# **SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

# **MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2023**

**TOWN HALL SECOND FLOOR MEETING ROOM**

**SB Members Present:** John F. Reilly, Chair; Rebecca H. Pine, Vice Chair; Matthew F. Pisani, Clerk; Alison S. Manugian

**SB Absent:** Peter S. Cunningham

**Also Present:** Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager, Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk, Patricia DuFresne, Town Accountant, Destination Groton Committee: Gregory M. Sheldon, Chair; Jeff Gordon, Joni Parker-Roche, Julie Platt, Mairi Elliot; Senator John Cronin, Representative Margaret Scarsdale, Representative Danillo Sena

John Reilly called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and reviewed the agenda.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

None

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None

**TOWN MANAGERS REPORT**

1. **Mr. Haddad requested in Pursuant to M.G.L. c.41, §10 that the Select Board vote to add vacancies on the Park Commission and the Trustees of the Groton Public Library to the May 23, 2023 Annual Election Ballot.**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to add vacancies on the Park Commission and the Trustees of the Groton Public Library to the May 23, 2023 Annual Election Ballot. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

1. **Mr. Haddad recommended that Pursuant to M.G.L. c.54, Section 25B(c)(1) the Board consider whether or not to conduct early voting for the May 23, 2023 Annual Town Election be continued to the March 27, 2023 Select Board meeting.**

*Ms. Manugian made a motion to continue the determination whether or not to conduct early voting for the May 23, 2023 Annual Town Election until March 27, 2023. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion was* carried unanimously.

1. **Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Development Update**

Mr. Haddad said that there were no new updates for the FY24 budget.

1. **Update on Select Board Meeting Schedule Through 2023 Spring Town Meeting**

Mr. Haddad updated the Select Board on the upcoming meetings.

Monday, February 6, 2023 -Affordable Housing Trust Update/ Report

Wednesday, February 8, 2023 -GDRSD Committee Meeting- Superintendent Presents

Preliminary Budget

Monday, February 13, 2023 - Regularly Scheduled Meeting

Monday, February 20, 2023 - No Meeting (President’s Day)

Monday, February 27, 2023 -Executive Session to review collective Bargaining Budgeting Related Issues - Review First Draft of 2023 Spring Town Meeting Warrant

Monday, March 6, 2023 - Regularly Scheduled Meeting

Monday, March 13, 2023 -Public Hearing of 2023 Spring Warrant Regularly scheduled meeting

Wednesday, March 15, 2023 -School Committee Approves Budget

Monday, March 20, 2023 -No Meeting

Monday, March 27, 2023 -Regularly Scheduled Meeting

Monday, April 3, 2023 - Regularly Scheduled Meeting

Monday, April 10, 2023 - Approve Warrant for Posting

Monday, April 17, 2023 - No Meeting (Patriot’s Day

Monday April 24, 2023 - Regularly Scheduled Meeting

Saturday, April 29, 2023 -2023 Spring Town Meeting

**ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND ACTION**

1. **Consider Approving Memorandum of Understanding to Join North Central Climate Change Coalition (NC4)**

Phil Francisco was present to review the request of the North Central Climate Change Coalition. He provided a background of the NC4 saying that the group was formed in 2021 and is composed of 17 municipalities. The mission is to establish a cohesive voice within the Commonwealth and look for opportunities to address climate change on a State and National level. He said that the importance of the NC4 is to be able to receive grants across the region and provide additional visibility and credibility. Mr. Francisco said that last summer the draft of the MOU was reviewed by Groton’s Counsel and then after revisions were compiled the Sustainability Commission unanimously supported it.

Ms. Manugian questioned how the NC4 group functions in accordance with the open meeting law. Mr. Francisco said that the group abides by the open meeting by posting on the municipalities’ websites two days prior to any upcoming meeting and that they are held virtually on zoom to allow for members to easily attend the meetings. He said that there needs to be a minimum of four member municipalities for a quorum or three members and one organization member not representing a municipality. Ms. Manugian asked about the advocacy mechanisms. Mr. Francisco said that the NC4 advocates for the Select Board and if there are any important issues or proposals they would return and discuss with the Select Board to hear their recommendations or comments.

Ms. Pine said that it is extremely important for the NC4 to be able to continue meeting remotely.

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the Memorandum of Understanding to Join North Central Climate Change Coalition (NC4). Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

**Public Hearing – Pursuant to M.G.L. c.54, §25B(a)(1) – Consider Opting Out of Vote by Mail for the May 23, 2023 Annual Town Election**

Mr. Haddad read aloud the M.G.L. c.54, §25B(a)(1) and highlighted that the Select Board has the ability to vote not less than 45 days prior to the election to opt out of Voting by Mail.

Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk was present for the hearing. She displayed a diagram from the Danvers Town Clerk regarding the “Vote by Mail Process” and discussed each step. She said that a vote by mail takes an estimation of 7 minutes to be fully processed and is extremely time consuming. The Primary and General Election were the first two elections that vote by mail were instituted by the Votes Act of 2022. On September 6, 2022 there were 768 ballots that were received by mail or early voting and totaled 33% of all votes. On November 8, 2022 for the General Election 41% of votes received were by mail or early voting. Ms. Dunbar expressed that the work required cannot be accomplished by her, and the two Assistant Town Clerks, the volume is too substantial. She strongly urged for the Select Board to opt out of Voting by Mail due to the additional funding required and the amount of labor that is imposed on the Town Clerk’s Office. Ms. Dunbar estimated $7,000 in extra funding to cover the costs for additional election workers and to send postcards notifying all registered voters of the option to Vote by Mail. She explained that this is a yearly vote required by the Select Board. Ms. Dunbar said that Town Clerks are divided across the State and Pepperell has opted in while Lunenburg has opted out. Mr. Haddad asked if the Board of Registers had taken a position. Ms. Dunbar said that the Board of Registers is recommending that the Select Board Opt out of Voting by Mail due to the additional work burdened on the Town Clerk’s office and the additional expenses on residents. Ms. Dunbar said that the absentee ballot is still available.

Ms. Manugian asked if the paper application has to be received by the Town Hall or if it can be downloaded. Ms. Dunbar said that some applications were received electronically however; the forms need to be kept on file and the voters signature needs to be verified. She said that a postcard is unnecessary and that the State does provide a form so voters can request to receive ballots by mail for each election in one given year. Ms. Manugian asked what the savings would be if they chose not to send a postcard. Ms. Dunbar said approximately $2,000.

Ms. Pine questioned the process on an absentee ballot. Ms. Dunbar said that the Votes Act changed the absentee ballot and there needs to be a reason stated why the voter cannot be present. The ballot would be mailed to the voter and then returned by mail. Ms. Pine was concerned for residents that may not be comfortable with voting in person at the polls due to Covid-19 and by opting out of Voting by Mail or Early Voting it does not provide an alternative option. Mr. Haddad stated that last year and during the pandemic voting was conducted in person.

Ms. Manugian commented that it is important to have as many residents as possible to vote and the request is a relatively minor investment. Ms. Pine was surprised that the postage expenditure is more than the labor cost. Ms. Dunbar said that postage costs have increased and that she would be working on filling out a survey in hopes of receiving a reimbursement for some of the costs from the Primary and General Election. Mr. Haddad said that the State will not cover Town Elections. Ms. Pine recommended keeping the Vote by Mail option to allow for residents who may find it difficult coming into the polls. She felt that the postcards are unnecessary and the residents can be notified by publications around Town.

Mr. Reilly asked what the time frame is regarding the nominations. Ms. Dunbar said that the nomination papers go live on Wednesday, February 1, 2023 and the deadline is Tuesday, April 4, 2023. Ms. Pine questioned if the Select Board were to opt in for Vote by Mail can there be a request that the ballot be postmarked by a specific date. Mr. Haddad said no, the State Law needs to be adhered to. If early voting is allowed it would be required one week prior. Mr. Haddad asked when the deadline for allowing for early voting is and said that an override may dictate the decision. Ms. Dunbar said prior to April 8, 2023. Mr. Haddad recommended that the Select Board continue the public hearing until March 27, 2023.

*Ms. Manugian made a motion to continue the public hearing regarding opting out to Vote by Mail for the May 23, 2023 Annual Town Election until March 27, 2023. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

**Legislative Update – Senator John Cronin, Representative Margaret Scarsdale, Representative Danillo Sena**

Mr. Haddad welcomed Senator John Cronin, Representative Margaret Scarsdale, and Representative Danillo Sena and commended them for joining the discussion tonight. He said he would like to address a few important issues including the Florence Roche Elementary School, State Aid, PFSA at the High School, the Broadmeadow Road Project, and The Open Meeting Law.

Senator John Cronin said that he is extremely familiar with the area having grown up in Leominster. He is very excited to work with the Town and be able to advocate for it. He said that he has been working closely alongside Mr. Cunningham on the Squannacook Rail Trail and the Elementary School and looks forward to continuing collaborating with others.

Representative Margaret Scarsdale said that she was a former Groton resident and is honored to become a public servant for the Town. She understands the priorities and is supportive of the continuance of remote public hearings.

Representative Danillo Sena said that he currently represents six towns. He said that he understands the budget requests and Earmarks that will benefit the Town. He said he would ensure that the Town is connecting with resources within the State.

Ms. Pine explained that PFAS was discovered in the High School Water and the school’s field irrigation systems. It has been determined that the increased amounts of PFAS were caused by a previous fire and the cleanup, unfortunately the company responsible has shut down. The Town is currently struggling to find funding for both the PFAS issue and the construction of the new Elementary School. Representative Sena said that the PFAS levels are similar to the Town of Boxborough and suggested a partnership with the Federal Government. He asked that the Select Board send any requests in writing or by email. Ms. Pine said that Broadmeadow Road regularly floods and there is a joining unpaved way that needs to be upgraded to an actual road. She said that there would be multiple benefits and it would alleviate traffic through the center of Town. Representative Cronin stated that those conversations have commenced with the Town Manager and said that there are two avenues to explore. The first one is the MVP Grant Program which has a substantial amount of money that has been appropriated at the legislature for climate resilience projects. The second avenue is engaging the MRPC Regional Planning Commission. Senator Cronin recommended that now is the time to commence that initial process with the Federal Funds that are anticipated over the next 8 years. Ms. Pine asked that the Representatives keep the Select Board informed with issues that potentially could impact the Town. In the past there have been flaws where the process could have been improved. Representative Scarsdale commented on the PFAS and said that it is a monumental challenge and not all Towns can afford $9 million dollars to remedy the issue. She agreed that they needed to find an appropriate way to address this. Representative Sena stated that he has formed a bill on promoting “clean drinking water quality for all.” He explained that when there is a purchase and sale and the dwelling contains a private well there would be a requirement to test the quality of water, knowing that mediation can be very expensive.

Mr. Pisani commented that the Towns resources are heavily residential based in regards to taxes and that the Town is going to need assistance for the additional items that might be unsustainable.

Ms. Manugian commented that it is very challenging to receive the School Districts Budget well after the deadline for the Town's Budget. She also mentioned the Covid impacts in learning and behavioral concerns that will not be remedied within the year and there will be a need for continued support. Representative Sena commented that some of the Towns do not require all day kindergarten. Ms. Manugian said that Groton offers a full day kindergarten that is tuition based and unfortunately it contains one of the highest rates in the surrounding towns and cannot be eliminated. She explained that Covid support is necessary and with her experience it is ultimately cheaper to address the issue sooner rather than later even though it is financially difficult.

Mr. Reilly said that communication and keeping each other informed is very important. He said that representatives need to understand each individual Town and continue to keep that in mind when they are advocating at the State House and he appreciates all the work they are committed to achieve. Representative Sena assured the Select Board that every concern can be addressed by working collaboratively and creating a strategic partnership.

Ms. Michelle Collette, Board of Health, said that she encouraged support for the bill formed by Representative Sena in regards to protecting drinking water quality for all and the protection it obtains for private wells. She said that there are several wells located in Dunstable in the vicinity of the Groton High School and the BOH has sent out notifications encouraging the abutters to conduct water quality testing on their private wells. She said that extending public water is a solution however may not be accessible in all areas. She commended the representatives for all their efforts.

**Destination Groton Committee Update**

The Destination Groton Committee played a short video that captured their vision for the Town of Groton and what it has to offer. Clips consisted of the prestigious education offered, the extensive trail systems, amenities, and the New England charm. Mr. Sheldon reviewed a PowerPoint presentation with the Select Board. He commenced by saying the Committee’s mission and goals are to narrate Groton’s quintessential story and engage stakeholders and collaborate with strategic partners. The objectives are to increase revenue, promote the numerous activities, and continue the quality of life. Mr. Sheldon then discussed the highlighted background of the rich history of the town, the extraordinary landscapes, and the exquisite dining opportunities which will all allow for the success in becoming a Destination Community. With the opening of Groton Hill Music it will accelerate the pace and increase the geographic range of people traveling to Groton. Other local businesses and the Town will benefit from the increase of generated revenue. Mr. Sheldon listed the Activities to Date which included participating in the MA Municipal Association “One Stop Economic Development Grant Application Webinar, meeting with the Planning Board, State and Town Officials. The Committee met with the Executive Director of the MA office of Travel and Tourism to discuss grant opportunities. He said that they are scheduled to meet with the US Representative Lori Trahan. Mr. Sheldon displayed the Nashoba Valley Living magazine and noted that the Fall/Winter edition is dedicated to the Town of Groton. Mr. Sheldon said that a series of three public forums were conducted with 100 participants, a synopsis is available on the Town Website. Concerns expressed were traffic mitigation and infrastructure. It was said that Groton should identify with Federal, State, Local, and Private grant opportunities to assist with funding Destination Groton. Mr. Sheldon assured that Groton would not become over-developed due to the very limited amount of land zoned commercial. Going forward the DGC would like to conduct a Town wide survey seeking to weigh the public support for specific programs and improvements. The DGC is planning on organizing a group to assist in researching and drafting a strategic implementation plan to then be submitted to the Town Manager and Select Board. Tonight the DGC is requesting that the Select Board consider signing the letter drafted to pursue a state grant from the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission.

Ms. Deborah Buckley from Principal of Deborah Buckley Associates was hired to design and produce the new website and logo for Destination Groton. Ms. Buckley unveiled the ICON, Tagline, Logo, and the Website ([www.DestinationGroton.com](http://www.destinationgroton.com)). She described the process as a team effort and said it was a great opportunity working for a committee. She said that a tagline needs to be memorable, simple and unique. Groton Enjoy the Experience would capture everything that the Town has to offer while creating memories. The logo displayed consisted of a rolling green hill representing Groton’s Landscape and the blue representing the many water sources. A focus group was formed of residents from Groton who all agreed upon the final image. Ms. Buckley discussed the Key components of a website which include the platform and navigation, search engine friendly, and user and brand experience. She then briefly discussed Robust and Professional Website & Services which entailed the system agreement, domain, and social media. She said that the website is compliant to all safety measures. Ms. Buckley navigated through the Experience Groton website. A user has the ability to explore the history, nature, recreation, acclaimed artist, unique dining experiences, performing arts, and equestrian destination. Each page included beautiful images that were captured from around Town. Ms. Buckley informed the Select Board that is only phase 1 and when the project is complete they hope to embrace and attract more people to the community.

Senator Cronin commended everyone who participated in creating such an incredible resource.

Mr. Pisani agreed and said that the project is a great adventure, and the highlights that have been embraced will encourage people to experience what Groton has to offer.

*Ms. Pine made a motion to forward the letter drafted to Mr. Glen Eaton in regards to pursuing grant writing services. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Haddad said that the Town has received numerous complaints of vehicles speeding on Main Street and the major concern is the visibility of pedestrians trying to cross in the crosswalk in front of Salt & Light. Mr. Haddad said that he has requested blocking 10 feet before the crosswalk heading east towards Littleton and 10 feet before the crosswalk heading west towards Pepperell to increase the visibility. There will be two parking spaces eliminated for the time being.

Mr. Haddad asked the Select Board to grant him permission to send the previously drafted letter to Governor Baker to Governor Healey.

*Ms. Manugian made a motion to grant the Town Manager permission to send the drafted letter to Governor Healey. Ms. Pine seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.*

**ON-GOING ISSUES**

Mr. Haddad said that there is a request for a proposal out on the PFSA issue to hire an engineer to explore interim solutions which may include trucking in water or a temporary line to Pepperell.

Mr. Haddad said that the MEP Bids have been received for the Florence Roche Elementary School Construction Project. The plumbing and HVAC bids were right on budget whereas the electric was substantially higher. He said that there is no need for concern due to the bids on the building envelope being substantially less. The project remains on budget and the additional funding of $9.5 seems to be sufficient. Mr. Haddad hopes that Senator John Cronin and Representative Margaret Scarsdale assist in passing the bill proposed by Senator Kennedy to provide relief. Mr. Haddad said that the steel erection is complete and was ahead of schedule. He said if the project continues this way their costs could be reduced.

Mr. Haddad said that Ms. Dufresne has provided a report regarding the ARPA Funding and it will be reviewed next week.

**MINUTES**

*Ms. Manugian made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting on January 23, 2023. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

The meeting was adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted: Kristine Fox, Minute Taker