# **SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

# **MONDAY, MARCH 06, 2023**

**TOWN HALL SECOND FLOOR MEETING ROOM**

APPROVED

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

**SB Absent:** none

**Also Present:** Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant; Dr. Laura Chesson, GDRSD Superintendent; Nik Gualco, Conservation Administrator; Division of Fisheries and Wildlife; Megan Foster, Principal Assessor; Treasurer/Collector, Hannah Moller

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Haddad asked the Town Clerk to give everyone an update on a few matters.

Ms. Dunbar announced to the public, nomination papers are now available in the Town Clerk’s Office and need to be returned by April 4, 2023. Fifty (50) registered voter’s signatures are required. Ms. Dunbar also announced there are currently several elected boards with vacancies. Census forms were mailed out in January but they have not heard from 1,700 households. Late fees are now effective as of March 1st, 2023 to register your dogs and they would like to encourage everyone to please come in. They are 700 dogs short of being registered from last year.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None

**TOWN MANAGERS REPORT**

1. **Consider Request from Middlesex County Retirement Board to Provide COLA**

The Middlesex Country Retirement Board is requesting the Select Board to vote to accept Chapter 269 of the Acts of 2022. This is a local option which allows a one-time increase to the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) granted to retirees in FY 2023, from 3% to 5%. Town Treasurer/Collector, Hannah Moller, was in attendance to help answer any questions or concerns the Select Board members may have. Ms. Moller said there are implications and no community has rejected this increase. Ms. Moller said this would be an increase of $800 this year to our retirees. Ms. Moller asked the Select Board to consider adopting this Act.

Mr. Cunningham asked Ms. Moller if they choose not to endorse this Act, will the increase still go through? Ms. Moller said would if two-thirds of the communities in Middlesex County approve it. She said every 2 years we see a 2% increase and the amount will get added to the base. Ms. Connie Sartini questioned how many towns are in the Middlesex County District? Ms. Moller said there are there are 5394 retirees in Middlesex County and there are thirty-one towns.

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to accept Chapter 269 of the Acts of 2022, to allow a one-time increase to COLA to retirees in FY 2023, from 3 percent to 5 percent. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

1. **Consider Request from Division of Fisheries and Wildlife to Purchase Conservation Restriction on Brownloaf Property**.

Mr. Haddad announced the Department of Fish and Game is here tonight. Conservation Administrator, Nik Gualco and the Department of Fish and Game have sent letters to the Select Board requesting the Select Board to consider selling a Conservation Restriction to the Department of Fish and Game for the Brownloaf Property. This property was sold to the town in 1999 for municipal purposes. The 2011 Spring Town Meeting voted to authorize the Select Board to transfer the care and custody to the Conservation Commission for conservation purposes. The town has tried several times to utilize this property for municipal purposes but has not been successful. The town has had no interest in this parcel and Fish and Game is willing to purchase a conservation restriction.

Mr. Cunningham wants to make sure public access will be maintained there. He would like to make sure when the restriction is drafted it retains the right for the public to allow any access to pre-existing trails for hiking and non-motorized vehicles.

Mr. Pisani asked if there are any trails documented on this parcel. Mr. Cunningham said there are trails out there, maybe the Trails Committee has a map of them. Mr. Gualco said this is the intention of the Conservation Commission, to not lose any existing uses. By April 29th, there should be drafts of the Conservation Restrictions for the Select Board to review with the language in there.

Mr. Haddad asked Mr. Gualco what he is looking for from the Select Board? Mr. Gualco said they are looking for two actions this evening: To commit to working with the Conservation Commission and Fish and Game and to place a Conservation Restriction and a vote of support to move forward with a letter for documentation.

Ms. Manugian asked where will the funding go that comes in from the sale. Mr. Haddad said it will go into the General fund and close out as free cash.

*Ms. Pine made a motion to authorize the Town Manager to write a Letter of Support that the Select Board would work with the Department of Fish and Game for a conservation restriction on the Brownloaf Property and to grant permission to agents of Fish and Game to access the property for the purpose of conducting an appraisal. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. The motion approved by a majority vote, 4 in Favor, 1 Abstain - Manugian.*

1. **Consider Ratifying the Town Manger’s Appointment of Barbara Keast as an Election Worker.**

Ms. Dunbar, our Town Clerk, has recommended that the Town Manager appoint Ms. Barbara Keast as an Election Worker.

*Ms. Pine made a motion to ratify the Town Manager’s appointment of Barbara Keast as an Election Worker, Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

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

Mr. Haddad said Saturday’s Joint Meeting with the Finance Committee went well. GDRSG Superintendent, Dr. Chesson did a great job. Mr. Haddad provided a revised Town Manager’s Proposed Operating Budget update with the outlined changes after the meeting. The minor adjustments that were outlined, allowed for an increase in the Groton Dunstable Regional School District Assessment by $400,000 from $1,218,398 to $1,618,398, with Assessment going from $24,319.318 to $25,937,716. The Dispatch Position and Firefighter position would be the most important positions to be added back to the budget if funding became available.

Since Saturday there have been additional changes. The revised Town Manager’s Proposed Operating Budgets from March 6, 2023 lists the most up to date changes. The school received great news about their health insurance rate which came in at 5.9%, and not the 15% they were carrying. This is a savings of $476,000. Dr. Chesson sent a list of crucial positions she would like to be added back into the budget. Dr. Chesson will recommend these to the School Committee. If the Select Board and Finance Committee want to fund Mr. Haddad’s request of $107,000 and Dr. Chesson’s request of $175,014, they would need additional funding of $282,014. The possibility of an Override in FY 2024 was discussed, to fund the reductions in the School Districts Assessment and the Town’s Operating Budget. This would add $0.12 to the tax rate.

Mr. Haddad wants the information shared and to keep the board up to date.

Mr. Reilly asked if the override can be exclusive to the school and it can go back to our original municipal budget. Mr. Haddad said it is based off of whatever Town Meeting votes on. Ms. Pine said there are some implications when saying it is an override for the schools. People have not followed the level of detail that we have. We need to show it will benefit the municipal side and the schools. We would do better if it is presented this way.

Ms. Manugian asked if they can we get a final list on what has been cut on both sides? Dr. Chesson said she will send a final reduction list that she will recommend to the School Committee.

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

Wednesday, March 8, 2023 - School Committee Approves Budget

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

Monday, March 20, 2023 - No Meeting

Monday, March 27, 2023 - Continuation of Public Hearing on Mail in Voting at Annual Town Election

Monday, April 3, 2023 - Finalize the FY 2024 Town Operating Budget

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 Ratifying New-Three Year Agreement with Fire Chief Steele McCurdy**

Mr. Haddad said he is pleased that Fire Chief Steele McCurdy has accepted the Select Board’s offer for a new three (3) year Agreement. The terms of the Agreement are as follows:

A Three-year contract from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2026.

B. Compensation:

FY 2024- Annual Salary of $145,000

FY 2025- 2 % COLA and up to 2 % performance incentive added to base

FY 2026- 2% COLA and up to 2% performance incentive to base

1. Add the following Health Insurance Opt-out Language:

Employee can choose to “Opt-Out” of the Town’s Health Insurance Program subject to the following:

The employee shall receive twenty- five (25%) percent of the Town potion of the health insurance plan the employee is enrolled in at the time of the “Opt-Out“. The pro-rated amount shall be provided to the employee divided by the number of remaining pay periods in the Fiscal Year that is being paid; and

For the employee to the eligible, they need to provide proof of Health Insurance Coverage; and

For the employee to be eligible for the “Opt-Out” option, they need to be enrolled in the Town’s Health Insurance Program in the preceding entitlement period.

D. Education Incentive- Educational Incentive Payments to the employee shall be made in accordance with the following:

Master’s Degree in Fire Science $2,000

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion that the Board ratify the new three year Agreement between the Town and Chief Steel McCurdy. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried 4-0. Pisani Abstained.*

**OTHER BUSINESS**

**ON-GOING ISSUES**

PFAS Issue: The Select Board has asked to look at Groton Option for the PFAS issue. Wednesday there will be a meeting to put together a full plan and the Board will talk about it during the Public Hearing on the Warrant at next Monday’s meeting.

Water Department- Manganese Issue- Mr. Haddad said the Water Treatment Plant project to address the manganese is going well.

On March 13, at UMass Amherst, the Joint Committee on Ways and Means will conduct a public hearing to discuss Chapter 70 and Unrestricted Local Aid. This will be a virtual or in person event.

Ms. Dunbar said there are four different bills to extend remote meetings past March 31st. This would extend the current rules through 2025, Ms. Dunbar will provide the information as she receives it.

**MINUTES**

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting from February 27, 2023 as presented. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.*

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25pm.

Respectively submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager