

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
VIRTUAL MEETING  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2020  
APPROVED**

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

**Also Virtually Present:** Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant; Melisa Doig, HR Director; Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant; Michael Hartnett, Tax Collector/Treasurer; Michael Chiasson, IT Director; Bud Robertson; Art Prest

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Chiasson, the Town's IT Director, said that on October 29<sup>th</sup>, emails for Groton employees would be switching to grotonma.gov from townofgroton.org. He said that a press release would be going out and notification would be placed on the website.

Mr. Haddad said that the Suffrage Walk and Talk weekend would take place on November 7<sup>th</sup> and November 8<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Pine thanked Mr. Bouchard for the very informative presentation he gave on Zoom about voting. She said that early voting had begun and that ballots had been mailed out to all those that had requested one.

Ms. Pine said that the Affordable Housing Trust had a vacancy and wanted to put the word out about that. She thanked Stuart Schulman for all his time on the Committee as a founding member.

Mr. Degen referenced the Lowell Sun's editorial about Town Meeting's vote on the sundown town article. He said that this article wasn't done to make white people happy but done instead to make the playing ground level no matter what the color of your skin was. He said he was very upset with the editors for interjecting politics into their editorial.

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

1. Mr. Haddad said that they had received several emails from residents relative to Halloween and trick or treating. He said he was still comfortable with the Board's decision to prohibit trick or treating but didn't know if the Board wanted to discuss this. Ms. Pine said that their vote concerned public trick or treating with no controls however she didn't think their vote precluded a private organization from setting up a different way to celebrate the holiday with the parents being responsible for safely doing so. Ms. Manugian said that they were standing firm that trick or treating was cancelled.
2. Mr. Haddad said that Groton had continued to climb with the number of positive COVID tests adding that any change was significant. Mr. Haddad said he wouldn't be surprised if they climbed to yellow over the next week and urged people to continue being vigilant.
3. Mr. Haddad said that they opened the response to the RFP for the Lease of the Prescott School. He said that they received one proposal from the Friends of Prescott. Mr. Haddad said that he worked with Josh Degen and Bud Robertson to review the proposal adding that the Friends proposal met all the requirements of the RFP and would call it an advantageous proposal that could be accepted by the Select Board if they so choose. Mr. Haddad said that he, Mr. Robertson and Mr. Degen met with the Friends of Prescott to negotiate a new lease based on their proposal. He said that he was recommending that the Board take the following action:
  - A. Vote to Accept the Proposal from the Friends of Prescott to Lease the Prescott School for an additional three (3) years commencing on September 1, 2021.

- B. Vote to amend the current lease (through August 31, 2021) to allow the Friends to occupy the second floor once the Sprinkler System was installed and approved and the Fire Chief and Building Commissioner sign off on its use. All other Terms would remain in full force and effect.
- C. Vote to enter into a new three (3) year lease with the Friends of Prescott, effective September 1, 2021 through August 31, 2024 with the following new Terms:
  - Three (3) year lease with the potential to renew the lease (under the same or renegotiated terms) for an additional three (3) year period.
  - Friends of Prescott would be responsible for landscaping and snow removal.
  - Rent would be \$20,000 per year, plus 5% of the gross annual revenue of the tenant (less donations).
  - All other Terms would remain in full force and effect.

Mr. Robertson said that the important thing to the Town was that the Town would not be subsidizing operating expenses with this new lease.

Mr. Giger said that he looked at this in 2 parts; amend the current lease to allow for use of the second floor and then discuss a new 3 years lease. He said that there were things to talk about in years 4, 5, and 6 (a new lease). He said there was no reason to ram through three more years this quickly. Mr. Giger said that more people needed to be involved in what they wanted to see happen with that building for the next 3 years. Mr. Prest said that this needed to go before the Finance Committee adding this was the first time he had heard about it. Mr. Robertson said that a sub committee had been set up to review the last lease and this one. He said that bringing everyone into a lease negotiation would mean that nothing would get decided. Ms. Manugian said that the process Mr. Robertson laid out was the correct process. Mr. Giger said he wasn't aware that the committee selected to oversee the lease was the same group to negotiate future lease(s). Mr. Degen said that the sub committee had been meeting with the Friends quarterly. He said that per a voice vote, the Select Board voted to issue an RFP. Ms. Manugian said that this project had long been two-fold. She said she was concerned, adding one of the Board's goals was to look at the future of Prescott School. She said that to issue a new three-year lease was something she could not support at this point.

Mr. Reilly said he too looked at this in 2 ways; long term viability of the building and a lease. He said he supported use of the second floor but was concerned about tax dollars being spent on the building. He said that the lease wasn't appealing to him. Mr. Degen said that there were people that wanted to see the use of the building succeed. Mr. Robertson said that no one would rent the building knowing the Friends didn't have a long-term lease. He said that he didn't consider a three year lease a long-term lease. He said that after the next 3-year lease, they should look at and decide what the long-term plan for the building was. Ms. Manugian said she was hesitant with no long-term goal in place. Mr. Robertson said that there was a real goal out there this time.

Mr. Giger said that the Town didn't vote to turn this building into a community center. Mr. Giger said that if the Friends wanted to perpetuate longevity, they should develop a trust fund to operate and maintain that building. He said he saw this falling on the back of the taxpayers. Ms. Pine agreed that the vote wasn't to turn this building into a community center adding Mr. Giger was right about that. Ms. Pine said that they were following a plan that a committee spent time to develop which the Select Board voted to accept. Ms. Pine said that the Friends had been able to somewhat continue through COVID and make a small profit, albeit, much smaller than what they planned. Ms. Pine said that they should vote in favor of what the oversight committee had recommended and saw no reason to question this RFP. Ms. Manugian said that if the building didn't need renovations, they wouldn't be having this discussion adding they had a multi-million-dollar problem facing them.

Mary Jennings said that the Board voted to issue an RFP and that the Friends responded to an RFP in good faith. She said that years 4, 5 and 6 was necessary for year three of their current contract to be successful. She said that this was needed for future and current tenants. Ms. Jennings said that the Friends saw themselves as subsidizing the Town with all the renovations, etc. they have done and took exception to the comment that the Town was subsidizing the Friends. She said that there was nothing in the RFP about looming renovations. She said that the restriping of the

parking lot was done for mutual benefit adding that the Friends would be plowing the parking lot reminding the Board that it was a town parking lot. She said that they responded in good faith and wanted a vote from the Board.

*Mr. Degen moved that they open the current lease to allow for the use of the second floor. Ms. Pine seconded. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Reilly-aye; Manugian-aye; Giger-aye*

Ms. Manugian asked when they needed to decide upon the new three-year lease. Mr. Haddad said that they would have 30 days from when proposals were due which was September 30. Mr. Degen said that the need for brick and mortar office space was changing due to COVID adding that if they wanted to give the Friends a chance, they should approve a new three-year lease.

*Mr. Degen moved to award the RFP to the Friends of Prescott and to enter into a lease consistent with what had been presented to them for a term of three years. Ms. Pine seconded the motion.*

Ms. Manugian said that she would not support this adding a one-year lease was the right move right now. Ms. Pine said that it put them in a bad position to issue an RFP and not vote in favor of it. Ms. Pine said that this could be a revenue generator for the Town. She said that the Prescott Oversight Committee had done projections and shown that this could be a revenue maker for the Town.

Mr. Degen withdrew his motion.

He said that if this failed tonight, he was concerned about legal issues. Mr. Degen tendered his seat on the Committee and asked Mr. Reilly to step in and renegotiate the lease. Mr. Reilly said that his assigned goal was the long-term plans for the building adding no one wanted to see an empty building. He said he would take Mr. Degen's place on the Committee if he had to but thought Mr. Degen had been doing a good job. He said that the Friends had also done a great job. Mr. Giger pointed out that he was supportive of a new three-year lease but did not support the current proposed leasing document the way it was.

Mr. Haddad said he didn't think they would come back with anything more than what they presented the Board with adding the Friends had opened their books completely. He said he understood the frustration adding that Mr. Robertson and Mr. Degen pushed hard on the rent plus gross revenue terms within the proposed lease. Ms. Pine said that right now the building did not need substantial renovation but would need to be looked at in the future. Mr. Giger said that line stripping had a cost. Mr. Haddad said it would be no more than \$5k and would be included in the current lease. Ms. Manugian said she agreed that not all the information was out there. Mr. Robertson suggested that Mr. Giger go through the proposed lease, ask questions and discuss it over the next 4 days. Mr. Giger said he wanted the Board to look at the document, ask questions and approve or reject it. He said he didn't want to be bullied and backed into a corner. Mr. Degen said that they shared everything with the Board adding he thought Mr. Haddad was being picked on for using the word profit and not revenue. Mr. Giger said he was not going to put up with this adding he would vote no on this tonight if they called for a vote further adding he didn't have any more energy to put into this.

*Mr. Degen moved to award the RFP for a three-year lease to the Friends of Prescott based on what was brought forward that evening. Ms. Pine seconded the motion.*

*Ms. Manugian moved to reduce the term to one year. There was no second.*

Ms. Pine said that there had been a lot of emotion expressed. She said she wasn't sure what Ms. Manugian didn't understand about what was presented. Ms. Manugian said that in going through their goal for Prescott they decided on a different route adding this would lock them in for 3 years. Mr. Reilly said he had enough information to make a decision that night.

*Roll Call: Manugian-nay; Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Reilly-aye; Giger-nay. The motion carried 3-2 in favor.*

Mr. Degen left the meeting around 8:25pm.

4. Mr. Haddad said that their first quarter was far better than they anticipated adding they met their first quarter projections. He said that payment of motor vehicle excise taxes were delayed until June 30<sup>th</sup> by the State and adopted by the Board adding those taxes were recoded after July 1. He said that Lawrence Academy gave the Town their PILOT payment after July 1 which affected their free cash last year but helped them this year. He said that the golf course had exceeded their expectations even only opening this season for golf. He added that GELD didn't pay their intergovernmental payment until after July 1 which would also help them this year. He thanked the tax payers for continuing to pay their taxes even during COVID understanding that this could have been a financial issue for some. Mr. Haddad said that they were also well on their way on meeting their meals tax estimates as long as they didn't have another shut down.
5. Mr. Haddad said that they would be meeting in joint session next Monday with the Finance Committee for the purpose of developing FY 2022 Budget Guidance for the Town Manager. He said that Fiscal Year 2022 looked to be a very difficult budget year. He said he had begun working with the Finance Team to develop projections and had taken into consideration the following (from the Town Manager's Report):
  - A. *We estimate approximately \$229,000 in unexpended tax capacity.*
  - B. *We are reducing anticipated State Aid in FY 2022 by \$50,000.*
  - C. *We are estimating approximately \$15 million in New Growth.*
  - D. *We are increasing Estimated Receipts by approximately \$280,000.*
  - E. *We have been told that there will be a 14.41% increase in our Pension budget, or a \$285,000 increase.*
  - F. *We are estimating a 10% increase in Health Insurance Costs.*
  - G. *We are anticipating 8 additional students at Nashoba Tech next year and are estimating an increase in that Assessment of \$140,000.*
  - H. *With regard to Groton Dunstable Regional School District, we have increased the starting Operating Assessment by \$680,000 to make up for the reduction in FY 21 due to the use of School District E&D to offset the Operating Assessment. We then increased this new base number by 4% to account for a modest increase in FY 2022. In addition, based on a conversation with School Superintendent Laura Chesson, I have added an additional \$300,000 to that estimate in the event that we are still dealing with COVID-19 related remote learning next year.*
  - I. *We have level funded Municipal Expenses and level funded wages across the Board.*

Mr. Haddad said that taking all of this into consideration, they were estimating a \$1.2 million deficit in FY 2022.

Ms. Pine asked how the Florence Roche Building would affect this. Mr. Haddad said that it would not adding it would be a debt exclusion and no have impact until after construction was completed.

Mr. Degen returned to the meeting around 8:35pm.

6. Mr. Haddad reviewed the Select Board's goals and updates to them.
7. Mr. Haddad reviewed the Board's schedule for the next few weeks.

### **ON-GOING ISSUES**

3. Mr. Haddad said that MS4 stormwater bills would be going out on Wednesday.

Mr. Degen said he would be asking to meet with the Board shortly to provide an update on mediation with Town Counsel.

### **MINUTES**

*Mr. Degen made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 3, 2020 and October 5, 2020. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Manugian-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye*

Ms. Manugian adjourned the meeting at 8:44pm.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Rebecca H. Pine, Clerk

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

Date Approved: 10/26/2020