

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY, APRIL 29, 2024  
APPROVED**

**SB Members Present:** Peter Cunningham; John Reilly; Becky Pine; Matt Pisani; Alison Manugian;  
**Also Present:** Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant; Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair; Tom Orcutt, Water Superintendent

Pursuant to the Select Board Policy regarding Board Re-organization, Mr. Haddad called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and reviewed the agenda.

**ANNUAL REORGANIZATION OF THE SELECT BOARD- PER SELECT BOARD OPERATIONAL POLICY, THE TOWN MANAGER CALLS THE MEETING TO ORDER AND CALLS FOR NOMINATION FOR CHAIR.**

Mr. Haddad called for nominations for the position of Chair. Ms. Pine nominated Ms. Manugian. Mr. Cunningham seconded the nomination.

Those in favor of Ms. Manugian – All five members were in favor of Ms. Manugian as Chair.

Ms. Manugian was voted in as Chair.

Ms. Pine expressed that Ms. Manugian should be Chair because of her leadership skills, excellent understanding of the school's finances and the Regional Agreement with Dunstable.

Ms. Manugian called for nominations for Vice Chair. Mr. Cunningham nominated Mr. Pisani, and Mr. Reilly seconded the nomination. Ms. Pine said that she would be interested in becoming Vice Chair. Mr. Pisani said that being newer to the position, he wouldn't mind another year of learning the role and supported Ms. Pine as Vice Chair.

Mr. Cunningham nominated Ms. Pine for Vice Chair. All five members were in favor of Ms. Pine as Vice Chair.

Mr. Pisani nominated Mr. Cunningham for Clerk, and Mr. Reilly seconded the nomination. All five members were in favor of Mr. Cunningham as Clerk.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Cunningham announced that the Groton Friends of the Tree Warden will hold their 2024 celebration of Arbor Day on Sunday, May 5, at 1:00 p.m. at Moison's Ace Hardware. He also announced that the Garden Club would hold its Annual Plant Sale at Legion Hall on Saturday, May 11th, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD #1**

Mr. Robertson explained that he and Mr. Haddad had the quarterly meeting with the Friends of Prescott the week prior. Mr. Robertson said that the Friends of Prescott's revenue has increased, and Mr. Haddad stated that they have exceeded their projections and have performed exceptionally well. Mr. Haddad said the town had received a check from the Friends of Prescott earlier that day in the amount of \$5,000, which represents one of

three payments for the 5% of gross revenue owed to the town. He said the Friends of Prescott had paid a total of \$35,000 this year in rent income, and he was very pleased. Their lease is up on August 31, 2024, and Mr. Haddad plans to advertise an RFP for bids to manage the building for the next three to six years.

Ms. Mayra Alosco, a resident of Groton, was in attendance to request clarity from the Select Board on a Letter Campaign for Groton's non-profit organizations and to whom they should be reaching out. She mentioned that it felt disorganized and asked for guidance from the leadership. Mr. Cunningham acknowledged it was an issue and assured Ms. Alosco they would contact Groton's private schools. Ms. Pine stated that the leadership of the non-profits needed to hear from the people, but she felt that people sending letters to private schools may not be effective. She suggested a careful approach to contact the schools. Mr. Pisani appreciated the efforts of the residents and believed that the message had reached the right people. Ms. Manugian proposed having a Q & A information session to educate the residents once they gather more information. Ms. Pine reiterated that the Board is willing to work on the problem.

## **TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

### **1. Update from the Town Manager on the Fire Chief Search.**

Mr. Haddad explained that since the Charter does not allow for an Interim Fire Chief, he immediately began the Search for a Permanent Fire Chief. He explained that the position was advertised in the MMA Beacon, Lowell Sun, Groton Herald, Facebook, the Fire Chief's Association Newsletter, and the Town of Groton's website. May 17<sup>th</sup> is the deadline to apply for the position. Mr. Haddad has formed a Search Committee which will be made up of Town Moderator Jason Kauppi; Police Chief Michael Luth; Chair of Personnel Board and Finance Committee Chair Bud Robertson; Groton resident Connie Sartini; Shirley Fire Lieutenant Brian Callahan; Ayer Deputy Fire Chief Jeremy Januskiewicz, and Groton Resident Raquel Majeski. Mr. Haddad stated that he would not appoint a Select Board member to the Search Committee. He wants all members of the Board to have the same advantage.

Mr. Haddad said he is also assembling a "Chief's Panel" consisting of three local Fire Chiefs. After the Search Committee narrows the field, the panel will conduct a second round of interviews. The Department Heads will also interview the finalists. BadgeQuest has been contracted to perform the Assessment Center for the Board.

Mr. Haddad shared that during that Search for the Police Chief and previous Fire Chief Search, the Board conducted interviews on a Monday, and the Assessment Center was held on Tuesday. He thought this process went well. Mr. Haddad also stated that he would like the Board to witness the Assessment Center, which is scheduled for Tuesday, June 25th, with interviews taking place the day before on Monday, June 24th. They are hoping to have a final decision made by July 1st. The Board agreed with Mr. Haddad's proposal. Mr. Pisani asked what would happen in the interim. Mr. Haddad explained that the Deputy Fire Chief would oversee the Department. He stated they need to amend the Charter and plan to discuss this with the Board in the next few weeks.

### **2. FY 204 Third Quarter Financial Update.**

Mr. Haddad presented the Fiscal Year 2024 Third Quarter Financial Report, prepared by the Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant, Patricia DuFresne. Ms. Patricia DuFresne and Mr. Bud Robertson were also present at the meeting. Mr. Haddad wanted to review the Report with the Board. He was

pleased with the results compared to last year's third quarter. Mr. Haddad went over the highlights of the General Fund Statement of Revenues and Expenditures Report. Groton Hill Music Center has provided the Town with a \$43,000 payment from the Community Fund, and the Country Club exceeded last year's record year by \$18,000. Building permits and licensing were down, but investment income increased due to increased interest rates. He said the Florence Roche Elementary School money was monitored daily by Treasurer/Tax Collector Hannah Moller to ensure no arbitrage. Mr. Haddad stated that Investment income would be the town's savior this year in terms of revenue.

Mr. Haddad said expenses were a bit lower percentage-wise compared to last year. Ms. DuFresne mentioned that the debt service was down because the Florence Roche debt was paid in the third quarter of last year and the fourth quarter of this year.

Mr. Haddad stated that the Department Heads continue to do an excellent job managing their budgets. Based on their third-quarter financial review, Mr. Haddad said they were in good financial shape.

### **3. Update on FY 2024 Select Board Goals.**

Mr. Haddad explained to the Board that it was common practice to review the status of the current year's Goals and Objectives when reviewing the Financial Report. He provided the Board with a copy of the latest update on the FY 2024 Select Board Goals, which was then discussed (Reference Fiscal Year 2024 Goals of the Select Board, included in these minutes).

1. Mr. Haddad provided an update on Environmental Contamination Issues and said the Select Board approved the Phase II IMA on January 29th. The Town of Pepperell also received grant funding to cover Groton's cost share for Phase II, so there will be no cost to Groton Taxpayers for Phase II. The Town has submitted a grant request to the Federal Government to cover Phase I costs.

Mr. Haddad said at the May 18th Special Town Meeting a parcel of land from the Groton Cemetery Association will be acquired for a chlorine booster station. Mr. Haddad explained that they are currently working with DCR on getting the release of the interbasin transfer from Lost Lake and moving forward with the design of the booster station. They needed to find the perfect land location to put the chlorine booster station on, so Mr. Haddad and Mr. Orcutt reached out to the Groton Cemetery Association, and they negotiated and agreed to sell the land that abuts the Williams Barn for \$70,000. He said this was a reasonable acquisition, considering it could have been sold for approximately \$240,000. Mr. Robertson explained that this was a significant discount to the land. The money will be taken out of the remaining ARPA funds, so there will be no additional cost to the taxpayers. Groton Water Superintendent Mr. Tom Orcutt said it was important to note that the parcel is partially within the 100 ft. buffer zone, and they need to obtain all the necessary permits before the Town could borrow funds from the state.

Mr. Haddad noted this was the only new article on the Special Town Meeting Warrant. He asked the Select Board to vote to authorize the Town Manager to proceed with the land acquisition.

*Ms. Pine made a motion to authorize the Town Manager to continue negotiating the land acquisition to purchase the property and place the article on the May 18<sup>th</sup> Special Town Meeting Warrant. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*

2. Climate Change

Ms. Pine asked if the New Groton Electric Light Department Director, John Patterson, could attend an upcoming Select Board meeting. Mr. Haddad said that the Sustainability Commission has asked to be included on the June 3<sup>rd</sup> Select Board agenda to give an update, so he would ask Mr. Patterson to join the June 3<sup>rd</sup> Select Board meeting with the Sustainability Commission.

3. Master Plan

The Planning Board continues to move forward with the Master Plan.

4. Reducing the Cost of Government

The Select Board has assigned the Town Manager the task of collaborating with Groton's non-profit partners to write PILOT agreements. Also, the Town is evaluating the possibility of presenting a Home Rule petition to the legislature. This petition would allow the Town to collect funds from Private Schools to cover the education cost for children who reside in tax-exempt properties on their campuses. Mr. Haddad said the budget presented for the May 18<sup>th</sup> Special Town Meeting stays within the anticipated FY 2025 Levy Limit after the Override was defeated.

5. Affordable Housing

Ms. Pine expressed her frustration regarding the slow progress of Affordable Housing. She shared some good news: There are currently two Chapter 40B applications before the Zoning Board of Appeals. One has already been approved, and the other is nearing the end of the process. Additionally, she mentioned that the Affordable Housing Trust would like to create one lot on the Hoyts Warf Parcel for a Veterans group to build a group home; She hopes they will make progress.

6. Diversity, Equity Inclusion

Mr. Haddad said there was no new update, and this goal is essentially completed. He said they will continue to work with the DEI Committee on their various initiatives. Ms. Pine said that the DEI Committee has connected with a member of the Nipmuck tribe, who will be consulted by the committee with funding from Lawrence Academy. Ms. Pine and Ms. Michelle Collette have also been invited to work with them. Lawrence Academy is interested in creating a land acknowledgment statement.

7. Town-wide Examination of Traffic Patterns, Speed limits, Road Designs, Etc.

The agreement for a developer to acquire the former Light Department Garage and create a road between Broadmeadow and Station Avenue has fallen through. Mr. Haddad said there is no

immediate course of action until a new buyer purchases the land. As of now, Mr. Haddad suggests that this goal be marked as complete with no further action required.

**4. FY 2025 Budget Update.**

The Finance Committee has approved the Proposed FY 2025 Town Operating Budget with the revised GDRSD Assessment and Proposed Operating Grant of \$619,000. They approved the Municipal Budget at \$17,271,660, an increase of \$381,271 or 2.26%. The total Fiscal Year 2025 Operating Budget is \$51,067,297, which reflects an increase of \$1,656,975, or 3.5%. Mr. Haddad would like to present this as a consent motion at the Special Town Meeting since there is no controversy except for the Operational Grant. He said the Finance Committee will most likely hold the School Assessment so that they can explain why they support the Grant to the School District.

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

Monday, May 6, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Tuesday, May 14, 2024	Virtual Meeting
Saturday, May 18, 2024	Special Town Meeting
Monday, May 20, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, May 27, 2024	No Meeting- Memorial Day Holiday
Monday, June 3, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, June 10, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, June 17, 2024	No Meeting
Monday, June 24, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting

**ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND ACTION**

**1. Consider Appointing Kimberly Kuliesis to the Conservation Commission.**

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to appoint Kimberly Kuliesis to the Conservation Commission, with a term expiring on June 30, 2025. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

**2. Consider Approving Letter of Support for Devens Enterprise Commission’s (DEC) Proposal for 604(b) Water Quality Management Grant.**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve a Letter of Support for the Devens Enterprise Commission’s (DEC) Proposal for 604(B) Water Quality Management Grant. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

**3. Approve and Issue the Warrant for the May 18, 2024 Special Town Meeting.**

Mr. Haddad wanted to take a few minutes to review the Warrant for the May 18, 2024, Special Town Meeting and explained that the Warrant closed at 4:00 p.m. that day. (See the Warrant included in these minutes).

Mr. Haddad explained that Articles 1-14 would be presented as one Consent Motion because they are important articles, and he was worried about holding a quorum at the Special Town Meeting.

Article 22 Acquire Land for Chlorine Booster Station: Mr. Haddad added this to the Warrant.

The Special Town Meeting is scheduled for 9:00 a.m. on May 18, 2024. Mr. Haddad said that they are prepared to accommodate up to 1100 attendees.

Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board vote to approve and issue the Warrant for the May 18, 2024, Special Town Meeting. The Warrant will be posted on the Town of Groton website, and postcards containing a QR code to the website will be mailed to residents on Friday, May 3, 2024. He said 400 copies of the Handout will be available at the Special Town Meeting. Mr. Haddad is working on ensuring WIFI at the High School.

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve and issue the May 18, 2024, Special Town Meeting Warrant. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

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

- A. **Green Communities Application and Implementation-** Mr. Haddad said he received the signed contract earlier that day. They are starting the procurement process for the hot water heater at the Town Hall, and the school is working closely with the RISE engineers on weatherization.

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

Mr. Cunningham was happy to report that the Trails Committee has progressed with DCR on extending the handicap-accessible trail down the river. The director of natural resources came out, and they had a good meeting.

#### **Public Comment Period #2**

Groton resident Mayra Alosco wanted to know if there were any updates on increasing the ticket fee from the Groton Hill Music Center. Mr. Haddad said the Groton Hill Music Center would conduct a review with the Town next year.

#### **Approval of Regularly Scheduled Meeting Minutes from April 22, 2024**

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of April 22, 2024. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried 4 in favor, 1 abstention (Reilly).*

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

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