

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2024  
APPROVED**

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

**Also Present:** Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Melisa Doig, Human Resource Director; Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant; Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk; Nandi Munson, Acting Council on Aging Director; Nicole Sarvela, Council on Aging Director Candidate; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant; Hannah Moller, Treasurer/Tax Collector; Brian Edmonds, Park Commission Candidate

**Park Commissioners Present:** Brendan Mahoney, Chair; Anna Eliot, Vice Chair; Mary Jennings

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Ms. Pine explained that during the March 4<sup>th</sup> Select Board meeting, there was a Public Hearing for an On-Premise Retail Liquor License for Craft Beer Armory Brewing, LLC. The proposed location was 195C Main Street. She said many members of the Select Board expressed support for the applicant's proposed project but also raised concerns about the location. Mr. Schaffer has formally withdrawn his permit application for that specific location and is potentially looking for a different location.

Mr. Cunningham shared that he participated in an MMA webinar on Property Tax Relief for Elders. The webinar focused on solutions implemented in certain communities and explained some available local options. Mr. Cunningham said the Assessors are exploring these options with the hope of providing relief in the future. He said it was a great webinar.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

Sustainability Committee member Mr. Phil Francisco announced upcoming events they would be hosting. On Wednesday, March 13, there will be a Managing Stormwater and Snow Removal seminar. On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, there will be a session on Sustainable Food Choices. Also, on May 19<sup>th</sup>, the Sustainability Commission will host an EV (electric vehicle) and hybrid Petting Zoo. This event will take place at GrotonFest and the Groton Inn, where fourteen different models and hybrid choices will be available for visitors to learn about and ask their owners questions.

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- 1. Consider Ratifying the Town Manager's Appointment of Nicole Sarvela as the Council on Aging Director.**

Applicant Ms. Nicole Sarvela was in attendance.

Mr. Haddad informed the Board that the Search Committee for the Council on Aging Director has successfully completed their task. The Search Committee, which consisted of Mr. Haddad, Select Board Member John Reilly, Council on Aging Member Michelle Collette, Human Resource Director Melisa Doig, Executive Assistant Kara Cruikshank, and Acting COA Director Nandi Munson, received a total of 33 resumes for the position. After a thorough review of all the candidates and conducting interviews, the committee agreed that Ms. Sarvela was the best fit for the position. Ms. Sarvela is currently the

Assistant COA Director for the Town of Littleton. The Council on Aging unanimously recommended that Mr. Haddad appoint Ms. Sarvela, and the Department Heads supported her appointment. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Select Board consider ratifying his appointment. A copy of Ms. Sarvela's resume was enclosed with the Town Manager's Report to the Board.

Mr. Cunningham welcomed Ms. Sarvela. He explained that a few years back, Ms. Sarvela was one of the finalists during a Director Search when he was on the Council on Aging. However, her life took her in a different direction. He said a lot is happening at the Center with great staff, and he was happy to see her return. Mr. Reilly said our seniors are not like the others, but they are unique in a good way. He complimented Ms. Sarvela on a great interview. Mr. Haddad said Ms. Sarvela's research on the town and the minutes she read before the interview were impressive.

*Ms. Manugian made a motion to ratify the Town Manager's Appointment of Nicole Sarvela as the Council on Aging Director, effective April 8, 2024. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The vote carried unanimously.*

## **2. FY 2025 Budget Update.**

The second Budget Forum was held on Wednesday, March 6<sup>th</sup> at the Center, and Mr. Haddad was very pleased. He said it was well attended, and like the one in Dunstable, residents were respectful and asked excellent questions. He explained that the next steps in the process were Town Meeting, which is scheduled for March 26<sup>th</sup>, followed by the Override Election on April 2, 2024. Mr. Haddad said he believed the Select Board, Finance Committee, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Committee, the Town's Finance Team, and the GDRSD Administration had done an excellent job of providing information on the reason and importance of the Override Request and its impact on the FY 2025 Budget. He said they had provided more information to the Residents on the Budget than they ever have provided in the past. He said regardless of the outcome of the Override, they did their level best to ensure the Residents had all the information necessary to make an informed decision and had no regrets.

Mr. Haddad mentioned an issue that he wanted to comment on and meant to bring up at the Forum. He spoke about the potential impact of the override on the town's Bond Rating and how it may negatively affect the remaining borrowing of around \$25 million for the Florence Roche Elementary School project. The town has been making every possible effort to maintain its AAA Bond Rating since 2014 and has taken all necessary measures to do so. Mr. Haddad highlighted some of the strengths of the Ratings Review conducted by S&P in February. He expressed concern that if the Town needs to make major reductions to the budget and does not continue to focus on long-term planning, it may receive a negative outlook from S&P and a downgrade in the Bond Rating. This could result in a higher interest rate and the possibility of not receiving a premium when they permanently finance the remaining funds for the Florence Roche Elementary School Construction project. He wants the residents to understand that a higher interest rate would result in a major tax increase to pay for the excluded debt, which is raised outside the tax levy limit. Mr. Haddad expressed his concern about the issue and stated that he has been working hard to maintain the town's AAA Bond Rating to benefit residents and taxpayers. Mr. Cunningham asked how often S&P conducts a Bond Rating. Mr. Haddad explained that they have been meeting regularly with Wall Street due to the town's frequent borrowing. Treasurer/Tax Collector Ms.

Hannah Moller added that the frequency of Bond Ratings depended on the amount of money the town borrows. She said Bonds have been a significant source of funding for the town. They want to ensure that lenders know the town's strong financial position. Mr. Haddad said that was very important.

Mr. Haddad explained to the Board that the motions for Town Meeting were complete, and the Warrant will be sent to the Post Office on Tuesday, March 12th, and mailed to homes.

**3. Update on Select Board Meeting Schedule Through the 2024 Spring Town Meeting**

Monday, March 18, 2024	No Meeting
Monday, March 25, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 26, 2024	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 (HYBRID)
Monday, April 15, 2024	No Meeting- Patriots Day Holiday
Monday, April 22, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Tuesday, April 23, 2024	2024 Annual Town Election

**ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND ACTION**

**1. Approve and Issue the Ballot Question Booklet for the April 2, 2024 Special Town Election.**

A copy of the Ballot Question Booklet for the April 2, 2024, Special Town Election was provided to the Board for review. Mr. Haddad and the Town Clerk Dawn Dunbar worked collaboratively on the Ballot Question Booklet, which was reviewed and approved by Town Counsel. Mr. Haddad explained that he asked a few members of the Select Board to write the yes argument, and opponent Paul Fitzgerald wrote the no argument. Mr. Cunningham inquired about including the names of argument writers in the Booklet. Mr. Haddad said they had never done so in previous years, and Town Counsel stated that it was not required. The Board decided to omit the names from the Booklet. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board accept the Ballot Booklet and vote to authorize its issuance.

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve and issue the Ballot Question Booklet for the April 2, 2024, Special Town Election. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Mr. Haddad said he would ask the Town Clerk to include the sample ballot in the Booklet. The Ballot Booklet will be sent to the printer this week and mailed to households the week of March 17<sup>th</sup>.

**2. Consider Approving a One-Day All Alcoholic Beverages License for the Groton Business Association for GrotonFest to be held on Legion Common on Saturday, September 28, 2024, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve a One-Day All Alcoholic Beverage License for the Groton Business Association to be held at Legion Common on Saturday, September 28, 2024, from 10:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m., for tasting and the sale of alcohol. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

- 3. Consider Approving a Wine and Malt License for the Groton Business Association for the Monthly Association Meeting to be held at the Groton History Center on Wednesday, April 17, 2024, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Groton Business Association for the monthly association meeting to be held at the Groton History Center on Wednesday, April 17, 2024, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

- 4. Consider Approving a Wine and Malt License for the Groton Business Association for the Monthly Association Meeting to be held at Anytime Fitness on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve a One-Day Wine and Malt License for the Groton Business Association to be held at Anytime Fitness on Wednesday, May 15 2024, from 5:00 p.m.- 7:00 p.m. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

- 5. Consider Approving the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game's Request to Purchase Land in Groton.**

Mr. Haddad explained that the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) wanted to purchase a conservation restriction (CR) on two tracks of land in Groton. The Board Members received letters intended to serve as written notice of DFG's interest in acquiring these restrictions. Mr. Haddad explained that Track No. 2024-1-15 was owned by the Groton Conservation Trust, and Track No. 2024-1-14 was owned by NEFF's Wharton Plantation. Mr. Haddad asked the Select Board if they wanted to send letters of support for these restriction purposes, which the Conservation Commission had already done. Ms. Pine said that she was in favor of this and noted that the conservation restriction was another layer of protection against the land being developed. If there were some circumstances where the Trust lost ownership, then it would be developable if there wasn't a CR on it. Mr. Cunningham said he was inclined to agree but was worried about whether the Department of Fish and Game would place a restriction on the NEFF property and whether they would still permit horseback riding and non-motorized bicycle use on the trails located on this property. That evening, Mr. Cunningham suggested separating the properties and taking action on only Track No. 2024-1-15. He was not opposed to the CR, but he would like to receive more information on the NEFF transfer. Ms. Pine asked Mr. Haddad if there was any time urgency regarding this. He said he didn't have an answer to this question but could find out. Mr. Pisani said he echoed Mr. Cunningham's concerns. Groton resident Anna Eliot concurred with Mr. Pisani and Mr. Cunningham's opinions. The Board considered writing a letter of support for Track 2024-1-1-15, but they requested Mr. Haddad to find out if there would be any restrictions on Track No. 2024-1-14, which NEFF owns. The Board agreed to revisit the matter concerning Track No. 2024-1-14 on March 25, 2024.

*Ms. Pine made a motion to write a Letter of Support to the Department of Fish and Game for Track No. 2024-1-15, owned by the Conservation Trust. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

**6:15 P.M. IN JOINT SESSION WITH THE PARK COMMISSION- CONSIDER APPOINTING BRIAN EDMONDS TO THE PARK COMMISSION TO FILL A VACANCY UNTIL THE 2024 ANNUAL TOWN ELECTION**

Park Commissioners Mr. Brenden Mahoney, Ms. Anna Eliot, Ms. Mary Jennings, and Park Commission candidate Mr. Brian Edmonds were in attendance.

The Select Board met in a joint session with the Park Commission to fill a Vacancy caused by the resignation of Gail Chalmers. This appointment would be until the April 23, 2024, Annual Town Election. Mr. Haddad said Mr. Edmonds was taking out nomination papers, and he was voted unanimously by the Park Commission. Mr. Edmonds thanked the Select Board and members of the Park Commission for having him. Mr. Cunningham asked Mr. Edmonds to explain why he was interested in joining the Park Commission and give a background of his interests. Mr. Edmonds shared that he was raised in Pepperell and had a strong interest in public service. He mentioned that he was the youngest School Committee Member in the state and became a North Middlesex School Committee member at 19 years old. He later became an attorney with a desire to give back to the community. Mr. Mahoney expressed his confidence in Mr. Edmonds' ability to vote objectively on all items, and Ms. Elliott agreed. Mr. Edmonds has been actively involved in community work for the past few months. Ms. Jennings praised Mr. Edmonds for his collaborative approach, and Mr. Pisani said he appreciated his willingness to volunteer. Therefore, it was suggested that he place his name on the nomination papers for the vacancy on the Park Commission.

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to place Mr. Edmonds's name on the nomination papers for the Park Commission vacancy. Mr. Brian Edmonds to the Park Commission with a term to expire on April 23, 2024. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Eliot-aye; Mahoney-aye; Jennings-aye; Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham- aye; Pisani aye.*

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

**Pursuant to the Charter, Authorize the Town Manager and One Member of the Select Board to Sign Warrants for the Next 30 Days.**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to authorize the Town Manager and the Select Board Chair to sign Warrants for the next 30 days. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

#### **ON-GOING ISSUES**

No Updates

#### **SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS**

**Public Comment Period #2**

None

#### **Approval of Minutes from March 4 and 6th, 2024**

*Mr. Pisani made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of March 4, 2024. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

*Mr. Reilly made a motion to approve the minutes of the Budget Forum on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m. Respectively submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager.