

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
VIRTUAL MEETING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2022
APPROVED**

SB Members Present: Rebecca H. Pine, Chair; Alison S. Manugian, Vice Chair; Peter S. Cunningham, Clerk; Joshua A. Degen, Member; John F. Reilly, Member

Also Present: Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Melisa Doig, HR Director; Megan Foster, Principal Assistant Assessor, Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant; Hannah Moller, Tax Collector/Treasurer; Michael Bouchard, Town Clerk

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Cunningham commended the DPW on maintaining the roads during the recent snowstorms.

Ms. Pine informed the Board that the Bystander Training Program is scheduled for tomorrow night at 6:30 PM. The topic is implicit bias. She briefly described the program as an interactive training that will teach people to understand their own implicit biases in order to begin to undo them. The program is free and any additional information can be found on the Town Website.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Rebecca Tabasky thanked the Select Board members for setting up the Bystander Training and expressed that it is deeply important to learn how to intervene when there is hate. She thanked the Groton Public Library for hosting an event on anti-bias in early childhood education on February 1st. 60 neighbors had attended with curiosity and open minds to learn positive ways to celebrate differences. She was disheartened when three neighbors decided to intentionally introduce racist comments. Ms. Tabasky was grateful for the moderator and the participants to recognize intrusion and was able to steer the conversation back to learning. She urged all Groton residents to attend the programs.

TOWN MANAGER's REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad stated that Groton continues to be low in positive Covid cases and there were approximately 100 positive cases in the last week. The numbers will continue to be monitored and the Town Hall is still on target to open at the end of the month and be able to return to in person meetings.
2. Mr. Haddad said that in regards to the FY2022 second quarter finance update the numbers are doing well in collections. Motor vehicle excise taxes continue to be equal with the total collections of last year. Mr. Haddad was pleased with the local meal tax and the local occupancy tax which has already exceeded the estimate. Mr. Haddad informed the Board that the following information would not be found on this quarters report. In January the Country Club took in over \$120,000 in revenue, last year they were at \$10,000. Mr. Haddad said the sales were generated from golf memberships and summer programs which are almost sold out. Mr. Haddad was pleased with the results within the Country Club. In terms of expenses they are as expected at 56% of the budget. Mr. Haddad said employee benefits are paid up front and the numbers are slightly off. 79% of the benefits are paid to Middlesex County at the beginning of the year. The General Government, Public Safety, and the DPW are performing well and the departments are continuing to be very frugal with their expenses. Mr. Haddad stated that the overall budget is doing well. Mr. Robertson was concerned with last year's dispatch budget of \$416,000 compared to this year's total of \$423,000. Mr. Haddad explained that the 65% is due to receiving a grant in January instead of December. \$110,000 of the granted funds is used to offset salaries and the budget may be slightly short from an increase in overtime. Ms. Dufresne replied that in this instance the timing is different, expenditures of the SI Grant generally commence in October through April. The delay in the grant will affect the spending from January through June. \$113,000 in personnel cost was promised by the State and only \$110,000 would be utilized for the offset. Ms. Dufresne was not worried about any additional costs.
3. Update on FY 2022 Goals and Objectives
 - A. Environmental (Contamination) Issues- Mr. Haddad said that a workshop has not been scheduled. The Sportsmen's club continues to be monitored and a notification was received on January 5th stating that the EPA is waiting on a draft site investigation report from the contractor. At that time they will make a decision to take remedial or removal action and the EPA will cover the costs. Mr. Cunningham commented that the report has been provided to the EPA. Regarding the PFAS the Water Department is continuing to monitor the levels and the Town is well below the states federal standards. There were elevated levels found at the Groton Dunstable

High School and Mr. Orcutt will be speaking with the school officials. Mr. Haddad had questioned if the elevated levels would impact the Whitney Well and Mr. Orcutt assured that there would be no issues. Mr. Degen commented that it is important to schedule a joint meeting with the Water Department and the BOH. He discussed the alarming statistics coming out of Maine regarding the contamination caused by the use of a sludge base fertilizer being offered by the States free of charge. The major concern is that the water stream and food streams are being affected. Mr. Degen wanted to ensure that the fertilizer is not being used on the Country Club or the Town Field. He recommended that the general public should be informed. Mr. Haddad said that when the Greenway Committee presented their annual report they discussed the old Nod Road landfill and questioned if it should be monitored. Mr. Haddad asked the Town Planner to reach out to the engineer and perform a study to see if there are any projected issues. The report will be provided to the Board within the next few weeks.

- B. Taxpayer Burden/Costs of Government- Mr. Haddad said that two HCA's have been signed for recreational marijuana and there are two proposed establishments one located at the Four Corners and the other at the Mill Run. The Select Board has placed a Warrant Article on the Spring Town Meeting to amend the Town's Zoning Bylaw to change the 500 foot requirement from property line to door to door. The item is on the Planning Board's agenda for February 24, 2022 at 7:00PM and Mr. Cunningham would be accompanying Mr. Haddad. Mr. Haddad said that 6 out of the 7 collective bargaining units have tentatively reached agreements. The Board would be moving into executive session after the public hearing to discuss the agreements further. Mr. Haddad stated that the PILOT working group includes Mr. Degen and Mr. Whitefield and they have developed a plan to approach the nonprofits. There are meetings scheduled within the next couple weeks to discuss their ideas. Ms. Manugian requested an update on the PILOT ideas prior those meetings. Mr. Haddad replied that he is concerned with having a public conversation before having the opportunity to meet with the nonprofit, it would put the group in a difficult situation and their goal is to become a partnership. Mr. Degen agreed with Mr. Haddad, and commented that the Select Board would be pleased with the proposal and that the PILOT money should increase significantly. Ms. Manugian expressed that without speaking to the Select Board prior to the final agreement that is reached between non-profits would lead to conflict internally. Ms. Pine recommended that any concerns should be addressed to the Town Manager. Ms. Pine then commented that the tax burden goal included taxing short term rentals and questioned if the Board would be interested in doing so. If there is an interest she recommended researching the surrounding towns. Ms. Pine stated that the Legislature passed a law a few years ago allowing the Town to collect a room tax on Airbnb type rentals. With the arrival of the Indian Hill Music the idea may want to be reconsidered. Ms. Manugian commented that there are not viable mechanisms of identifying all the rental properties available. Mr. Haddad said that he and Ms. Dunbar researched properties that were available a couple of years ago and there was not a sufficient number to make it worth the while for expenditures of staff time and collecting a minimal amount. Ms. Pine requested that Mr. Haddad reach out to the surrounding towns and ask if they are collecting the tax. Mr. Haddad stated he would work with Ms. Dunbar and explore the records that the assessors obtain.
 - C. Affordable Housing and Housing Diversity- Mr. Haddad said that there is a 40B development under review at the Cow Pond Brook Road. A site walk will be conducted tomorrow and on Monday night's agenda the Select Board would be discussing any comments regarding the project. The Deluxe property is in the process of being permitted and will also contain affordable housing. Mr. Haddad had a conversation with the Chair and the Affordable Housing Trust has done an extensive search of Town owned properties where they could make a difference. An update should be provided if that search has been successful. Ms. Pine stated that she could not report on anything at this time. Mr. Degen questioned if the warrant that he signed today for an expenditure of \$3400 for the Affordable Housing Trust was the same property for the site analysis on Cow Pond Brook Pond. Ms. Pine assured that it was not the same property.
 - D. Promote Economic Development- Mr. Haddad said that walkability would be improved throughout the Town. The Complete Street Committee received a grant for the installation of sidewalks on West Main Street and Lowell Road. An Earmark was received from the States ARPA Funds for the installation of a sidewalk on Old Ayer Road from Boston Road to the Music Center. Mr. Haddad said that the Destination Groton Committee was appointed members and they are off to a great start and have a lot of ideas. They meet every other Wednesday and will keep the Board updated. Ms. Manugian questioned if there are any plans to repair or upgrade the sidewalks on Main Street. Mr. Haddad replied no, the DPW will be focusing on using the grant money and if they do have the availability to fix any sidewalks they will address the issues.
4. Mr. Haddad informed the board that Mr. Woodin is the grandson of one of the founding members of the Williams Barn Committee. Mr. Haddad requested that the Board consider accepting the nomination of Stephen Woodin for appointment to the Williams Barn Committee.

Mr. Cunningham moved that the Board appoints Stephen Woodin to the Williams Barn Committee with the term to expire June 30, 2022. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Cunningham-Aye; Manugian- aye; Degen-aye; Reilly- aye, Pine- aye

5. Mr. Haddad requested that the Board consider accepting the nomination of Rick Salon for appointment to the Great Ponds Advisory Committee.

Ms. Manugian moved that the Board appoints Rick Salon to the Great Ponds Advisory Committee with the term to expire June 30, 2022. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Roll Call: Cunningham-Aye; Manugian- aye; Degen-aye; Reilly- aye, Pine- aye

6. Mr. Haddad said that the Finance Committee is scheduled to meet on February 15, 2022 to review the budget along with the capital plan. Mr. Haddad said he would provide an update on the status of the budget. The Board was informed that the Groton Dunstable operating assessment is higher than the amount set aside. The main reason is due to the Governor's proposed state aid for Chapter 70 and Chapter 71. Mr. Haddad expressed that the number is not adequate. Other factors that contributed to the issues were the minimal contribution for the Town of Groton has increased to 5.29%. There was a slight increase in the five year spread of the populations between the two communities. To meet the operating expenses the school district needs to increase the Town's operating assessment by \$303,000. Mr. Haddad has been working with both Sherri and Laura and requested that the school budget be \$100,000 less. They are currently reviewing the numbers. The Finance Team has made adjustments to the state aid based on the governor's number and the assessments. There was a slight increase in motor vehicle excise and fees and there would be more money required out of the capital stabilization fund. Mr. Haddad was very leery on increasing the estimated receipts totaling \$383,000 and increased the amount by \$55,000. Reductions were required to balance the budget and were made within the health insurance based on the reduction of full time positions, collective bargaining, and the 8.5% rate offered by the Minuteman Health. The Fire Department's request for a full time firefighter was eliminated along with the dispatcher and the part time clerk for the Council on Aging. Mr. Haddad explained eliminating those positions removed all new expenditures and left a level service budget on the municipal side and only accounted for collective bargaining with the unions. Mr. Haddad was reluctant to reduce the additional \$100,000, if Groton Dunstable is unable to accommodate the amount then the \$100,000 that is being carried in snow and deficit can be used out of free cash and the operating needs would be satisfied. Mr. Haddad had a conversation with Mr. Degen regarding the recent ice storms and the DPW is utilizing more materials. Mr. Cunningham recalled the Finance Meeting held on Saturday and stated that the most compelling presentation on Saturday came from Chief Luth requesting an additional dispatcher position and he hoped that need could be met.

7. Update on Select Board Meeting Schedule Through Spring Town Meeting
Mr. Haddad said that the 40B Cow Pond Brook Road Development would need to be addressed and added to the next agenda. Comments need to be submitted to the State by February 22, 2022 and he suggested that next week could be utilized to see if there is any input from the departments. Mr. Haddad stated that he would be inviting Mr. Tada to the February 28th meeting to update the Board on the MBTA housing law to ensure that everyone is familiar and up to date. The Board is required to vote by May 2nd and Mr. Tada will provide an update on the status of the Planning Board and what actions need to be taken. The Board will receive a first draft of the warrant on February 28th. Mr. Haddad reminded the public that the warrant closes on Friday, February 25th and must be submitted prior to the Select Board. On Monday, March 14, 2022 there will be a public hearing with the Finance Committee regarding the warrants. Ms. Pine questioned if members of the public can submit comments directly to the State regarding the 40B proposal. Ms. Manugian replied that the State's preference is that comments are only submitted by the Town and explained once the comprehensive permit application is received by the ZBA that is when the public is allowed to address their concerns. Ms. Pine stated if the public has any questions to please notify the Select Board by the next meeting.

Mr. Cunningham informed the Board that Fran Stanley forwarded a communication regarding a webinar that was being held on February 16, 2022 at 12:00pm on MBTA Community Zoning. More information can be found on the Town Website.

8. Mr. Haddad said that a bond was issued and requested an approval from the Select Board.
Ms. Moller said that the \$8.142 Million note was approved and was very successful. It came in at 8.5% net interest with a \$93,000 premium after issuance fees. The amount will cover the police radios, the Whitney Pond Well, and the Highway Department equipment that was previously borrowed last year. The amount also includes new borrowing for the Whitney Pond Well, water treatment facility, and the middle school track. Mr. Haddad said that the \$8.1 Million would be coming from the Enterprise Fund and the CPC, only a minimum amount would come out of

the General Fund. Mr. Haddad expressed that this shows the benefits of a AAA bond rating and reaches great benefits for the taxpayers. The premium of \$93,000 is outstanding and allows the Town to borrow less. Mr. Degen questioned the second and third place options and noted that the bond premium was higher than the other two. Ms. Moller stated that the net interest was considered and it was the least expensive to the Town. Mr. Degen questioned if the best interest of the Town was considered. Ms. Moller explained that all factors are considered and the Financial Advisers recommended the most financially responsible decision. Mr. Pine questioned if a vote is still necessary regarding the track. Mr. Haddad replied that the bond issue was scheduled prior to knowing the issue of the cost overrun. The planning had been occurring for over the last month and a half, if the amounts needed to be rescinded then it can be performed. There was clarification that the amount is for the rebuild of the middle school track and not the high school which would be funded by CPA funds. Ms. Pine questioned what would occur if the track was postponed or not built. Mr. Haddad said that the \$1.4 Million would be paid off and not rolled over.

Mr. Degen moved to approve the motion for the bonding issue as written and as presented. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Cunningham-aye; Manugian-aye, Degen-aye; Reilly-aye; Pine-aye

SELECT BOARD ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Mr. Haddad said the annual review has been conducted of the Towns Financial Policies and there have been recommendations for minor changes to three of the supplemental plans (OPED Investment, General Funds and the Long Term Funds, and the Investment Policy Fund) to the main policy. The word shall is being replaced with the word may and the title Town Treasurer will be replaced with Town Accountant. Ms. Pine questioned the reasoning behind the minor changes. Ms. Moller replied that the Town has not been consistently receiving the information and that it was more responsible in the event that the information “may” be requested from the investor. The word shall holds the Town more liable if the documents were not asked for. Ms. Moller explained that Towns are not requesting these documents regularly and they are not necessarily needed on an annual basis. When the policies were originally composed they were not directly formatted for the Town of Groton and adjustments were required to make them more applicable to the Town.

Mr. Robertson informed the Board that the main Financial Policy was also reviewed and there were no changes made.

Mr. Degen moved to approve that the Select Board adopt the changes as proposed and approved by the Finance Committee. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Roll Call: Cunningham-aye; Manugian-aye, Degen-aye; Reilly-aye; Pine-aye

Mr. Degen moved that the Select Board reaffirm the previous vote of the main Financial Policies of the Town of Groton. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Cunningham-aye; Manugian-aye, Degen-aye; Reilly-aye; Pine-aye

OTHER BUSINESS

- A. Mr. Haddad said that the Florence Roche Building Committee would be meeting on Thursday, February 10, 2022 at 6:00PM to discuss the value engineering report and review the budget. The meeting is open to the public and will be held on zoom.

Mr. Degen commented if anyone has any questions for the Town Manager concerning any of the Select Boards proposals before moving forward to please reach out prior to the scheduled meeting on Thursday, February 10, 2022.

MINUTES

None

Ms. Pine adjourned the meeting at 7:56 pm and requested to move into executive session.

Mr. Cunningham moved that the Board adjourns the public meeting and move into executive session. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Cunningham-Aye; Manugian- aye; Degen-aye; Reilly- aye; Pine- aye

Approved: _____
Peter S. Cunningham, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted:
Kristine Fox, Minute Taker

Date Approved: 2/28/2022