

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
VIRTUAL MEETING  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 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; Hannah Moller, Assistant Tax Collector/Treasurer; Megan Foster, Assistant Assessor; Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair; Dr. Laura Chesson, School Superintendent; Marlena Gilbert, School Committee Chair

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Ms. Pine thanked everyone that played a part in delivering the delicious turkey dinners around to the seniors last Thursday as well as thanked Gibbet Hill for preparing the dinners. She added that this was in place of the annual Gibbet Hill Dinner.

Ms. Pine said that the emergency rental assistance program that was voted on at the October Town Meeting would begin next Monday, November 30<sup>th</sup>. She said that information would be available beginning next Monday on the Town's website.

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

1. Mr. Haddad said that they would continue to adhere to protocols as established for any COVID exposure as they did last week with the closure of Town Hall. Mr. Haddad said he also sent out an email over the weekend that only Vermont and Hawaii were non-restricted states. He asked people to be careful over the holiday week with travel.
2. Mr. Haddad said that Groton now had 16 cases within the last 14 days and was trending higher. He said that this made Groton a Green community adding he would continue to monitor this uptick in positive cases.
3. Mr. Haddad said that there was a letter in the Board's packet explaining the unfilled position in the Police Department. Chief Luth said that the second School Resource Officer (SRO) position was established in 2018 right after he arrived in Town as Chief. He said that this additional SRO had been very good and had a great relationship with the schools. He said that they needed to have the 20<sup>th</sup> position within their department filled otherwise it put them behind the eight ball and was a liability for them to not have a supervisor on for every shift.

Mr. Haddad said that they had budgeted \$122K for the Deputy's position. He said that the Deputy had retired in June and they had not filled that position. He said they instead promoted one of the Sergeants to Acting Lieutenant and paid him a stipend instead because of the hiring freeze. He said that the Chief would like to promote the Acting Lieutenant to Deputy, move an officer into the vacant Sergeants role and put the second SRO back in as a patrolman. He talked about the loss of funding of \$35K that they would see for the second SRO from Dunstable and Groton School.

**TAX CLASSIFICATION HEARING**

*Ms. Pine moved to reopen the public hearing on the tax classification hearing at 7:15pm. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye*

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT – cont.**

Ms. Pine asked what this meant for SRO coverage in the schools. Chief Luth said that with one SRO, the primary responsibility would be at the High School but that the SRO would be available to help in any of the other schools. Ms. Pine asked if Lawrence Academy and Groton School were receiving SRO coverage before the second SRO was added. Mr. Haddad said that they had. Ms. Pine asked if it was feasible for one SRO to cover all those needs. Chief Luth said that coverage would not be the same adding the single SRO would be where he was needed to be. Ms. Pine said she was torn and didn't want them to not fill this position in the future. Mr. Haddad said that they were not

reducing the roster adding it would stay a 20-person roster. He said that once the hiring freeze was up, they would look to refill that position. Ms. Pine asked if there was more Cares Act money and if it could fund this second SRO citing the necessity for this position within the schools during the pandemic. Mr. Haddad said that if they provided additional funding, he didn't know if they would be able to use Cares Act money to fund this but would have to check with the State. Ms. Dufresne said that there was no word on additional Cares Act funding on the horizon adding that their mental health funding request had been denied for use of Cares funding. Dr. Chesson said that she understood the reduction of an SRO as temporary and said she supported this because of the temporary nature of this position. She said that she understood that this would be funded in FY22 with the cut only being for the rest of the current FY year. Ms. Gilbert said that she had an issue cutting the SRO to fill a position within the Police Department. She said that they were talking a security personnel from the Schools and didn't think this conversation should be happening. She said she saw this as taking services away from the students. Mr. Reilly said that the SRO's were also interacting with the students even when they weren't in session. He said that the SRO's were good at the entire picture, 365 days a year and available during school and after school. Mr. Reilly asked Chief Luth if they were spending overtime to fill vacancies. Chief Luth said that 4 out of 6 nights, only 2 officers were covering which meant he had to fill the other 2 shifts using overtime. He added that training, vacations, etc. was down because of COVID therefore overtime was down as of right now.

Mr. Robertson said that this was a big issue which was going to be one of many with this budget. He said that they needed to make a list of priorities adding the priorities for the Schools and the Chief, in this instance, needed to be taken into consideration. He said that after the budget meetings, the Town Manager needed to prioritize budget items with discussions being had by the Finance Committee, Select Board and the School Committee. He said that they needed to look at all departments and take all departments into consideration. Ms. Manugian said she agreed and asked what detriment there was in waiting 6 weeks to look at it in the overall budget process. Mr. Haddad said that waiting did not have any impact. He said he needed to prioritize everything by December 31<sup>st</sup>. He said that the Police Department was in flux in terms of supervision and why it was added to the agenda. He said that he and the Chief wanted to bring it forward to discuss their thought process. Chief Luth said the supervision needed attention adding it was a liability for them to be down a supervisor. Mr. Degen said it would make more sense to decide on the supervisor position by January 15<sup>th</sup>. He asked if their patrol positions would suffer if they didn't fill that position. Mr. Haddad said that if they filled the deputy position, filled the supervisor position and left the patrol position unfilled, that would lead to overtime costs to fill that position and cautioned the Board of the overtime costs. He said that a potential savings of \$70K would be eaten up by about 70% in overtime costs. There was confusion whether cutting the second SRO would happen now or on July 1, 2021 and a brief discussion about that.

Mr. Giger said that making one of the SRO's part time in the schools and part time patrol would help some of this situation especially where the schools weren't attending fulltime. He said that this could help with the overnight shifts. He said that they needed to think about the support needed for the officers on the overnight shifts. Ms. Manugian said she was having a hard time talking about cutting and filling positions at this point in the year without knowing what funding looked like in the future.

#### **TAX CLASSIFICATION HEARING – Cont.**

Mr. Haddad said that the DOR had certified their values and was now waiting on the Board of Assessors to meet on this information. He asked if the Select Board wanted to wait until December 7<sup>th</sup> or hold a hearing next week so as to not hold up bills from going out. Ms. Foster said that the DOR was backed up because of COVID and municipality delays in getting information to them. Mr. Giger said that if they didn't know any more by next Monday, they couldn't make a decision. Ms. Foster said that because they were approved by the State earlier that day, the Assessors just needed time to put together their presentation. Mr. Haddad said he didn't see the Select Board approving anything but a single factor of 1 and asked if the Board could set then tax rate based on what they had thus far that night. Mr. Degen said he saw this as usurping the Board of Assessors adding he didn't need to hear the explanation but someone in the public might. Ms. Manugian asked if it was realistic for the Assessors to have their presentation done by next Monday. Ms. Foster said the Assessors would be ready for next week. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to continue to Monday, November 30<sup>th</sup> at 7:15pm.

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

#### **TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT – CONT.**

4. Mr. Haddad said that he had provided the Board with an updated plan on the reorganization in the Tax Collector/Treasurer's office. He said that the revised plan would make Mr. Hartnett the Part Time Assistant TC/Treasurer, Ms. Moller would be the Full-Time Tax Collector/Treasurer, the Payroll Coordinator would remain the same at 35 hours and hire a part time, 15-hour a week clerk. He said that this would save them \$17,771.89 with the possibility of an additional \$18,500 savings in Mr. Hartnett's health insurance.

Ms. Manugian asked if leaving the 15-hour clerk unfilled would be a possibility. Mr. Haddad said that that would mean a decrease in office coverage but was something he would have to discuss with Ms. Moller and Mr. Hartnett. Ms. Manugian said that there may be reductions in availability depending on the budget issues they were facing. Mr. Hartnett said that Ms. Manugian's suggestion was a good one. He said he liked this new proposal adding Ms. Moller would get going right away. Mr. Degen said he liked Mr. Hartnett's pay staying the same and he liked looking at this yearly. Mr. Giger said that they shouldn't be making these decisions in small groups adding they needed to take this information consideration like the patrolman position. Ms. Manugian said she shared the same concerns and wasn't sure about adding a new position. Mr. Haddad said that they were adding a part time position in place of making one position part time. He said that a lot of thought had gone into this proposal and needed information like this in order to put together his proposal. He said that this proposal would make the budget for the office \$17K less than what it would be should Mr. Hartnett not plan to retire. Ms. Manugian said she could support the first 3 items but not the part time Clerk at this point. Mr. Degen said he disagreed with Mr. Giger in that he didn't view this as a small group discussion. He said that these ideas were being brought forward for discussion. He said he could support the first three pieces but not the part time clerk. He said he didn't want to see them choosing one department over another but needed to look at the big picture.

Mr. Haddad said he would like to get going on Ms. Moller's training immediately. He said he would have to figure out those 30 hours during the budget process. He said he would like to ensure that Ms. Moller and Mr. Hartnett of their positions come July 1, 2021.

*Mr. Degen made a motion to approve the plan as presented with the exception of the additional clerk position. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Manugian-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye*

5. Mr. Haddad said that they had completed the DPW construction project. He said that there was a warranty issue they were dealing with but wouldn't affect the budget. He said that they would be turning back about \$17k. He thanked those for helping to make this project a success. Mr. Giger said that the Building Committee wasn't mentioned and wanted to thank them for their volunteer time. Mr. Haddad apologized for not mentioning the Building Committee and thanked them for their time and involvement. Mr. Haddad said that proceeds could be used for any like project they could bond for; a project with a 20-year life expectancy.
6. Mr. Haddad said that the Prescott Sprinkler System was complete and was under budget by \$14k. He thanked everyone for their help on this project. Mr. Haddad said that the current fire alarm panel did not provide the Fire Department with a location of a potential fire which was a safety and code issue. He said that the quote to install this new fire panel was \$19K. He said that they had \$14K to put toward this. He said that the Friends of Prescott voted unanimously to cover the additional \$6K cost to cover the installation of the fire panel. Mr. Degen said that the use of the top floor could not be utilized until the fire panel was installed and was important to add to the discussion. Mr. Giger asked if Town funds were still going to be used. Mr. Haddad said that the funding for the fire panel would come from the surplus in the sprinkler system project and from the Friends of Prescott. He said there would be no additional town funds used.

7. Mr. Haddad said that the Finance Committee had met to review the financial policies. He said that the investment section was updated to coincide with the recent town meeting vote on investments. He said that no other changes were being recommended by the Finance Committee and suggested that the Board adopt the policy. Ms. Pine said she saw one other item she was recommending a change on. She said that the section on ethics should also include a statement that any written disclosure should be provided to the Town Clerk in addition to the Town Manager. Mr. Haddad said that this was a good change and supported this.

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to make a motion to approve and adopt the financial policy as amended that evening. Mr. Robertson said that this did not need to go back to the Finance Committee adding the changes were not substantive.

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

8. Mr. Haddad provided the Board with an update on their schedule for the next few weeks. He said he would advertise a public hearing for December 14<sup>th</sup> for a liquor license fee waiver discussion. Mr. Giger said that they could make an exception to their policy. Ms. Manugian said that they could reduce the fees for the current calendar year and increase it again the following year.

#### **ON-GOING ISSUES**

Mr. Haddad said he was going to take off the highway garage project off the list.

#### **LIAISON REPORTS**

Ms. Pine said that the Housing Production Plan was available on the Town's website. She said she had received calls about other properties they should be looking at for affordable housing and appreciated those calls.

#### **MINUTES**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 16, 2020. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Manugian-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye*

Ms. Manugian adjourned the meeting at 8:37pm.

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

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

Date Approved: 11/30/20