

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2020  
EMERGENCY SESSION  
APPROVED**

**SB Members Present:** Alison S. Manugian, Chair; Joshua A. Degen, Vice Chair; John F. Reilly, Clerk; John R. Giger, Member; Rebecca H. Pine, Member

**Also Present:** Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant, All Town Department Heads

Ms. Manugian called the meeting to order at 10:00am and reviewed the agenda.

Mr. Haddad thanked everyone for attending the emergency meeting. He said that the Governor had declared a State of Emergency earlier in the week relative to COVID-19. He said the Governor made changes to the Open Meeting Law which gave them flexibility to not have to be in a room to attend a meeting. He said that the meeting still had to be posted and made available to the public.

Mr. Haddad said that the Fire Chief issued a letter with recommendations.

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to consider voting on a local state of emergency which allowed the Town and Chief to make decisions. Chief McCurdy said that in light of the unprecedented virus, they needed to step up and show the way to the community. He said that they should limit meetings and gatherings and restrict services they provided at this time. He said that they needed to slow the growth of the virus. Chief McCurdy said that closing buildings and departments was an important step. Chief McCurdy said that cancelling the senior tax write off program was a necessary step because they were the most vulnerable population. He added that allowing people to work from home and discouraging the public from coming into facilities were ways they could take measures.

Mr. Haddad asked for the Board to declare a local state of emergency for the foreseeable future. Mr. Degen said he understood the public health aspect, but asked what powers it gave the Select Board, Fire and Police Departments. Mr. Haddad said that it would give the Select Board authority over all departments in order to act quickly. Chief Luth said that the Police Department could enforce things that had been ordered by the Select Board. Mr. Degen asked if this was in line with state or federal procedures. Chief Luth said that he would have to research this further. Mr. Giger for a list of those things that the Select Board would be responsible for. Ms. Pine said that declaring a state of emergency was a way to remind people how serious this was. She said she hoped to get out to the public that it was highly likely that there were unknown cases in Groton right now. She suggested real social distancing. She said it would be helpful to understand procurement. Chief McCurdy said that this would allow them to recall employees should additional man power be needed.

*Ms. Pine moved that the Town of Groton Select Board declare a local state of emergency to deal with outbreak of COVID-19 illness to be in effect until the Select Board withdraws it. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Mr. Haddad said that he had provided the Board with an Infectious Disease Control Policy. He said it outlines what can be done about sending sick employees' home, quarantines should employees travel, and it allows Town Manager and Department Heads to allow people to work from home. He asked the Select Board to adopt the policy as presented.

Mr. Giger suggested wording relative to working from home to say that employees would continue to receive their regular pay and not have to use vacation or sick time.

Dr. Laura Chesson said that during her conference call that morning the Commissioners from the Education Department had not taken a stance on whether schools should be closing or not. She said that the advice was not well received by the Superintendent's Association adding it was a very gray discussion. She said that everyone was dealing with this the best they could. She said she might have a better idea later that morning after talking to the regional superintendents. She said a local state of emergency did not mean that schools would have to close. She said she was worried about their most fragile population, those on free and reduced lunch, etc. and were working on policies. She said she would update the public around 2pm that day. She said that she had staff that had children at home because of closures which was also another issue they

needed to consider. She said that they had no presumptive cases in Groton but needed to keep in mind getting their staff to the schools. She said that they couldn't get supplies they needed which was also a huge concern. She said they would continue to be in contact. Mr. Giger asked if there was any indication of whether they would waive the length of school days required. Dr. Chesson said the students would not have to go longer than 185th day which in Groton was June 19th. She said that they stopped short of saying they would cancel MCAS because that required state legislation and federal relief. She said that schools have already announced that they were cancelling April vacation because of this and something they were also discussing.

Mr. Degen asked if a state of emergency allowed for an override over union contracts. Mr. Haddad said he would have to check with counsel adding that some of this did allow the town to charge sick time. Ms. Pine asked if people who didn't have time would not receive pay. Mr. Haddad said that part time employees did not accrue time and therefore would not be paid. Ms. Pine said that it felt harsh to her. Mr. Degen said that unemployment benefits would be available according to the Governor and cited a layoff situation. Mr. Haddad said that if the Board decided to close Town Hall, employees would be paid. He cited a snow emergency as an example and suggested they follow the same practice. Mr. Haddad said that the union contracts also allowed for use of a sick bank should an employee not have time.

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to adopt as the policy as amended.

*Mr. Degen moved to adopt the Infectious Disease Control Policy as amended that day (March 13, 2020) until such time as the Board removed said precautions. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Mr. Haddad asked the Board if they wanted to consider closing town facilities and/or all meetings. Chief McCurdy said that he thought closing public buildings to the public was a smart move and showed the community how serious this was. He said he would leave the decision up to the Board if they wanted to close the buildings or go to a skeleton crew. He said that the Senior Center was also closed to the most vulnerable population. Kathy Shelp said that staff could work without people there and would like to continue to do that if allowed. She said that they would like to continue the van service to take people to the grocery store and doctors' appointments and continue the meals on wheels program.

Mr. Haddad said he would like to start by closing off public access in all buildings. He said that things could be done over the phone and by email. He said that the employees were following protocols to keep themselves safe from the virus. He said that if they needed to shut down after all, they could but thought the employees needed to continue to work. Mr. Degen said he agreed with closing Town Hall and the Senior Center. Mr. Haddad said that the Transfer Station needed to be available to those to dispose of their trash. He said there wouldn't be a lot of contact with people. He said that he wanted to confer with the Library Trustees but thought they should discuss shutting down the Library also. He added that he wanted to leave the Senior Van operable to assist those in need. Mr. Haddad said that the Country Club didn't officially open until the end of March and thought they could reassess at that time. Ms. Manugian said that from a community protection prospective the more they locked down the better. Chief McCurdy said he saw an opportunity to start with closing off the buildings to the public and reassess on Monday which would allow them to see what new information came out over the weekend.

Mr. Giger said that they might want to consider opening the Transfer Station to those items that people didn't have to pay to dispose. Tom Delaney said that all their doors were locked and operations were only done through a window. He said that they were using gloves and masks to handle money, checks, etc. He said that they were doing the best they could to limit exposure. Mr. Haddad said that not being able to get rid of garbage could lead to another health safety issue. Ms. Pine said that she thought keeping the Transfer Station open was okay adding it was primarily outside. She thought that limiting disposal to trash would be acceptable.

Ms. Pine said that she had mixed feelings about the Senior Center. She liked the idea of the staff working and meals on wheels but asked if there were people that would not be able to connect via technology and to other people leading to lack of socialization. Ms. Shelp said that they needed to weigh all factors when making that decision. She said that people were already not coming out adding there was a reduction in attendance. Mr. Reilly said that the Senior Center staff had a list of people to call and could continue that practice. Ms. Shelp said that keeping employees there so that they could check in on

people was a reason to allow staff to continue to work. Ms. Pine said that shutting off public access but allowing the staff to work was a good recommendation.

Ms. Pine said she would like to hear from the Library Director and Trustees. Ms. Shelp said that they had a mobile Library program they could keep active. Mr. Giger said that books needed to be cleaned. Ms. Manugian said that not closing the Library was not in line with their efforts. Mr. Degen said that the Library was a huge risk and thought it was in their jurisdiction to also close the Library to the public like they would Town Hall and the Senior Center. He said that they should continue the discussion on this next Monday.

Mr. Degen suggested the use of Zoom to hold meetings remotely. Mike Chiasson said that they could purchase a premium plan to allow for callers to call in. Ms. Pine said that they could just broadcast after the fact. Mr. Haddad said that there was no meeting important enough to bring people together. He said he would like to see all meetings over the next 2 weeks cancelled including Select Board meetings as recommended by the Fire Chief. Chief McCurdy said he would allow the Board of Health to meet if anyone at all.

Ms. Manugian said she didn't feel there was a downside to acting conservatively. Mr. Haddad said he wanted the Board to vote to shut down public access to the Town Hall immediately, to advise the Board of Library Trustees to do the same with the Library, and that the Senior Center also be shut down to public access until such time they need to do something differently. Ms. Manugian said that the Transfer Station would remain be open. Tom Delaney said that the DPW buildings themselves would be shut down to non-employees.

Ms. Manugian said that Groton School and Lawrence Academy were currently on break. She said that Groton School was going online following their break until mid-April as of right now.

Mr. Giger said that if the Board of Health or Select Board were going to hold a meeting, the meeting should be closed to public attendance. Mr. Haddad said that would be the case. Ms. Pine said that they had to accept public input somehow. Ms. Pine also suggested the need to have a larger button on their website with Coronavirus information. Ms. Manugian said that they had a staff that could handle this and didn't need to discuss that here. Mr. Haddad said he would work with IT.

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to vote to close all town facilities to public access immediately except for the Transfer Station facility.

*Mr. Degen moved to close all town facilities to public access immediately with the exception of the outdoor area of the Transfer Station until rescinded. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Mr. Kelly said that Groton Electric Light would also be closing to the public.

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to consider moving that all public meetings be cancelled over the next 2 weeks through March 30th with the exception of Board of Health and Select Board.

*Mr. Degen made the motion. The motion was seconded.*

Mr. Greeno said that if the Board of Assessors did not act on abatements, they abatement request would be automatically accepted. Mr. Haddad said that residents could go to the Appellate Tax Board. He said he was asking for 2 weeks of no public meetings. Ms. Pine asked if they could meet via phone or video.

*Mr. Degen moved to amend his motion above to add with the exception of the Board of Assessors who may meet remotely with no public comment unless via remotely.*

Ms. Manugian said it made sense to cancel all meetings. She said that they would have to use judgement or prudence. Nik Gualco said that the Conservation Commission had business, that according to regulatory requirements they needed to meet to discuss but could request continuations within a meeting. Ms. Manugian said that they would need to figure that out. Ms.

Pine asked if they could amend the motion to allow the Town Manager to allow remote meetings within provisions of law. Mr. Haddad said that the State was going to have to make a provision because Groton was not the only Town that was struggling with this. Mr. Degen said he didn't understand how they could start making exceptions. Mr. Haddad recommended that there be no public meetings between now and March 30th except for the Select Board and Board of Health. Ms. Manugian asked if Mr. Haddad could reach out to find out about regulatory issues that were arising. Mr. Giger said that these would not be public meetings but emergency meetings.

Department Heads were asked to compile a list of those items needing DLS consideration.

*Mr. Degen withdrew his motion.*

Ms. Marlana Gilbert called into the meeting to say that the school district was closing for 2 weeks.

Mr. Haddad asked the Select Board to vote that all public meetings for next 2 weeks be cancelled effective immediately with the exception of emergency Board of Health and Select Board meeting through Monday, March 30th.

*Mr. Degen made the motion. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Mr. Haddad said that the public hearing on the warrant would be cancelled on Monday night.

He said he was going to ask the Board to change the date of the Spring Town Meeting. He said that because they had not posted the warrant, they could change the date as long as it was 6 weeks into the future. He said he was going to ask them to change the date to May 18<sup>th</sup>. He said that Tuesday the 19<sup>th</sup> would be the subsequent night. He said that the date of the election would be June 9<sup>th</sup>, 4 weeks after Town Meeting as stipulated by the Charter. He said that if there was a problem still come May 18<sup>th</sup>, the Moderator could push the Town Meeting off for an additional 30 days. He said that the election would still stay on June 9<sup>th</sup> in that case. He said that there was a question on the interpretation of whether they needed to reopen the warrant but suggested not reopening the warrant at this time. Ms. Pine said that they could open the warrant by vote should something come up. Mr. Degen said it was a good idea but wasn't sure this was going to be resolved by May 18<sup>th</sup> and wasn't comfortable holding an event indoors. He asked about May 16<sup>th</sup>, Saturday and about conducting the meeting outdoors. Ms. Manugian said that the Moderator could pick a Saturday in June if he delayed it.

*Mr. Degen made a motion to move Town Meeting to May 18<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to vote, under the Charter, for one member to sign the warrant along with himself, for the next 30 days.

*Mr. Degen made the motion. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

*Mr. Degen moved to designate Mr. Giger as the Select Board designated warrant signer for the next 30 days. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

The meeting adjourned at 11:30am.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
John Reilly, Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_ respectfully submitted:  
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 3/23/2020