

SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 2024
S.B. APPROVED / FINCOM APPROVED

SB Members Present: Peter Cunningham, Chair; John Reilly, Vice Chair; Alison Manugian, Clerk; Matt Pisani; Becky Pine

Also Present: Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Tom Delaney, DPW Director; Brian Callahan, DPW Director In Training; Patricia Dufresne, Assistant Finance Director/Town Accountant; Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk; Hannah Moller, Treasurer/Tax Collector; Megan Foster, Principal Assessor; Jason Kauppi, Moderator

Finance Committee: Bud Robertson; Colby Doody; Mary Linskey; Michael Sulprizio

Mr. Cunningham called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Cunningham wanted to take a moment to take note of the passing of Earl Carter. Mr. Carter was an icon in the community and the “go-to” guy if you wanted to know something about Groton. He also wanted to extend his condolences to Mr. Carter's wife and family. Ms. Pine added that Mr. Carter had an amazing collection of Groton’s memorabilia. She hoped that the Town would find a way to preserve and share this history with the public, which Mr. Carter wanted. Mr. Carter oversaw the restoration of the cannon in front of Legion Hall. He also repaired the clock in the tower of the Unitarian church. Mr. Reilly said Mr. Carter was one of his best friends and had contributed greatly to developing the town's buildings and roadways. He was a true legend and a great man and will be greatly missed in Town. His biggest pride and joy was the restored Revolutionary War cannon. His efforts received national recognition for the restoration. Mr. Pisani said he did many things that no one knew about for the community. He said this is a significant loss.

Mr. Cunningham announced that the Groton Center had been recognized with national accreditation, and Groton was one of only nine centers in Massachusetts to receive this recognition. The Groton Center held a celebration ceremony. Mr. Cunningham appreciates all the hard work from the Council on Aging and staff put into making this happen.

Ms. Manugian announced that the new Superintendent interviews had been completed and that feedback forms were available on the Groton Channel.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Brian Leblanc, a member of the School Committee, expressed concern about the timing of the upcoming Town Meeting. He explained that during the previous Select Board Meeting, the timing of the meeting had been discussed, whether it should be held on a weekend or weekday. The Superintendent provided input on the matter, and Mr. Leblanc suggested holding the meeting on a weeknight rather than a weekend to have better attendance from parents. Ms. Manugian asked about when sports activities typically begin, and Mr. Leblanc said they usually start around April 1st.

Ms. Moller, the Treasurer/Tax Collector, wanted to inform everyone that applications for the TREAD program are now available for eligible seniors. She suggested reviewing the website and contacting the Tax Collector's office for more information. The deadline for submitting applications is January 31st.

Lisa Murry, representing Girl Scouts, was concerned about a new fee being implemented for user groups at the Groton Center. She wanted to bring attention to the difficulty of finding a meeting space for non-profit groups.

Ms. McWade, a member of the Council on Aging, raised concerns about the newly implemented Groton Center's Use Policy. She states she'd received multiple calls about it and felt the Council should have more input. Mr. Cunningham mentioned that a delicate balance must be maintained to protect the facility and ensure it is safe. Also, she said it was discussed that the Council on Aging (COA) would like to have more input on the process of choosing a new Council on Aging Director.

Mr. Francisco, a member of the Sustainability Commission, announced that the Seminar Series will restart on Wednesday, February 7, 2024, at the Groton Center at 7:00 P.M. The seminar will focus on the Greenhouse Gas Inventory.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Consider Ratifying the Town Manager's Appointment of Jonah Gaboriault to the Groton Country Club Staff.

Mr. Pisani made a motion to ratify the Town Manager's appointment of Jonah Gaboriault to the Groton County Club Staff. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Update from the Town Manager on Filling the Council on Aging Director Vacancy- Consider Ratifying the Town Manager's Appointment of Nandi Munson as Interim Council on Aging Director.

Mr. Haddad explained the following process to replace Ashley Shaheen as the Council on Aging Director. He said they would first advertise the vacancy in the usual platforms (MMA, Groton Herald, Lowell Sun, Facebook, Town Website, and COA ListServ). Second, he would have a Screening Committee to help conduct the preliminary screening and interview candidates. The Screening Committee would comprise the following members: Executive Assistant Kara Cruikshank; Human Resource Director Melisa Doig; Community Engagement Specialist Nandi Munson. Select Board Member John Reilly; Council on Aging Member Michelle Collette and Mr. Haddad. Mr. Haddad said once the Committee narrowed down the field to 2 or 3 finalists, he would schedule interviews with the full Council on Aging for their review and recommendation. He said once that process was complete, he would bring forward his choice to the Select Board for their consideration and ratification. He hopes to have someone on board by the end of May. Ms. Shaheen's last day will be February 9, 2024. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Select Board ratify his appointment of Nandi Munson as Interim Council on Aging Director, effective February 9, 2024.

Ms. Pine made a motion to ratify the Town Manager's appointment of Nandi Munson as Interim Council on Aging Director, effective February 9, 2024. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

3. FY 2025 Budget Update

Mr. Haddad has announced that the Finance Committee and Select Board will hold a joint meeting on Saturday, January 27th, at 8:30 AM. The meeting is scheduled to take place at the Town Hall. Earlier today, Ms. Cruikshank, Ms. DuFresne (Assistant Finance Director/Town Accountant), Ms. Kersey (Director of Business and Finance for GDRSD), Dr. Chesson (Superintendent for GDRSD), and Mr. Robertson met to prepare for the upcoming meeting.

Mr. Haddad announced two Budget Forums will take place. The first forum will be held on Tuesday, February 27, 2024, beginning at 7:00 pm at the Swallow Union Elementary School in Dunstable. The second forum will be held on Wednesday, March 6, 2024, beginning at 7:00 pm at the Groton Center in West Groton.

Mr. Haddad said he and the Finance Team had a rating call with S&P Global Ratings, and they believe they did a good job. Mr. Haddad believes that the Town will retain its AAA Bond Rating. This will go before the ratings committee, and they will find out on Monday. They will proceed with their plans to go out to bond next week.

4. Update on Select Board Meeting Schedule Through the End of the Year

Saturday, January 27, 2024	Joint Budget Meeting with FinCom
Monday, January 29, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, February 5, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, February 12, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, February 19, 2024	No Meeting- Presidents Day
Monday, February 26, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting-held at Groton Center
Tuesday, February 27, 2024	Special Budget Forum- Swallow Union Elementary School
Monday, March 4, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting- REMOTE MEETING
Wednesday, March 6, 2024	Special Budget Forum- Groton (Senior) Center
Monday, March 11, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 18, 2024	No Meeting
Monday, March 25, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Tuesday, March 26, 2024	Potential New Date of the 2024 Spring Town Meeting
Monday, April 1, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Tuesday, April 2, 2024	Special Election to Consider an Override of Proposition 2 1//2
Monday, April 8, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 15, 2024	No Meeting- Patriots Day
Monday, April 22, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Saturday, April 27, 2024	Current date of 2024 Spring Town Meeting

ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND ACTION

- 1. Consider Approving a One Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Prescott Community Center/Friends of Prescott for Open Mic Night to be held on Friday, February 9, 2024 from 6:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.**

Mr. Pisani made a motion to approve a One Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Prescott Community Center/Friends of Prescott for Open Mic Night to be held on Friday, February 9, 2024, from 6:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

- 2. Consider Approving a One Day All Alcoholic Beverage License for the Prescott Community Center/Friends of Prescott for a Bubbly Cocktails/Mixology Class to be held on Friday, February 9, 2024 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.**

Mr. Pisani made a motion to approve a One Day All Alcoholic Beverage License for the Prescott Community Center/Friends of Prescott for a Bubbly Cocktails/Mixology Class to be held on Friday, February 9, 2024 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

6:15 P.M. Discussion with the Public Works Director on the Preliminary Review of the Potential Removal of the Squannacook River Dam.

Tom Delaney, the Public Works Director, and Brian Callahan, DPW Director in training, attended the meeting to discuss the potential removal of the Squannacook River Dam. Mr. Haddad asked them to explain the history of the project. Mr. Delaney explained that he took over the project in the 1990s when the leatherboard mill was sold for development, and the Squannacook River dam became the property of the Town. He said the town line runs through the middle of the dam, and the other half is held under tax title by the Town of Shirley, but the owner is Helmar Nielson from Florida. Mr. Nielson was the prior owner of the site in Groton. Mr. Delaney explained that they follow all of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) regulations and are up to date on their annual inspections. So far, approximately \$400,000 has been spent on the repairs, etc. The town's side of the dam is up to date, but the other side needed approximately \$500,000 in repairs (which is private property). Mr. Delaney said to move forward with the project, they require more information on the next steps. He said this was only a feasibility study to explore various options, including site-specific dam removal and associated costs. Mr. Delaney explained the importance of obtaining this information to make informed decisions. He mentioned they have a few options, and the study is expected to be completed in August. He added that DCR (Department of Conservation and Recreation) would likely issue a consent order, but it would be best to wait to see what DCR decides. He said their options were to buy land in Shirley; the owner of the land in Shirley could give it to the town, or they could remove the dam down to the bedrock base. Mr. Delaney explained that the preliminary design was free and stated that the town would decide. He said the Groton side is inspected every two years and has passed. Ms. Manugian said she thought it was great they applied for this and was happy they would have this information to make a final decision. Ms. Pine found it unfortunate that this had gone so far without the public knowing. Mr. Delaney said that when they received the notification and got the grant award, correspondence was sent to Mr. Haddad and published in the Groton Herald. He also mentioned that the Nashua River Association assisted him with the grant, as it was a complicated process.

Public Comment

A resident of 7 Pepperell Road wanted to thank Ms. Pine. She met with the residents at the dam after hearing news about it. She explained she wasn't opposed to removing dams and mentioned there are around 3,000 in Massachusetts. She added that it would have been great if residents were informed about it before Mr. Delaney applied for the grant. She said the dam is the center of West Groton and is

what makes it beautiful. She wanted to add that they appreciate all the work that has been done. Mr. Cunningham said he believed applying for a feasibility study was appropriate.

Carl Canner pointed out that the town has already invested a lot of money into the issue and proposed a committee to study the dam. Ms. Pine asked who was responsible for conducting the study. Mr. Delaney said that the engineering firm Horsley Group, chosen by DER, would take care of it. Ginger Volmar, a resident, provided a summary of the dam's history to the Board. Carol Canner expressed her interest in being involved.

Mr. Cunningham stated that public feedback would be welcomed once the feasibility study was finished; they would revisit the topic.

7:00 P.M. Consider Changing the Date of the 2024 Spring Town Meeting to March 26, 2024. Call for a Special Override Election on Tuesday, April 2, 2024.

Chair Robertson called the Finance Committee to order at 7:00 P.M.

Mr. Haddad said last week he told the Select Board about the decision of the Dunstable Board of Selectmen to call for a Special Town Meeting on March 26, 2024, to consider approving their FY 2025 Budget prior to the proposed April 2, 2024, Special Override Election. Mr. Haddad stressed to the Board the importance of having Groton vote on its FY 2025 Budget on the same day. He had also requested that the Groton Select Board consider calling for a Special Town Meeting on that date to stay consistent with Dunstable. He explained to the Board that there could be a wrinkle with doing this as there's specific language in the Groton Charter that outlines the approval of the Annual Operating Budget. He said, unfortunately, that wrinkle was now a fact, based on the wording. According to Town Counsel, it is not possible to approve the Annual Operating Budget during a Special Town Meeting, but it can be approved at the Annual Spring Town Meeting. Therefore, his proposal for a Special Town Meeting to approve the budget couldn't happen.

Mr. Haddad strongly believes Groton should hold its vote on the same day as Dunstable. He requested the Board to consider changing the Spring Town Meeting date from April 27, 2024, to March 26, 2024. If approved, this change would result in only one Town Meeting and two local elections. The Annual Election will take place on April 23, 2024, three weeks after the Special Election. He said this change will not cost the Town any additional money, as there will still be two local elections (Special Override Election and Annual Town Election). It will also save the Town the cost of an extra Town Meeting. Mr. Haddad said there was still enough time to change the date of the Spring Town Meeting. The only issue is that it would move up the closing of the Warrant and Public Hearing.

Mr. Haddad reviewed and discussed the proposed timeline:

(Refer to the memo, Request to Consider Changing the Date of the 2024 Spring Town Meeting)

Ms. Dunbar, the Town Clerk, attended to discuss mail-in ballots and early voting and to answer any questions. Ms. Dunbar said voting by mail was required by all state, federal, and local elections unless the town chose to opt out of local elections. Ms. Dunbar recommended not opting out. She believed

early in-person voting would be important for both special and annual town elections. She said if the Select Board decided to call for a Special Override Election, she would ask the Board of Registrars to meet next week to consider making a recommendation to the Board on early in-person voting. Mr. Haddad said that based on the Board of Registrar's recommendations, he would include the in-person early voting discussion on the February 5th agenda. Mr. Haddad thanked the Town Clerk for the update.

Mr. Haddad stated that he knew the proposed timeline was aggressive. He explained that the School Committee has voted and prepared a Level Service Budget. Mr. Cunningham said aligning with the GDRSD and the Town of Dunstable made sense, conveyed a good message to the public, and showed consistency. Mr. Haddad said they were trying to give as many opportunities as possible to give public input and to get as much information out there relative to the budget. Ms. Manugian believes more information regarding the school budget must be provided to the public. She said it was hard to envision the aggressive schedule without enough information. Another concern was that she was unsure if the public would understand the significance of having a ballot vote if the budget didn't pass at the Town Meeting. Mr. Haddad explained that at the joint meeting of the Select Board and Finance Committee on Saturday, they would learn why the school budget is at an increase of 8.5 %. The school would provide answers to any questions Select Board members have asked. Mr. Haddad has provided the schools with all the questions from the Select Board and the Finance Committee to answer at the meeting. Ms. Pine believes the Select Board and Finance Committee could meet the aggressive schedule and had the budget under control. She said the CPC has a process and believes their timeline would have to be shortened. Mr. Haddad said he would work with the CPC if the Spring Town Meeting date changed to March 26th. Ms. Pine wasn't sure they could do a Town Meeting in one day. Mr. Haddad confirmed with the Moderator, Jason Kauppi, that the Town Meeting determines the dates. Mr. Haddad has reserved three dates, and the options are based on the Performing Art Center's availability.

Ms. Linskey said she was comfortable with the timeline as a Finance Committee Member, but was against it as a resident. She disagreed with the changes. Mr. Robertson asked when the Select Board would have to vote for an override election. Mr. Haddad said he would recommend that the Board do it this evening.

Mr. Robertson left the meeting at this time. FinCom quorum lost at 7:30 pm

Residents Mr. Francisco and Ms. Volmar commented that the timeline felt rushed.

Mr. Petropoulos, a resident of Groton, said he thought it was in everyone's best interest for the Town Meeting to vote first and then proceed with the election afterward. He believed the Board would be doing the Town a disservice otherwise.

Ms. Pine made a motion to change the 2024 Spring Town Meeting from April 27th to March 26, 2024. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion.

Mr. Reilly expressed concern that the timeline looks rushed, but he hoped the school would get the information out there. Mr. Pisani said they have a partner to work with and suggested that they vote on the same date as Dunstable. Ms. Manugian disagreed, saying that it would be detrimental to adjust the

schedule because they want to align with Dunstable. Ms. Pine stated they had very little time to put together the Special Town Meeting held in September of 2022, which was the most heavily attended meeting. Mr. Haddad said the \$5.5 million was presented in September by the Tri-Comm Committee, and it is not the first time this amount was discussed.

The motion carried 4-1, Manugian opposed.

Mr. Haddad respectfully requested the Select Board to call for a Special Election on April 2, 2024, to consider an override of Proposition 2 ½ and provide additional funding for Fiscal Year 2025. He said this additional funding would be sufficient for the next three Fiscal Years.

Ms. Pine made a motion to call for a Special Override Election on April 2, 2024, to consider an override of Proposition 2 ½ and provide additional funding for Fiscal Year 2025, and to issue a ballot question as follows:

“Shall the Town of Groton be allowed to assess an additional \$5,500,000 in real estate and personal property taxes to fund the operating budget of the Town and the Assessment of the Groton Dunstable Regional School District for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024?”

Mr. Pisani seconded the motion.

Ms. Manugian wanted to clarify that she supported the reality of needing an Override but not the accelerated timeline. The motion carried 4-1, Manugian opposed.

ON-GOING ISSUES

- A. Green Communities Application and Implementation- Mr. Haddad said Groton had been awarded a Green Communities Competitive grant for \$31,000. The grant was awarded for weatherization at the Middle School and a heat pump and hot water heater at the Town Hall.
- B. Florence Roche Elementary School- The Florence Roche Elementary School Construction Project tour has been rescheduled for February 6th at 11:45 a.m.

Approval of Minutes from January 8, 2024

Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting from January 8, 2024, with one correction on page 6. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

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