

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
VIRTUAL MEETING  
MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 2021  
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, Principal Assistant Assessor; Members of the Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee Marlana Gilbert; Fay Raynor, Rafael Glod, Brian LeBlanc, Jeff Kubick; Finance Committee Members Bud Robertson; David Manugian; Mary Linskey; Colby Doody; Gary Green; Art Prest; Scott Whitefield; DPW Director, Tom Delaney; GDRSD Business Manager, Sherry Kersey; Superintendent Dr. Laura Chesson

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Ms. Dunbar reminded the public that the plastic bag ban went into effect on January 1, 2021.

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

1. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to approve a CVL license for Hollis Street Nutrition. Ms. Manugian asked if it was possible for the Board to expand the approved hours to 7am-6pm daily to allow the owner flexibility to adjust hours seeing they were a new business. Mr. Haddad said that nothing prohibited the Board from doing that.

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the license with hours from 7am to 6pm daily with permission for the Executive Assistant to use the Board's electronic signatures on the license. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Reilly-aye; Giger-aye*

2. Mr. Haddad said that due to Governor Baker's decision to extend the temporary limits in capacity for various businesses and activities through January 24, 2021, he had extended working remotely at the Town Hall and Library through 6:00 a.m. on Monday, January 25, 2021.
3. Mr. Haddad said that they continued to monitor the weekly health report issued by the Department of Public Health. He said that they continued to be a "yellow" community with 45 reported cases in the last two weeks with a 4.93% positivity rate. He said that Groton was trending higher and dangerously close to becoming a "red" community. He said that they would continue to be diligent in their efforts to address the impact this pandemic has had on their operations.
4. Mr. Haddad said that they had completed their search to fill the new Stormwater Technician I position for the newly created Stormwater Utility. He said that DPW Director Tom Delaney was recommending that he appoint Benjamin Zimmer to the position. Mr. Haddad said that Mr. Zimmer had worked for the Town's Highway/DPW since 2001 and had been an exemplary employee. He said that Mr. Zimmer was the right person for this position. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board consider ratifying his appointment of Benjamin Zimmer as Stormwater Technician I and further respectfully requested that the Board lift the hiring freeze and allow him to fill the vacancy this appointment would create in the Highway Department. He explained that transferring Mr. Zimmer to the Stormwater Utility would put the DPW down two (2) employees adding it would be extremely difficult to operate the Department down two employees.

*Mr. Giger made the motion to ratify the Town Managers appointment of Benjamin Zimmer as Stormwater Technician I. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye*

*Mr. Degen moved to lift the hiring freeze to hire a DPW position. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Manugian-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye*

5. Mr. Haddad said that he had drafted the Liquor License Fee Adjustment Policy as discussed by the Board in December. He said that Town Counsel had reviewed and commented on the policy and it was in its final form and ready for adoption by the Board. He provided a summary of what the policy achieved. Ms. Pine said that she liked how Mr. Haddad worded this policy. Mr. Degen said that he believed the Country Club tenant had not paid their fee yet.

*Mr. Degen moved that they approve the liquor license fee adjustment policy as written with the caveat that one license holder that had yet to pay their fee must do so in order to qualify for said fee adjustment. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion.*

Mr. Giger said that they should only be credited if they paid up front. Mr. Haddad said that they would not wait until June to collect payment adding he wanted to have this resolved by the end of the month.

*Mr. Degen withdrew his motion and made another motion that they adopt the liquor license fee adjustment policy as written and the one license holder approved who had yet to pay had until February 15<sup>th</sup> to pay the entire fee or be added to the Select Board agenda for further discussion. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye; Giger-aye*

#### **PRESENTATION - TOWN MANAGER'S FY22 PROPOSED OPERATING BUDGET**

Mr. Robertson called the Finance Committee to order at 7:17pm. Ms. Gilbert called the GDRSC to order at 7:18pm.

Mr. Haddad presented the Town Manager's Proposed Operating Budget for FY22. (see attached presentation)

Mr. Haddad reviewed steps involved in the development of the proposed budget including placeholders for GDRSD and Nashoba Tech as the schools wouldn't have their budget requests until February and March. Mr. Haddad reviewed revenue projections. He said that new revenue totaled \$1.6M.

Mr. Haddad said that they had no choice but to cover pension and health insurance costs of \$422,754, Mr. Haddad said that some key positions were not filled because of budget constraints to include a police officer, highway employee, and part time library positions. Mr. Haddad provided examples of some of the cuts made to the municipal budget to balance the budget.

Mr. Prest asked about the proposed increase in Country Club revenue. Mr. Haddad said that they were hopeful that revenue would increase in FY22 based on golf usage of the Country Club during the pandemic. He said that should they not be able to resume the pool at full capacity and summer camp due to continuation of the pandemic, they would adjust the numbers.

Mr. Haddad said that should any funding become available, the Finance Team was recommending that the police wages be restored, the highway wages be restored, the library wages be restored and that fire expenses be restored and in that order.

Mr. Haddad reviewed the Enterprise Fund proposed budgets. He reviewed the proposed capital budget also adding it was a scaled back budget to include only those capital items that were necessary this year in order to save as much as they could in free cash due to the unknowns with the ongoing pandemic.

Mr. Haddad said that they were looking at using all their levy capacity next FY. He said that the final tax rate was projected to go from \$17.60 it currently was now to \$18.09. Mr. Haddad said that the five-year projection showed deficits of about \$700K/year. He said that they couldn't sustain these paths. Ms. Linskey said that their needs were growing but all they talked about was cutting. She said that every avenue needed to be explored including PILOT payments.

Mr. Haddad said that January 23, 2021 at 8:30am had been set by the Finance Committee as the Saturday budget meeting.

Mr. Robertson said there was only so much they could get from 2 ½ and new growth adding wages and benefits needed to be looked at continually adding that was a majority of both the municipal and school budgets. Ms. Linskey said that this needed to be looked at like a business. She said that everything needed to be looked at including new sources for revenue. Ms. Gilbert said that they were doing their part on their end to look at all costs. She said the placeholder would be a reduction of about \$900K in their 5-year projected budget but appreciated the work that had been done by the Town Manager to work to meet their needs. She outlined some of the programs and needs that would not be met with a reduction of that size. She explained how they were going to be playing catch up for many years due to the pandemic and special education needs that had not been met since the pandemic started.

Mr. Degen thanked Mr. Haddad for his presentation adding they needed to seriously consider a major multiyear override in addition to approaching the private schools along with Indian Hill about increasing PILOT payments. He suggested having a workshop meeting to discuss how to approach increase in PILOT payments. Ms. Manugian said they needed to be cognizant of the fact that the non-profits were also facing an increase in costs and losses in revenue due to COVID. Mr. Haddad said that 86% of their new revenues were going to the school district adding they would continue to work with them to address their needs. Mr. Robertson explained the reason he didn't think they needed to look at a major override just yet. Dr. Chesson said that the next round of stimulus was coming to the schools this time adding GD was only going to be getting about \$130K which was unfortunately much less than what they had hoped for. She said that they spent about \$900K in hiring of new staff due to COVID. She said that they only had funds to cover them for the first half of the year. Ms. Gilbert said she didn't think they were ready for a 5-year override and agreed with Mr. Robertson but thought there were enough reserves and pencil sharpening that could be done by both the schools and municipal budgets to get through this year.

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

6. Mr. Haddad said that as directed by the Select Board, and in conjunction with representatives from the Groton Dunstable Regional School District, he drafted a Community Preservation application for a new Middle School Track. Mr. Haddad said that he believed the application was ready for approval and submittal to the Community Preservation Committee adding he had received no negative feedback from the Select Board. Mr. Haddad added that the application had been approved by the Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee.

Mr. Giger asked about the Board supporting projects. Mr. Haddad said that the deadline for draft proposals was this Thursday. He said he was going to ask Sammie Kul for a list of all CPA projects and bring it back to a meeting at the beginning of February for the Board to discuss their support for various projects. Mr. Giger said that if they were going to put in an application for funding, they couldn't avoid a conflict of interest and therefore should not support other applications. Mr. Haddad said that what Mr. Giger was saying was that if the Select Board went forward with their own application, they should refrain from supporting other applications. Mr. Giger said that was correct. Mr. Haddad said that made sense. Ms. Pine said that if other applications had to do with other properties the Town owned, the CPC had a policy that they needed landowner support. Ms. Manugian said they could sign an application as a co-applicant if they were the landowner. Mr. Haddad said that this was more of an appearance issue than a legal issue. Ms. Pine said she would like to think they could register their support for multiple projects and allow the CPC to make decisions on what was presented to the Town Meeting. Ms. Manugian said that Mr. Giger's concern was really compelling. She said that the process of putting in an application, supporting an application and then taking a position on a warrant article was shifting the burden onto the Board and away from the CPC. She said her preference would be to be a co-applicant as needed and either support or not support when it came time to the warrant article. Mr. Degen agreed with what had been said. Mr. Reilly said that they were co-applicants on a lot of these potentially as landowners. He said he liked the idea of prioritizing. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to allow him an opportunity to compile a list of all CPC projects and bring it back to the Board for further discussion.

Ms. Raynor said that she thought with all the layers of review and approval that it was a stretch there would be a conflict of interest here. Ms. Pine said she was in favor of seeing a list of all projects. Ms. Manugian said she would prefer to not see a list right now but instead discuss the track project and further discuss this with the CPC at a later date.

*Ms. Pine moved that they approve the CPC application to be co-sponsored by GDRSD and the Town of Groton for the construction of a Middle School Track. Mr. Reilly seconded the discussion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Giger-aye; Degen-nay. The motion carried 4-1.*

7. Mr. Haddad said that it was that time of year for the Board to call for and open the Warrant for the 2021 Spring Town Meeting. He said that given the fact that the State was slowly rolling out the COVID-19 vaccinations, he would recommend that they hold the Town Meeting outdoors at the Track. He proposed that the Select Board call for the Spring Town Meeting to be held on Saturday, May 1, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. at the Track behind Florence Roche. He said he had cleared this date with the Town Moderator and that the track was available that day. He said that this would push the Annual Election back one week to Tuesday, May 25, 2021. He said he had cleared that date with the Town Clerk. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board vote to call for the meeting and open the Warrant at Monday's meeting adding the Warrant would close on Friday, February 26th.

*Ms. Pine made the motion that the Spring Town Meeting would take place on Saturday, May 1, 2021 at the Florence Roche Track. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye*

*Mr. Degen moved to open the Spring Town Meeting warrant effective today and close it on February 26, 2021 at the end of business. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye; Giger-aye*

8. Ms. Gilbert said that the project cost for the high school stadium field restoration, and the softball field restoration would be \$404,500. She said that GD@Play was donating \$100K to be used toward that. She said that Groton's portion would be \$138K. She said that in FY23, part of their capital would come down because this was being planned for FY23. Ms. Gilbert said that this project had been put off for many years. Ms. Gilbert asked the Select Board and Finance Committee to recommend their project adding it was a planned capital project that they were seeking CPC funds for instead. Mr. Haddad said that final applications were due to the CPC on February 18<sup>th</sup> which gave them time to discuss their policy on support letters. Mr. Degen said that the School Committee needed to obtain more quotes on the field restoration adding he thought those numbers should come in much less than what was included in the draft. Mr. Degen said that they spent a lot of money on those fields when they constructed them and asked what they were going to do to maintain these fields should this project move forward. Ms. Gilbert said that they now had maintenance plans in place which never existed before. She said that they were trying to get back to baseline on these fields so that they could maintain them properly. Mr. Degen appreciated her answer adding it was what he was looking for.
9. Mr. Haddad reviewed the Board's schedule for the next few months.
10. Mr. Haddad said that the legislature had finally approved their request for two additional package store licenses. He said they had already had a request for a package store license in West Groton.

### **ON-GOING ISSUES**

Green Communities – Mr. Haddad said that they were finalizing the projects already approved and were waiting for the State to come out and review the projects completed already.

### **MINUTES**

*Ms. Pine moved to approve the meeting minutes of December 21, 2020 as presented. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye*

Mr. Degen said that burn permits were for sale right now adding outdoor burning was permitted effective January 15, 2021.

Ms. Manugian adjourned the meeting at 9:10pm.

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

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

Date Approved: 01/25/2021