# **SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

# **MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2023**

**TOWN HALL SECOND FLOOR MEETING ROOM**

**SB Members Present:** Rebecca H. Pine, Vice Chair; Alison S. Manugian, Peter Cunningham, Matthew F. Pisani

**SB Absent:** John Reilly, Chair

**Also Present:** Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk (acting Town Manager), Diversity and Equity and Inclusion Committee: Michelle Collette, Fran Stanley, And James Moore

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Vanessa Abrahams, Groton Librarian, said that this week the library would be launching the annual Groton Reads. They are partnering with the Groton Garden Club and there are two books to choose from: Nature’s Best Hope, A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard written by Douglas W. Tallamy and Gardening in Eden, The Joys of Planning and Tending a Garden written by Arthur T. Vanderbilt. Ms. Abrahams said there is a full month of free activities planned for March. She invited all patrons tomorrow February 14, 2023 to enjoy homemade goodies and hot chocolate. Ms. Abrahams said that Jeffrey Pike is retiring and she is asking for stories to be shared of Mr. Pike to help celebrate everything that he has accomplished for the library.

Ms. Dunbar said that she distributed an email to all Town Personnel regarding the Conflict of Interest Training and to remain compliant it must be completed within the next 30 days. She said the training would take approximately one hour to complete and is user friendly.

Mr. Cunningham said that the Conservation Forum is being held this Thursday, February 16, 2023 at 6:30pm at the Groton Center.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Dan Twomey, Groton Resident, advocated for all young families that reside in Groton and are expected to pay the $5,000 tuition for full day Kindergarten. He said that there are only 18 schools remaining in Massachusetts that are required to pay tuition and Groton is the highest of them all. He said families are significantly impacted by paying this additional fee along with the high tax rates.

**TOWN MANAGER REPORT**

**1. Review Memo from Town Clerk on Early Voting and Mail-In Voting for Annual Town Election**

Ms. Dunbar said that she attended the Massachusetts Town Clerk’s Conference last week. At that time she had asked Michelle Tassinari, Director and Legal Counsel for Elections Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth if the Board of Registrars were required to officially vote to not recommend In Person Early Voting or if taking no action was considered the same action. Ms. Tassinari confirmed that they both meant the same thing. Ms. Dunbar said she would not need to hold another meeting to officially recommend opting out of Early Voting. The only option at this point is to offer voters to Vote by Mail.

Connie Sartini, from the Groton Herald, commented that the Select Board can only take a position on Voting by Mail and not Early Voting. Ms. Dunbar said that is correct due to the Board of Registrars not recommending the action by more than 50%.

Mr. Cunningham asked what the consensus of the Select Board was at the previous meeting and said that he was unsupportive of Early Voting due to the lack of voters that took the opportunity last time it was provided. Ms. Pine said that there will be further discussion at an upcoming meeting and that there were concerns of the financial burden of Voting by Mail. However, there was recognition that the additional options provided flexibility to voters that may not be able to vote in person. She said the information presented by the Town Clerk tonight has made the decision easier.

Ms. Dunbar informed the Select Board that she received $4,000 as a reimbursement from the State for the expense of the Primary and General Election and the funds would be applied to the General Funds.

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

Ms. Dunbar said that Dr. Chesson, Groton Dunstable Regional School Superintendent, released her FY24 Proposed Budget and the proposed assessment for the Town of Groton is $27, 808,707. Mr. Haddad had budgeted $26,800,655 leaving a $1,262,939 deficit. He and the Finance team will be working over the next several weeks on determining how to balance the budget. There will be an Executive Session held on February 27, 2023 at 6:30pm to discuss Collective Bargaining adjustments to try and cover some or the entire deficit. Then on March 4, 2023 at 8:30am the Finance Team and the Select Board will be meeting to discuss the budget in a joint session.

**3. Update on Select Board Meeting Schedule through 2023 Spring Town 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

-Consider Approving DPW Director in Training Program

Saturday, March 4, 2023 -Joint Budget Meeting with Finance Committee

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 -Continuance of Public Hearing on Mail in Voting at Annual Town Election

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

**ITEM FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND ACTION**

**1. Ms. Dunbar asked the Select Board to approve the letter of support to the Community Preservation Committee on the Affordable Housing Trust Application.**

Ms. Pine said that the Affordable Housing Trust had met with the Planning Board and the Housing Authority and they had both agreed to draft a letter of support.

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve the letter of support to the Community Preservation Committee on Affordable Housing Trust Application. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion was carried. Ms. Pine-abstain*

Ms. Manugain said that it was important to provide the Trust with funding to establish a track record; however, she is not fully supportive of the request made for consistent funding.

**2. Ms. Dunbar asked the Select Board to approve the letter of interest and the application to MRPC to update the Walkability Study.**

Ms. Dunbar said that the Planning Board reached out to the MRPC for a Unified Planning Working Program to provide assistance to study the walkability in the Town of Groton. She said that there is an extensive trail network however, not everything can be accessed on foot. The amount of pedestrian traffic has increased and the need for improvement is necessary. A study was performed 10 years ago and the MRCP is requesting for an updated study. Ms. Dunbar said that she had conversed with the Planning Board and was told that a letter of interest needs to be submitted prior to February 28, 2023. She said that the Planning Board has granted Russell Burke permission to file and submit the application. Ms. Dunbar said that she asked Mr. Tada to draft the letter to show that Groton is interested in updating the study.

Ms. Manugian asked for clarification if the walkability study assists in connecting sites and not only replaces sidewalks. Mr. Cunningham said that the previous study was very resourceful and assisted in applying for State Grants to be utilized for sidewalk extensions. The one for West Groton has been approved and it is expected to be completed this year. Ms. Dunbar confirmed that Mr. Tada is waiting on the engineering plans for the West Groton extension along with the extension from Rt40 proceeding up to Gibbet Hill, and the work on Peabody Street. Ms. Manugian asked if the study would only mirror roadways. Ms. Dunbar said she believes that the study would explore everything including pathways to connect establishments. Ms. Pine agreed that the study would be beneficial for the Town.

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to authorize the Select Board Chair to sign the letter of interest to the MRPC to update the Walkability Study. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

*Ms. Manugian made a motion to approve the application to be submitted to the MRPC to update the Walkability Study. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

**3. Ms. Dunbar asked the Select Board to approve a One Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott for an Open Mic Night at the Prescott School on Friday, March 10, 2023 from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.**

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve a One Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott for an Open Mic Night at the Prescott School on Friday, March 10, 2023 from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

**Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee – Annual Report Update**

Ms. Dunbar said that there was an error in the posting of the February 9, 2023 Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee meeting. The login password for zoom was inadvertently left off the posting. The meeting was held and recorded on zoom. Ms. Dunbar spoke with the Open Meeting Law Division and they said it is up to the Committee how to remedy the violation. Ms. Dunbar said that she also spoke with the DEI Chair and they agreed that it would be proper for the violation to be added to the DEI’s agenda for further discussion. She formally apologized for the error.

Ms. Michelle Collette, James Moore and Fran Stanley were present for the annual Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee update.

Ms. Collette said that a year ago the Committee’s name was changed to the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee. She said that the Committee is made up of 7 voting members and one nonvoting member (Officer Gordon Candow). Ms. Colette expressed that the Committee is very fortunate to have Officer Gordon Candow. He has been extremely resourceful with determining when police intervention is needed. The Committee has been focusing on reporting incidents of hate and hate crimes. Ms. Collette expressed that at times the position is challenging and can be emotional. The Select Board had asked the DEI Committee to formulate impactful Select Board and Groton wide interventions to recognize and try to prevent incidents of prejudice and hatred. The DEI Committee has recommended that the Select Board make a statement to condemn the incident and recognize the victimized community excluding incidents within the School District. Ms. Collette said that annually the Select Board would be provided a report from the DEI Committee on incidents of hate and hate crimes within the Town. She said that a forum is planned to educate the community about official hate incidents and crimes. Marian Ryan, Middlesex District Attorney, has been asked to attend the forum. The Committee will be celebrating Juneteenth by partnering with neighboring towns to coordinate a series of activities.

Ms. Collette apologized for the error of the missing login password and that said that the Committee would be discussing the violation at their next scheduled meeting.

Mr. Pisani said that he is very appreciative of all the work the Committee has done and expressed that this is a proactive group and it shows that Groton is embracing this. Mr. Cunningham commented that it is important to invite speakers such as Marian Ryan to discuss what constitutes a hate crime. Ms. Collette said in all the situations the Committee has reached out to the targeted individuals and made them aware that the Town is supportive of them. Ms. Pine informed the Board that Marian Ryan has sponsored a webinar once a month in regards to hate crimes and it is very resourceful. She recommended that the Committee subscribe to the mailing list.

Ms. Pine requested that there be clarification within the reporting of incidents of hate crimes, “The Select Board will make a statement to condemn the incident and recognize the victimized community excluding the Groton Dunstable Regional Public School and Private Schools.” She said that the Town has no jurisdiction within the Schools. Ms. Pine said she was collaborating with the Conservation Commission and they have identified a piece of land that will be named after the Nipmuc Tribe and it will be finalized in the next couple of months. They would like to ask a representative from the Nipmuc Tribe to partake in the process.

Mr. Moore said it's amazing the timeline of how long that people have inhabited this area. He suggested combining the idea of naming the parcel of land after the Nipmucs and creating a trail to signify movement. Ms. Pine commented that in those hundreds of years people relied heavily on rivers for travel. Mr. Moore said it is important to keep the initiative of Destination Groton in mind. Ms. Collette noted that there is a resident of Groton who is an active member of the United Native American Cultural Center and partnering with that organization to request their knowledge and participation would be significant.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Ms. Manugian said that the School Committee had previously looked into eliminating the tuition for full day Kindergarten however; they had received numerous concerns from parents that did not want the option of ½ day kindergarten removed. She also recommended that the Select Board members review the School Committees presentation from January 25, 2023, the Superintendent had identified various scenarios if the deficit was not met by the municipalities and the reductions that would need to occur. Ms. Manugian said she hopes the Town Manger can compile a similar document.

Ms. Manugian said that she has noticed that the parking lot lights are remaining on throughout the night at the Groton Hill Music Center and feels that it is unnecessary and should be addressed.

Mr. Cunningham said that he is working on drafting a letter to other communities that have been impacted by school debt to encourage them to work with their legislatures to support the bill established by Senator Kennedy. Ms. Manugian requested that MASC is included when the letter is distributed.

**ON-GOING ISSUES**

Ms. Dunbar said that the Select Board had met in a joint session with the School Committee and the Town Manager and Tom Orcutt would continue to work on the PFAS issue. Ms. Pine said that WBUR is airing a week-long program on PFAS and a segment emphasized on the fertilizer that comes from septic sludge contains a high level of PFAS.

**SELECT BOARD LIAISON REPORTS**

**MINUTES**

*Ms. Manugian made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting on February 06, 2023. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 pm

Respectfully Submitted by Kristine Fox, Minute Taker