

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, MARCH 14, 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 (Via Zoom)

Also Present: Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Hannah Moller, Tax Accountant; Fire Chief, Steele McCurdy; Police Chief, Michael Luth; Sergeant Kevin Henchan; Melisa Doig, HR Director; Megan Foster, Principal Assistant Assessor; Michael Bouchard, Town Clerk; Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant (via Zoom); Finance Committee Members – Michael Sulprizio, Gary Green, Bud Robertson, Colby Doody, David Manugian, Scott Whitefield

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Pine announced the they were meeting again in person, exactly two years after we first went remote due to the pandemic.

Ms. Pine said that the last Bystander Training was going to be held on Wednesday, March 16th on how to respond when you witness a troubling incident of bias or discrimination.

Ms. Pine said that drive-by Voter Signup was being held at Prescott on Saturday, March 19th from 9am-12pm

Mr. Robertson called the Finance Committee to order at 7:05pm.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that he was pleased to report that they have reached a Tentative Agreements with AFSCME, Council 93, Town Supervisors Union. Mr. Haddad said he provided the Board with a copy of the tentative agreement. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board consider ratifying this Agreement
2. Mr. Haddad said that with regard to the FY 2023 Proposed Operating Budget, the Groton Dunstable Regional School District Committee approved their Proposed FY 2023 Budget. He said that the following was their proposed Assessment for FY 2023:

Operating:	\$	24,319,318
Capital:	\$	577,026
Debt:	\$	482,904
Total:	\$	25,379,248

Mr. Haddad said that based on this, he had revised the Town Manager's Proposed Operating Budget to reflect this assessment. I have made the following adjustments:

1. Restored the New Dispatcher Position
2. Restored the Part-Time Council on Aging Administrative Assistant
3. Updated various Salary and Wage Line Items to reflect Ratified Collective Bargaining Agreements, including an additional appropriation from Free Cash of \$118,044 to reflect one time Cash Payments in the various Agreements
4. Reduced the Amount of ARPA Funds used to offset the Highway Department Budget from \$74,288 to \$19,588
5. Reduced Proposed OPEB Funding from \$187,553 to \$181,000 (reduced Free Cash by the same amount) to reflect elimination of Proposed New Firefighter

Mr. Haddad said he hoped the Finance Committee and Select Board would fund the dispatcher position as well as the Part time Council on Aging Administrative Assistant to gap needs in both those departments. Mr. Robertson said that the overall budget was down \$25K from when they last discussed the budget. Mr. Degen asked how far

under the levy limit they were. Mr. Haddad said that they were at the levy limit, and had done that to lessen the dependency on ARPA. Ms. Pine said she appreciated the School Board and Superintendent for bringing their assessment down.

WARRANT PUBLIC HEARING

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

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

Mr. Haddad said he was hoping there were going to be two questions on the warrant. He said that the Legislature was working on the Special Act and were really pushing for it to happen by April 11th. The Board questioned the language for the Town Clerk Ballot question and whether more could be added to it. Mr. Bouchard said that they would have the question books at the polls but couldn't add any additional wording.

Mr. Haddad began the review of the warrant.

Article 5: Mr. Robertson said that the Finance Committee would be discussing whether or not to have the budget done under a consent agenda. The Board didn't see any issues with keeping it done this way.

Article 6: Mr. Degen asked how Mr. Delaney was getting the same truck 5 years later for the same amount. Mr. Delaney said that they had switched the make of truck and had lowered the costs that way this time. Mr. Cunningham asked how the cost of fuel was impacting their budget. Mr. Delaney said that they would be okay this year but he wasn't sure about next year yet.

Mr. Haddad said that not all the library's capital items were on the list for this year but because they had some available funds and decided to get them all done this year.

Mr. Degen asked how often the Master Plan was used. Mr. Tada said that they used it as often as needed adding it was referenced in their zoning. Mr. Tada said that it was last done in 2011 and was in need of updating. Mr. Degen asked if the skeleton was in good condition, why they couldn't farm it out to MRPC to update the required information and leave the relevant information. Mr. Tada said that it was a big undertaking and didn't want to assume they could get a grant to update the plan. He said if there was an opportunity to get a grant, they would apply.

Mr. Black reviewed the park property capital improvements covered by the requested \$25,000.

Mr. Haddad said that because of Covid and added costs to police vehicles, the requested \$104K would not be enough. Chief Luth said that the approximate price might be \$10K more than what had been requested. Chief Luth said that they get better estimates by obtaining quotes and not from the State Bid List.

Mr. Degen said that because they hadn't received the golf carts yet, he suggested that the \$25K for this year be zeroed out. Mr. Haddad said he had planned to make a double payment upon receipt but that he could zero out this year's appropriation.

Mr. Manugian said that the CPAC supported the Master Plan in full adding it was considered an asset for the Town. He added that even though they hadn't received the golf carts, there may be additional maintenance costs this year for the existing carts. Mr. Manugian said he also thought the fire engine and voting machines should be added to the capital budget. Mr. Haddad said that he kept them as separate because they were not part of the original capital plan.

Article 7: Mr. Haddad said that engine 5 had been involved in an accident during the ice storm and sustained substantial damage. He said that there were a couple of different options before them on this. He said that if they were to purchase a new engine, they wouldn't need the money for 18 months and when they needed to bond it, it would replace some debt that was

coming off the books. Mr. Cunningham asked about a delivery date. Chief McCurdy said that the delivery time started out at 500+ days but had come down to about 400 days as of right now. Mr. Robertson said that they wanted to do an analysis on this, which the Chief put together. He said that they needed to think about some of the other options such as fixing it right now. Chief McCurdy said that it would take 6-9 months to fix it. Mr. Robertson said that the debt for the school had been proposed as sloped to help the burden on the tax payers so they didn't feel the increase in their taxes all up front. Mr. Robertson asked if they wanted to put the money up now or fix the truck and wait until 2028. Mr. Haddad said that if they open up the truck and they total it, they have full replacement value coverage. Chief McCurdy said that the price of a fire truck goes up about \$50K every year. Mr. Haddad said that with inflation, the cost in 6 years will be substantially higher. Mr. Degen said that he appreciated Mr. Robertson's perspective but knew that this truck was due to be replaced in 5 years anyway and was looking at it that way. He said that maintenance work over the next 5 years might be higher also because it was an older truck to begin with. Mr. Degen asked for maintenance information from the Chief. Ms. Manugian said that this was the type of question that should go to Town Meeting and allow the voters to weigh in on this. Ms. Pine said that they needed to go to Town Meeting with one proposal on this. Ms. Manugian said that they would get one option adding that if it got voted down, they would repair it instead.

Article 8: Mr. Haddad said that when they State proposed new boundaries for house seats, Groton now had 197 voters who vote for a different State Rep and those ballots had to be counted separately. He said that this was the reason they were asking for money to purchase a new voter machine. Mr. Bouchard said that he was looking into whether the State covering this cost was a possibility.

Article 11: Mr. Degen asked if the Conservation Commission had considered reducing their requested amount to \$350K to free up some money. Ms. Manugian said that she wouldn't be opposed to seeing it reduced further to \$100K which still met their \$750K fund goal.

Mr. Haddad explained the Prescott School Elevator proposal. Ms. Manugian said she couldn't support this without a master plan for the whole building. Mr. Degen said that the Friends of Prescott had done extremely well, were meeting their goals and were at 100% rental capacity. He said that they were meeting all their targets adding the community was responding well to their programming. Mr. Cunningham asked if there was a plan to renovate that building. Jodi Valenta introduced herself as the new Executive Director and explained the plan of the Friends. She said that having an elevator would increase the value and increase potential rents. She said that it would be an important investment for the building moving forward. Mr. Cunningham said he also noticed how well the programming was doing. He asked if the Friends could come in and talk to the Board about their master plan so they have a better understanding of it. She said that this money was for the design of the elevator adding they were seeking a grant for the purchase and installation.

Article 12: Mr. Haddad said that the Planning Board held a public hearing and voted unanimously to recommend this article.

Article 13: Mr. Tada explained the proposed clarifying changes contained in this article.

Article 11: Mr. Mark Gerath said that the Conservation Trust was requesting \$39,545 for the restoration of the James Brook Crossing off Old Ayer Road. He said that they would be replacing it with a precast concrete structure.

Mr. John Amaral said that their original proposal to restore the existing courts wasn't enough when they went out to bid so they went back for additional funding to meet the bid prices. Mr. Degen asked what kind of maintenance plan was being put in place to deal with a project of this size and cost. Mr. Amaral said that they would fund the maintenance out of a fund which was starting with a net positive of \$14K. He said that this was another source of revenue for the Country Club also at the end of the day. He said that the demand for pickleball was huge adding they received additional support every day.

Mr. Paul Funch explained the Trails Committee CPC article seeking funding for the Nashua River Walk. He said that if they were successful receiving a grant for this, the requested amount would be reduced to \$35K.

Article 14: Mr. Haddad said that this article extended to sewer district to the property located at Map 116, Lot 101 an undeveloped lot on Taylor Street.

Article 15: Ms. Manugian asked why they were asking Town Meeting whether they wanted to appoint a committee to study electronic voting.

Article 16: Mr. Jeffrey Brem said that the citizens petition was to fix the definition of age restricted housing. He said that this made some corrections to the definition. Ms. Manugian said that her initial read was that he wanted to remove the age restriction. Mr. Brem said that the age restricted definition was incorrect. He said that his proposed project was for an age restricted project. He gave an example of a child with a disability who needed to live with their age restricted parent(s) and how this change would help this. Ms. Pine asked what this change would allow. Mr. Brem said that it would allow the project to move forward while changing an outdated definition. Ms. Pine said that they should put more effort into putting affordable units in an age restricted development in town and thought it was an important consideration. Ms. Pine said that the Planning Board would hold a hearing on this on March 24th and understood that their current bylaw was complicated and needed to be updated to match state law. She said that if they allowed the increased density with no affordable component, that was not desirable for their town in her opinion. Ms. Pine asked if amendments could be allowed to allow for an affordable component. Mr. Haddad said that any article can be amended on the floor of Town Meeting. Mr. Degen said he understood why this was being brought forward. Mr. Haddad said that Town Counsel's suggested comments were provided to Mr. Brem. Mr. Degen suggested that Town Counsel attend the Planning Board hearing. Mr. Brem said that he was amendable to making suggested changes but not amenable to affordable housing. He said that these were going to be smaller more affordable houses adding he did a similar project in Westford. Ms. Pine said that if they changed their zoning, they wanted it to be what was right for the Town. The Board asked to be invited to the Planning Board's hearing on this matter.

Mr. Haddad said that they could vote on proposed line-item transfers at Town Meeting or wait until the end of the FY and approve the requested line-item transfers at a joint meeting of the Select Board and Finance Committee. Mr. Haddad reviewed the proposed transfers. Ms. Dufresne said that this was a preliminary draft adding there would be more requested transfers as they got closer to the end of the FY. Ms. Dufresne recommended waiting until the end of the FY to discuss and vote on these. Mr. Robertson said that they should wait until the end of the FY.

The Board discussed their meeting schedule. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to continue the public hearing to April 4th at 7:15pm.

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

Mr. Robertson adjourned the Finance Committee meeting at 9:16pm.

SELECT BOARD ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Mr. Haddad said that the Zoning Board of Appeals had requested that the Select Board appoint Krzysztof Jezak as an Associate Member of the Zoning Board of Appeals. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board consider making this appointment.

Ms. Manugian moved that the Board appoint Krzysztof Jezak as an Associate Member of the Zoning Board of Appeals. Mr. Degen seconded. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Cunningham-aye; Reilly-aye

2. Mr. Haddad asked the Board if they were okay with the letter to Mass Housing relative to the proposed Heritage Landing project. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to vote to allow the Chair to sign the letter for submittal.

Mr. Degen made that motion. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Cunningham-aye; Reilly-aye

3. Mr. Haddad said that at last week's meeting, the Board voted to remove the Town Seal Modification Article from the Town Meeting Warrant and add a Non-Binding Referendum to the Annual Town Election Ballot. Mr. Haddad read the following proposed ballot question language:

NON-BINDING REFERENDUM - Should the Seal of the Town of Groton be modified by removing the words "Holy Bible" from the image of the book in the center of the Seal, leaving the image of the book blank?

Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board approve this wording.

Mr. Degen moved to approve the wording as presented. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion.

Ms. Manugian said she was concerned people might think the book itself was being removed. Mr. Bouchard said that he would put in the ballot book a picture of the seal before and after.

Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Cunningham-aye; Reilly-aye

4. Mr. Haddad said that Mr. Patel appealed the liquor license suspension and asked the Board to vote to stay the suspension.

Mr. Degen moved to stay the suspension of Boston Road Market pending outcome of ABCC hearing. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Cunningham-aye; Reilly-aye

ON-GOING ISSUES

Ms. Pine said it was exciting to hear earlier that day that the car charging stations had been shipped.

C: Ms. Pine said that she thought they had 5 years to reduce their energy costs and asked where they were. Mr. Haddad said he would forward them their first report.

Mr. Cunningham asked if the Board was interested in issuing a proclamation to show solidarity to Ukraine. The Board was in favor of this. Mr. Cunningham said he would prepare something for their next meeting.

MINUTES

Mr. Degen moved to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting on March 7, 2022. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Degen-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham-aye

Ms. Pine adjourned the meeting at 9:26pm.

Approved: _____
Peter S. Cunningham, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted:
Dawn Dunbar,
Executive Assistant to the Town Manager

Date Approved: 3/28/22