

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
VIRTUAL MEETING  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 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; Affordable Housing Trust Members; Diversity Task Force Members; Fran Stanley, Housing Coordinator; Bob Garside, Building Inspector

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Haddad said that he issued a press release earlier that day about the temporary closure of Town Hall due to COVID. He read the press release into the record.

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

1. Mr. Haddad said that there were no other changes to COVID protocols other than the closure of Town Hall for this week. He said that the DPH report released last week stated that Groton had 9 cases reported, that Groton was a gray community but that they were trending higher.
2. Mr. Haddad said that Mr. Garside had successfully become a certified Building Commissioner. He asked the Board to consider ratifying his appointment of Mr. Garside as Building Commissioner. He said he was very excited to make this appointment adding that the State unanimously voted last Thursday to certify Mr. Garside as a Building Commissioner.

*Mr. Giger moved to ratify the appointment of Bob Garside as the Building Commissioner effective November 12, 2020. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye*

3. Mr. Haddad said that they had received a request from the Groton Publick House for a reduction in the fee from \$3,000 to \$500 of their alcohol license for the function hall as they had been operating at a loss due to COVID. Mr. Haddad said that the Board may hear from the Barn at Gibbet Hill also as they too were unable to hold functions. Mr. Haddad said that other communities were asking if Groton was waiving or reducing fees due to COVID. Mr. Haddad said he was moving forward with regular fees but thought that the request before them was a reasonable one. Ms. Pine said she was inclined to agree with this. Mr. Giger suggested that they look at their policy to make sure they were doing this correctly before taking any action on this. Mr. Degen suggested prorating the fee for months they were not able to operate functions. Mr. Haddad said he would review the policy and bring this back.

**TAX CLASSIFICATION HEARING**

Mr. Haddad read the public hearing notice into the record.

*Ms. Pine moved to open the public hearing. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye*

Mr. Haddad said that the Board of Assessors was not ready adding that there was a back log at the State level and they hadn't received their review. He asked the Board to continue the hearing until Monday November 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:15pm.

*Mr. Degen moved to continue the public hearing on the tax classification until Monday, November 23, 2020 at 7:15pm. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye*

## **TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT – CONT.**

4. Mr. Haddad reviewed the Board's schedule for the next few weeks.
5. Mr. Haddad said that he had provided the Board with Zoom invites to attend the budget hearings beginning on Monday, November 30<sup>th</sup> at 8am.

Ms. Manugian asked about the financial policy review. Mr. Haddad said that the Finance Committee had reviewed it separately this year and would be bringing the Finance Committee's suggested edits to the Board for their review.

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST**

Ms. Pine called the Affordable Housing Trust to order at 7:21pm. Carolyn Perkins, Colleen Neff and Cindy Lane-Hand were all present.

Ms. Pine said that affordable housing was much needed in Groton. Ms. Pine reviewed the definition of affordable housing as defined in the housing production plan. Ms. Manugian asked what the income levels were to be eligible for affordable housing. Ms. Stanley said that the income limit for affordable housing was \$78,500 for a family of four. Ms. Pine reviewed the steps necessary for housing to be considered by DHCD as affordable housing. Ms. Pine said that they had 222 units of affordable units. She said that they needed an additional 173 units to meet their 10% threshold. Ms. Pine reviewed a map showing potential areas in town for affordable housing.

Ms. Pine said that they had started to look at the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel this fall. She said it had no wetlands, or endangered species and was flat. She said that they had found a couple of hurdles adding one was the road access. She said that at the time of the purchase of the property, the Town signed a legal agreement with the Groton School, that the public use of the road that goes through Groton School would be closed off leaving the General Field driveway as the only way in and out. She said it was a lengthy driveway and would be costly to pave. She said that lack of Town water and sewer was also an issue. She said that sewer might be likely from Ayer, but would require a town meeting vote in Ayer and would receive opposition from the abutters in Ayer. Ms. Pine said that they recently learned of a couple of parcels closer to the center of town, but would require negotiations because they were privately owned. Ms. Pine said that all volunteers on these various Boards in Groton were attempting to exhaust the knowledge they had but added they would have to spend some money at some point to further explore these options even though they may not be viable options after all.

Mr. John Sopka said that the number of units listed in the Housing Production Plan was based on the 2010 census and thought the deficit might be larger at this time. Ms. Pine agreed. Mr. Cunningham asked if the natural heritage concerns on some of the properties would be trumped by a 40B process. Ms. Stanley said that a developer had to go through natural heritage because those were state guidelines. Mr. Cunningham asked if there were rare species at Surrenden Farm. Ms. Pine said that there were currently not any they were aware of. Mr. Giger asked if testing had been done to determine whether the land at General Field could support sanitation, what the level of the water table was and if this was a viable alternative if they had to build their own septic system. Ms. Pine said that no testing had been done. She said that there may be sandy soil there. Mr. Nii-Ama Akuete asked if private developers had been reached out to, to see if they would be willing to take on the testing and research of properties. Mr. Easom said that they needed to investigate arsenic at Surrenden Farm as that had been discovered when they looked at purchasing the property. Mr. Degen suggested putting out an RFP for a developer to investigate and develop a project. Ms. Pine said that that was a process they had envisioned using. Ms. Manugian said that the map showed parcels that the Town and its related entities owned and asked if it made sense to look at all parcels that met a certain criterion also.

There was a brief discussion about 40B zoning requirements and what permit application processes could be waived. Ms. Manugian asked if there were any tax incentives for developers who wanted to build affordable housing. Ms. Perkins said that they didn't need to reinvent the wheel adding that neighboring towns had been successful with tax incentive plans. Mr. Cunningham cited Rivercourt Residences as an example of a tax incentive project. Ms. Deb Busser said that Dunstable had issued an RFP for a developer as discussed earlier and could be used as a resource. Mr. Degen said he liked the idea of a tax incentive but liked the idea of ground leases and federal incentives better. Mr. Nii-Ama Akuete agreed with Mr. Degen.

Ms. Pine said that they put in a preliminary application with the CPC for engineering and design money and would be trying to figure out more specifically what they would be asking for. Ms. Pine said that they had a small amount of money and would be great if they had money they could nimbly use. Mr. Haddad said that they had \$500k in the CPA housing bucket. He said that there were communities that shifted money from the housing bucket to the affordable housing trust account so that they had the ability to act and create more housing quickly. He said that to have access to that money and not need town meeting votes made sense.

Ms. Manugian said that this was a great conversation with lost of questions and brainstorming. Ms. Pine said she was very happy that people were interested in affordable housing and thought it would be wonderful to make some progress.

**ON-GOING ISSUES**

Mr. Haddad had no updates.

**MINUTES**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 9, 2020. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Manugian-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye*

Ms. Manugian adjourned the meeting at 8:18pm.

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

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

Date Approved: 11/23/20