

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
VIRTUAL MEETING
MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 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; Jonathan Greeno, Principal Assessor; Finance Committee Members - Bud Robertson; Art Prest; Colby Doody; Scott Whitefield; Mary Linskey; David Manugian; Gary Green; Library Trustees - Kristin von Campe; Nancy Wilder; Mark Gerath

Ms. Manugian called the meeting to order at 7:00pm and reviewed the agenda. She said that the Select Board and Finance Committee had just concluded an Executive Session a few minutes prior.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Pine said that the Affordable Housing Trust was working hard on exploring the possibility of building affordable housing at the base of Surrenden Farm. She invited the Board and members of the public to attend a site walk on Saturday morning at 10am. She also asked people to watch their last Trust meeting for more information on housing.

Ms. Pine said that there had been a lot of questions and confusion on the stormwater bills that went out last week. She said that this unfunded mandate had fallen on them locally. She said that the state was requiring that they sweep streets and clean catch basins more often and gather more data than in the past having to do with pollution in the ground. She said that this totaled about \$200k per year for their Town. She said that they had been having these discussions for over a year and had been brought to town meetings for votes. She said that this was a once a year fee and every parcel in town with pavement or building was paying this fee including non-profits, schools, the Town, residential, and commercial spaces. She said that every town in the Commonwealth would be having to find ways to fund this.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that last December, because of financial issues at the time, he removed from his recommended budget the \$8K line item for the Interface Mental Health Referral Service. He said that GSRSD and Dunstable also participated in this. Mr. Haddad said that he wasn't sure why this had just come up now. Mr. Haddad said that a resident, Beverly Harris sent Ms. Pine an email to which Ms. Pine responded with her opinion, that he inadvertently forwarded to the entire Board thus violating the Open Meeting Law. Mr. Haddad read the email into the record and said he had already filed a disclosure with the Town Clerk and would notify the Attorney General.

Mr. Haddad said he had several conversations with members of the Board today individually. He said that Dunstable had their \$2K share in the budget still and were willing to pay for the service this year. Mr. Haddad said that they had the option to utilize a reserve fund transfer for their portion. Mr. Haddad said that Mr. Giger asked if they could use Cares Act funding for this. Ms. Dufresne said that the Department of Finance at the State level was reluctant to comment on whether Cares Act funding could be used.

Mr. Robertson said he thought this was required in today's environment. Mr. Reilly asked if it would cost the Town \$12K if Dunstable and GDRSD didn't want to utilize the service any longer. He said he thought it was a worthwhile program. Ms. Pine said that they should have it, especially this year. Mr. Manugian asked if this needed to be procured. Mr. Haddad said it was under the threshold for obtaining 3 quotes. Mr. Prest said that given the crazy world, he thought they needed to support this.

Mr. Haddad asked for a motion that if the Department of Mental Health allowed for Cares Act spending on this, or if not, he would like to go to the FC for a reserve fund transfer.

Mr. Giger said that they should get the okay from the Finance Committee first for a reserve fund transfer and then look for guidance from the state on whether Cares Act funding could be used but thought that this should be funded.

Mr. Giger made his statement a motion. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Degen-aye; Reilly-aye; Giger-aye

Mr. Haddad asked the Finance Committee to approve a reserve fund transfer for \$8K.

Mr. Prest made the motion. Mr. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pres-aye; Doody-aye; Robertson-aye; Green-aye; Whitefield-aye; Linskey-aye

BUDGET GUIDANCE

Mr. Haddad said that he had given the Board and Finance Committee some information relative to projected finances. Mr. Haddad reviewed the following from his 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 FY 2021 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. Mr. Haddad said that because of the uncertainties he was recommending that the guidance be to level fund the municipal budget. He said that would mean he would have to come up with money to cover health insurance and pension costs. He said that this would be a reduction in the municipal budget. He said that he would like to add working with the School Committee, Superintendent and Nashoba Tech to work on assessments as discussed above. Mr. Robertson said that the Finance Committee agreed adding that the budget had to be balanced. Mr. Robertson said that the use of free cash could be considered for onetime costs. Mr. Manugian said he would like to add for discussion that the level funded budget prioritize what extra money in the fall might be spent on at this time too.

Mr. Haddad said that the districts projection called for a \$1.3M increase or 5.8%. Mr. Haddad said that he was carrying a 4% increase which meant with this projection, they were now looking at a \$1.6M deficit. Ms. Pine asked how they were going to solve this. Mr. Haddad said that as a start they would have to level fund the municipal budget and the school district would have to come in with less than \$1.6M increase. Ms. Pine asked about an override. Mr. Haddad said that this would not be the time ask for an override. Ms. Pine asked if they would then have to cut people. Mr. Haddad said that they would have to look at reducing services.

Ms. Manugian said she was hearing no override, no increase in municipal budget, acknowledgement that some free cash be used for one-time expenses, that the Town Manager work with the schools and that all capital items be accounted for as early as possible.

Mr. Giger said he would like to ask for a detailed record of what they would be pulling out of the proposed budget and made available to them so they don't forget taking things out. Mr. Degen said he wanted to maintain the hiring freeze adding there would be a position within the Police Department and Highway Department they should not fill but save the money to turn it over to the general fund and cut them next year. Mr. Haddad said he would want to talk to the department heads first adding there were also frozen positions in the Library he would like them to consider not filling too. Ms. Gilbert said that they had

some flexibility with what they anticipated their E&D to come in at in January, that the use of free cash could be used for COVID expenses. Mr. Haddad said that they were on the same page on the municipal side as it related to COVID also.

Ms. Pine made a motion that the budget guidance to the Town Manager include no override, no increase in the municipal budget, acknowledgement that some free cash be used for one-time expenses, and that the Town Manager work with the schools on their assessments. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Degen-aye; Reilly-aye; Giger-aye

Mr. Manugian moved they provide the guidance as approved by the Select Board. Ms. Linskey seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pres-aye; Doody-aye; Robertson-aye; Green-aye; Whitefield-aye; Linskey-aye

Mr. Robertson adjourned the Finance Committee at 7:54pm.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT – CONT.

2. Mr. Haddad said he didn't have specific updates but with early voting ending on Friday, he would have a cleaning company come in on Saturday to clean the Town Hall.
3. Mr. Haddad said that they were continually monitoring the Department of Public Health Weekly Reports. He said that Groton remained a "green" community, however, they were trending lower over the last two weeks. He said he would continue to monitor these reports and provide the Board with an update at next week's meeting. He said that he would use the information to determine if any recommended changes in protocols were necessary. Ms. Gilbert said that they had a total of 5 cases so far within the schools. She said that protocols in place had been working well adding that no close contacts had tested positive. She said they needed everyone to understand how important it was to stay vigilant and follow the protocols.
4. Mr. Haddad said that the Diversity Task Force was recommending a slight change to their charge. Mr. Haddad reviewed the change as presented in his Town Manager's Report.

Ms. Pine made a motion to accept the changes as presented. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye

5. Mr. Haddad said that at the 2019 Spring Town Meeting, he presented an Article to the Town Meeting requesting to increase the number of liquor licenses available in the Town of Groton. The specific article was as follows:

ARTICLE 22: Petition the General Court for Additional Liquor Licenses

To see if the Town will vote to authorize the Select Board to petition the General Court for special legislation increasing the number of liquor licenses available in the Town of Groton as follows:

*Three (3) additional licenses for the sale of on premises all alcoholic beverages
Two (2) additional licenses for the sale of off premises all alcoholic beverages*

And to authorize the General Court to make clerical and editorial changes of form only to the bill, unless the Select Board approves amendments to the bill before enactment by the General Court, and the Select Board shall be authorized to approve amendments which shall be within the scope of the general public objectives of the petition, or to take any other action relative thereto.

TOWN MANAGER

*Select Board: Recommended Unanimously
Finance Committee: No Position*

Summary: This article will request that the General Court increase the number of liquor licenses allowed under State Law in the Town of Groton. The Select Board's office has received several inquiries for additional licenses and the purpose of this article is to petition the Legislature for this increase in an effort to create more business opportunities in the Town of Groton.

Mr. Haddad said that when the bill went to the Legislature, they asked why the Town needed the licenses. He said that he told them that the Town was trying to expand businesses in West Groton (Clover Farms Store) and Four Corners (Shaw's Plaza) adding they couldn't consider the request without specific areas specified. He said that based on this, the only way the Legislature would approve the bill was to clearly identify where the licenses would be located. Mr. Haddad said that the home rule petition was restrictive, and that the Joint Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure made a number of substantive changes to the text of the bill adding that the Select Board would need to vote to approve the changes. He said that the Committee would need a letter from the Town Clerk stating that the Select Board voted to approve the changes contained in H4809 "An Act authorizing the town of Groton to grant additional alcoholic beverages licenses". Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board vote to approve the new language in the Bill.

Ms. Manugian said that this was a significant change but guessed it was better than nothing. Mr. Giger said he could not support additional package stores in the Four Corners area. Mr. Haddad said he didn't think the Legislature would care if they didn't ask for any in the Four Corners area. Mr. Degen said he was a believer in free enterprise and didn't want to restrict anyone from obtaining another license in Four Corners. Ms. Pine said she thought they should approve it as is and see if they could requesting moving one of those to the center of Town after it was approved.

Ms. Pine moved that they approve rewording of H4809 "An Act authorizing the town of Groton to grant additional alcoholic beverages licenses". Mr. Degen seconded the motion.

He asked if they could expand this to include 2 more for the center of Town. Mr. Haddad said it had taken a year and a half to get this far and didn't want to add further delays.

Roll Call: Giger-nay; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Pine-aye

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Degen said that he had a conversation with Mr. Haddad after he abruptly resigned from the Prescott Oversight Committee at their last meeting. He said he would be willing to continue to serve adding he had familiarity with this. There was no objection to Mr. Degen continuing to serve.

Ms. Pine said that she had received letters about the right to protest. She said that she wanted to state her confidence in the Groton Police Department in their handling of peaceful protests in the past and in the future. She read a statement into the record.

ON-GOING ISSUES

A: Mr. Haddad said that they were at the punch list stage right now and would hope to have the sprinkler system project finalized in the next week or so.

D: Mr. Haddad said that he would try to get an update from the Board of Health on polystyrene containers.

E: Mr. Haddad thanked Quintin Shea and Takashi Tada for their work on the Green Communities application implementation work. He said that they would be ready to apply for the next grant round next March.

F: Mr. Degen asked if the vote could be delayed on the Florence Roche project without losing MSBA funding. Ms. Manugian said that the OPM had asked if COVID related discussions had been had within the MSBA and the answer had been no. Ms. Gilbert said that the MSBA had budgeted for this project and regardless for the economic constraints there were others in line for money. She said that they needed to keep the long-term goal in mind adding requesting a delay would jeopardize the funding. Mr. Degen said that the success of the project was hinged on taxpayers looking at their own financial impacts. Ms. Gilbert said that they might not be considered for another project if they do not move forward at this time.

G: Mr. Haddad said that he would have a final accounting report for the DPW project at their November 9th meeting.

MINUTES

Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 19, 2020. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Manugian-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye

Ms. Manugian adjourned the meeting at 8:24pm.

Approved: _____
Rebecca H. Pine, Clerk

_____ respectfully *submitted*:
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 11/2/2020