Times in Minutes meant. Mr. Pease said that safety was the basic service people expected from their taxes. He said that he appreciated the work of a diverse group of Committee members. He said he was comfortable with a recommendation of an additional 2 people. He said he thought they should make that recommendation to the Town. Ms. Pine thanked the Task Force for their work. She asked if there was a motion on the floor or if they were just being asked to accept the report. Mr. Haddad said he thought they might discuss the addition of 2 personnel under the budget seeing the Finance Committee was present. Ms. Pine asked if they added 2 additional people if they would be in the same boat they were last summer based on the charts. Chief McCurdy said that they were still short one person adding this would be adding more depth to their pool to tap into to better cover shifts. Mr. Giger said that the schedule was always moving because on any given day someone could call out sick where a per diem or call member would have to be called in to cover a shift. Chief McCurdy said that they were constantly evaluating what their levels were. He said that there was no staffing at the station at night but put some in last night because of the snow storm as an example of the ever shifting coverage. He said that those levels always needed to be evaluated.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT – Cont.

5. Mr. Haddad said that he had provided the Board with a lot of information on the addition of 2 fire department personnel. He said that the increase in the school's budgets and the increase to cover these 2 positions was not included in his original budget. He said that last week they discussed the \$150K in snow and ice deficit they were carrying and said that if they were to take that out of the budget and plan differently, that would lower the deficit to \$128K. He asked if they should look for \$128K in cuts to the municipal budget, reduce what they could provide the Regional School District or go for an override.

Ms. Pine arrived at the meeting at 8:33pm.

Mr. Pease said it might be premature to have a discussion on funding because they didn't have the final numbers from the School Committee. Ms. Gilbert said that there was potential for the School Committee to have their vote this week but that they were still asking questions of the Superintendent. Mr. Haddad said that if the School Committee was inclined to give them information on Wednesday, they could discuss this at their meeting next Monday. Mr. Degen said that they needed to make a decision based on the merits of that decision.

Ms. Sartini asked for the Board's feelings on the additional fire department staff. Mr. Degen said he supported the addition of 2 fire fighters. Ms. Manugian said she did also but thought they had some financial conversations to have. Ms. Pine said that she assumed in the future they would have 24-hour coverage. She said that adding 2 more wasn't going to hold them over for long and thought the 2 they added in January meant they could hold off another year and revisit this. Mr. Giger said he didn't want to see them get into an override situation. He said he would still support this and give the voters a choice to decide on an override. Mr. Pease said that he agreed that bringing this to a ballot vote was the right thing to do. Ms. Manugian asked that they consider adding back in the on-call incentive pay. She said that they needed to look at overrides jointly. Mr. Haddad said that an override question might be the best way to do this adding in the on-call incentive pay for a total of about \$117K. Mr. Robertson said that he thought they should add the school override in this year. Mr. Haddad said it was reasonable adding that they could raise the recap by that much even if they didn't use it this year.

Mr. Degen asked why they would need the incentive pay. Chief McCurdy said that it created an incentive for the staff to show up for the call and thought they were taking care of that through the staffing increase. Mr. Degen said that they needed to start looking at the big picture of overrides over the next few years. Ms. Manugian said that she agreed.

6. Mr. Haddad said that there was no rush for them to discuss possible housing at the Country Club and asked the Board to postpone this until the summer.

Mr. Degen moved to withdraw the warrant article for a CPA application for Housing on the Country Club. Mr. Giger seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

7. Mr. Haddad said that he set aside time to discuss retiree health insurance. He asked if the Board wanted to make any further changes to this. Mr. Degen suggested that effective July 1, 2019 any new hires beginning after July 1, 2019 should go to 60/40. He said that he wanted to see them also revisit this if future collective bargaining agreements show a further shift in health insurance. Mr. Haddad suggested keeping the 15% gap. Ms. Manugian said she was fine with this changing the split for new hires. Ms. Manugian said she would also consider revisiting this a couple of years from now and making changes if need be adding she would also support going to 50/50 for new hires now. Ms. Pine said she would favor going to 50/50 effective July 1, 2019.

Mr. Degen move that they adopt a new policy that all new hires after July 1, 2019 have retiree health rates of 50/50 for health insurance. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

ON-GOING ISSUES

A: Mr. Haddad said that they had a lively discussion on Thursday about the Senior Center roof. He said that the roof would be reviewed by the architect and the roofer. He said it was determined that a majority of the roof needed to be replaced. He said that roof replacement would take place in April adding that it would be made weather tight for the time being.

C: Mr. Haddad said that the article was on the warrant for the Charter but that Mr. Bouchard responded to a request from the Senate for the official votes which hopefully meant it was in process.

F: Mr. Haddad said that the Flo Ro Feasibility Study was moving along. He said that they conducted OPM interviews and decided to hire Left Field as the OPM.

Mr. Haddad asked for permission to remove items G and K off the list. The Board was agreeable.

Mr. Degen moved to reconvene the Executive Session of 6pm at 9:26pm Pursuant to M.G.L., c.30A, §21(a), Clause 2 – “To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with non-union personnel” for the purpose of discussing the Town Manager's Contract and not return to Open Session. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pease-aye; Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye

Approved: _____
John Giger, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted:
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 3/11/19