

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES**  
**MONDAY, APRIL 6, 2020**  
**APPROVED**

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

**Also Virtually Present:** Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant; Melisa Doig, HR Director; Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant; Michael Bouchard, Town Clerk; Jonathan Greeno, Principal Assistant Assessor; Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair; Michael Hartnett, Tax Collector/Treasurer; Michael Chiasson, IT Director

Ms. Manugian called the meeting to order at 7:00pm and reviewed the agenda.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Ms. Pine said that Loaves and Fishes announced last week that they were closing temporarily. She said that Kathy Shelp and the COA coordinated within minutes with a few others in Town to set up an interim food pickup arrangement.

Ms. Manugian said she wanted to thank all employees for everything they were doing during these trying times. She said that the Board couldn't appreciate the staff more and wanted to make sure they were aware of that.

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

1. Mr. Haddad provided the following updates of the Town Departments (from Town Manager's Report):

- *The DPW was back to full work with new safety protocols in place as approved by the Chair. In addition, all bag sales have ceased at the Transfer Station. Bags are still required for the disposal of trash and they can be purchased at Shaw's, Country Farms Convenience and Shop and Save in Ayer. It is approaching the time of year for residents to purchase stickers for access to the Transfer Station. Ordinarily, stickers are sold at the Transfer Station and the Town Clerk's Office. We are working on a plan to implement online sales only. I will report back to the Board once this is put into place.*
- *The Finance Team met last week to review the Town's finances and tax collections over the last several days. We have posted over \$400,000 in tax collections last week. Dawn Dunbar has been designated to get the mail from the post office once a week. After a 24-hour quarantine period, mail will be sorted and given to the various departments. In addition, payroll was completed last week and all employees received their pay by direct deposit. The Assessors will schedule a meeting later this week or next to start reviewing abatement applications. The Town Accountant is in the process of preparing an expense warrant for issuance on April 9th. Open enrollment activities continue with our HR Director. The Finance Offices have been very busy this past week.*
- *The Public Safety Officials also met. They continue to provide excellent services to our residents. We are very fortunate that we are not experiencing any sick employees and remain at full strength. They continue to review and update their COVID-19 protocols to ensure employee safety.*
- *As voted by the Board, I have notified Boards and Committees that they can start meeting again. We are working with IT, Cable and the Town Clerk to schedule meetings on Zoom. I have asked Town Counsel how to address public hearings. I will amend rules on meetings once received.*
- *With regard to Building activity, last Monday the Board had adopted the Governor's Regulations with regard to building construction in Groton. However, the Governor changed those protocols on Tuesday to further restrict construction and issued new regulations on Thursday. I have attached those regulations to this report for your review. We have posted these regulations on line and alerted the public and various construction jobs that they have been updated. The original protocols put into place by me have not changed and we will continue to follow them. On a related note, Indian Hill Music has halted all construction activities until this crisis is over. I have also asked the Board of Health to review these new regulations and weigh in on them and provide any necessary guidance. He said that the Board of Health voted unanimously to enforce the Governor's regulations so that the Town could enforce them. He said that Indian Hill had halted their construction activities and were in the process of securing their site. He said that the Groton School cafeteria project might be an issue. He said that they had petitioned the state to get permission to be an essential construction site. He said that they provided their COVID-19 safety plan also and were waiting to hear back from the state.*

Mr. Degen asked if the Board of Health discussed how to move forward with all construction. Mr. Haddad said that the BOH had voted to follow the Governor's order which the Town could now enforce as projects locally were not considered essential construction operation. Mr. Haddad said that he and Mr. Degen discussed only allowing one trade on a construction site at once and would work to come up with some potential guidelines on that.

- *With regard to the water damage at the Center in West Groton, Tom Delaney, Quintin Shea and I met with our insurance adjuster to develop a plan to repair the building. We came away in agreement that the damage was caused by the negligence of the Plumber on the original construction job. Our insurance company has approved a plan to replace all damaged areas and will subrogate against the Plumbers insurance company. We hope repair work will begin ASAP.*

Ephraim and Michelle Hirschfield via chat asked if because other towns are allowing residential construction with inspections done electronically why Groton was different than other towns? Mr. Haddad said that this situation the Hirschfield's were referring to was an interior electrical inspection adding he was not allowing the electrical inspector into occupied spaces at this point adding it could not be inspected electronically.

2. Mr. Haddad said that the Governor had extended the stay at home order through May 4th adding the Town's stay at home order expired tomorrow at noon. He asked the Board to consider extending their stay at home order through May 4th. He said that he had asked Tom Delaney to have the Town Hall cleaned more frequently adding that he was finding more employees needed to get into the office for files, etc.

*Ms. Pine moved to extend the stay at home order in Groton issued by the Governor until May 4, 2020. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye; Manugian-aye*

3. Mr. Haddad said that they had an issue with too many people using Sargisson Beach over the weekend. He said that cars were parked along Whiley Road due to the parking area being closed. Mr. Haddad said that the Police Department asked everyone to leave the beach yesterday for lack of social distancing. Mr. Haddad said that he was going to ask the Board to allow for non-criminal disposition fines to be issued using a three-strike system. He said that the BOH voted to close the beach earlier that night.

Ms. Manugian left the meeting at 7:25pm.

Ms. Pine said that she originally thought people were using the beach to fish. Mr. Haddad said that people were congregating there, not just fishing. Mr. Giger said that there was a concrete fishing pier on the northern side of the area. He said that they congregated there.

Ms. Manugian rejoined the meeting at 7:26pm.

Mr. Degen asked if Mr. Giger wanted the fishing pier closed also. Mr. Haddad said that they were going to close off the beach and fishing, adding that was what was discussed with the BOH.

*Ms. Pine moved to support the closure of the beach by the BOH and authorize the Police Department under Section 21D to issue fines. Mr. Giger said he could only vote for this if people walking the trails and boat ramps were exempted. Mr. Haddad said that that was the case. Mr. Giger seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye; Manugian-aye*

4. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to vote to extend allowance for him and Mr. Giger to continue signing the warrant through May 11th.

*Mr. Degen moved to authorize Mr. Giger and Mr. Haddad to sign warrants on behalf of the Board through May 11th. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-abstain; Manugian-aye*

5. Mr. Haddad said that he had suggested last week the delay of some warrant articles. He reviewed the articles he had suggested they keep. He said that a couple of members wanted the capital items list dialed back further. He said he would delay the police cruiser until the fall but thought they needed to keep IT infrastructure, the dump truck debt, the mower lease and tractor debt. He said that he wanted to keep the ambulance replacement also adding it was coming from EMS receipts. He said that the ambulance really needed to be replaced adding it was costing them

more to fix it. Ms. Manugian asked if IT equipment would still be spent judiciously because of the spending freeze. Mr. Haddad said that it would.

Mr. Haddad said that he spoke to 3 members of the CPA. He said that 2 members agreed with moving forward with the Prescott School sprinkler system adding one member wanted to wait on all articles. Mr. Haddad said that he sent the Board an email over the weekend asking them to consider allowing the Housing Coordinator position using CPA funds to also be added to the warrant. He said that if they did not move forward with it, they would not be able to move forward with that position and wanted to fund that.

Mr. Haddad said that they would post the warrant on May 1st so that the meeting could be held on May 18th. Mr. Kauppi said that the Moderator could delay the meeting for unlimited 30-day extensions until the emergency was lifted. Mr. Haddad said that he was concerned about not having a Town Meeting because of the need for an approved budget on July 1. Mr. Haddad said that the Select Board could also extend the election by no later than June 30th. Mr. Degen asked that if the election had to be moved off, what would happen to the terms due to expire. Mr. Bouchard said that the elected members would serve until a successor could be named by election.

Mr. Kauppi said that if they could hold a meeting, he wondered if people would be comfortable attending. Mr. Degen said that social distancing would be an issue. Mr. Degen said he would not be comfortable meeting inside the Performing Arts Center. Mr. Kauppi said that they would not have a town meeting if they were in a state of emergency and wanted to make sure the public was aware of that.

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to vote to adopt his recommendations for the Spring Town Meeting so that they could move forward with final touches on the warrant. He said that he would like to still hold the public hearing next week adding they had the capabilities to do so via Zoom. He said it was important to follow their usual practice as much as possible.

*Ms. Pine moved to support the recommendations of the Town Manager on which articles to include on the warrant and scheduled public hearing on Monday, April 13th at 7:15pm as advertised. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye; Manugian-aye*

6. Mr. Haddad said that he left time on the Agenda for the Board to consider implementing a hiring freeze effective immediately.

*Mr. Giger made a motion to implement a hiring freeze effective immediately until lifted. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye; Manugian-aye*

7. Mr. Haddad said it was time for the Board to approve the annual fuel storage licenses. Mr. Haddad read the attached list into the record.

*Ms. Manugian made a motion to approve the annual fuel storage licenses as read. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye; Manugian-aye*

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to approve a fuel storage license for AL Prime.

*Ms. Manugian made a motion to approve a fuel storage license for AL Prime. Ms. Pine seconded. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-nay; Giger-aye; Manugian-aye*

8. Mr. Haddad said that he met with the Finance Team that morning to discuss the budget. He said that they looked at what needed to be done to balance the budget. He said that they received the school assessment at what they anticipated adding they had no choice but to bring that forward unless the schools decided to lower that amount. He said that he had a discussion with Malena Gilbert that morning also and suggested that they all meet in a joint session next Wednesday, April 15th (Select Board, Finance Committee and School Committee).

Ms. Gilbert said that the School Committee had conducted a few special meetings recently because of things changing on a weekly basis. She said that they had made changes already because revenues might not be as projected at this time. She said that they would have a raw preliminary discussion on what would not be spent and what would flow to E&D at the end of the year adding they would have a realistic idea of what they would have to offset the FY21 assessment. She said that they were trying to look at creative solutions so as to not affect the education of the children. She added that 13 districts were trying to negotiate with Dee Bus relative to the contract. Mr. Degen asked if the bus drivers had been furloughed or were being paid. Ms. Gilbert said that it was her understanding that they had been furloughed adding they had requested further information which they had not received yet.

Mr. Haddad said that they talked about new growth and how they were carrying \$15M. He said that right now they were in a construction freeze and was afraid they weren't going to make \$15M in new growth. He said that there was no way they would make that number by June 30th adding they dialed that back to \$10M or a decrease in \$86,900. He said that people were not buying new cars already adding this could be an issue moving forward. He said that they cut the estimate back by \$100K. He said that the meals tax and room occupancy tax would have been blown away had COVID-19 not happened. He said that based on the crisis, they reduced that back by \$150K. He said that they cut back fees by \$40K and the Country Club by \$50K because they weren't doing the roof. He said that the Country Club budget might have to be reduced further in the fall. He said that that left them with a deficit of \$426K. He said that they reduced the budget by \$43K (lifeguards and weed treatment). He said that he was suggesting paying off the snow and ice deficit from free cash. He suggested taking \$283,900 from free cash or stabilization funds to balance the budget.

Mr. Robertson said that the stabilization fund was their rainy-day fund and where the money should come from adding that free cash was anticipated to be lower than normal already. Mr. Giger said he was concerned about not funding the \$15K for Baddacook weed treatment and about letting it go a year. Mr. Haddad said that the Water Commission had pulled back their \$10K contribution already adding they needed that money to help fund it. Mr. Degen said that he wanted the Town Manager to find \$25K to fund this. He said that the progress at Baddacook had been huge and wanted to see them fund that. Mr. Degen said he was uncomfortable tapping into free cash for a shortfall adding stabilization was there for a reason. Mr. Haddad said that he agreed with him adding he wanted to make sure that tapping into stabilization didn't hurt their bond rating with Wall Street. He said that they would have a better understanding in the fall.

9. Mr. Haddad said that Mr. Giger had provided a proposal for the Town Manager's review policy adding Ms. Pine sent some comments earlier that day. Ms. Manugian said that Ms. Pine's proposal only brought back a meeting forum where the Board would discuss inclusion of comments. Mr. Giger said he wasn't comfortable with adding in comments because the comments caused the greatest amount of problems in the past. Mr. Giger said that if they wanted to continue having the addition of comments, they should go back to what they used. Mr. Degen said he liked Ms. Pines comments fundamentally but practically the comments would create problems. He said he would support Mr. Giger's version as is. Ms. Manugian said that she saw a difference between what they had done with comments before and what Ms. Pine was suggested. She said that a straight numerical process would not capture all strengths and weaknesses. She thought it was worth a try and thought they had the means to change the process should it not work. She said that the Town Manager should have an opportunity to be involved or able to respond. Mr. Reilly said that having done many evaluations, it would be difficult to get 5 people to agree on comments. He said that usually either an exceeding or a needs improvement should warrant a comment by an individual evaluator but was not as easy with 5 people. Ms. Manugian said she felt as though some level of comments needed to be included. Ms. Pine said that this was an attempt to put something down and provide them with an opportunity to meet in public to discuss this adding the OML didn't allow them to talk outside of a meeting. She said she didn't see them coming together discussing comments as an issue adding they were working well together as a Board and with the Town Manager. Mr. Giger said that a numerical system would provide clearer guidance to the employee. Mr. Giger added that waiting 12 months to provide feedback on an issue was not fair to the employee and should not be brought up in a review. Ms. Manugian said that she thought they should try this. Mr. Giger said if that was the case, they should stay with what they were using. Mr. Degen said that he would love to find a way to incorporate what

Ms. Pine provided but thought it created a lot of problems in the past. Mr. Degen said that if Ms. Pine and Ms. Manugian could come back with something for next week's meeting that he could consider, he would. Ms. Pine said that this was a different Board and thought that trying this could work. Ms. Manugian asked if it would be okay if they brought something back next week. The Board was agreeable to that.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Hartnett talked about specific tax reliefs available to the Town because of the COVID-19 pandemic adding they needed to be adopted by the Select Board. He said that they should extend the tax bill due dates to June 1, 2020, waive interest and fees on all tax bills due after March 9, 2020 if paid by June 30th, and extend filing deadline for exemptions to June 1, 2020. Ms. Manugian asked if they could schedule that for their next meeting. Mr. Haddad said that he would bring something back to their next meeting.

#### **MINUTES**

The Board asked to hold off on minutes approval for another week.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:53pm.

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

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

Date Approved: 4/13/2020