

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

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

SB Members Virtually Present: Alison Manugian, Chair;

Also Present: Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk; Deputy Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks; Police Chief Michael Luth; Deputy Police Chief Rachael Bielecki; The Groton Fire Department; The Groton Police Department; Melisa Doig, Human Resource Director; Hannah Moller, Treasurer/Tax Collector; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant; Robert Garside, Building Commissioner; Takashi Tada, Land Use Director; Tom Orcutt, Groton Water Superintendent; Tom Delaney, DPW Director; Brian Callahan, DPW Director In Training; Raquel Majeski, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee;

Others Virtually Present: Susie Bresney, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, and Jonas Procton, Horsley Written Group.

Ms. Pine called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Vice Chair Pine clarified that Chair Manugian would be attending the meeting virtually, and according to the law, she cannot act as chair. Ms. Pine would serve as Chair instead.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Dunbar, the Town Clerk, announced the State Primary on September 3, 2024. She mentioned that the early mail-in ballots would be sent out by Friday, August 2, 2024. The deadline to request a ballot by mail is August 26th by 5:00 pm. In-person early voting is scheduled for Saturday, August 24, from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm; Monday, August 26th, from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm; Tuesday, August 27th through Thursday, August 29th, from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm; and Friday, August 30th from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm. Ms. Dunbar said the deadline to register to vote in the Primary is Saturday, August 24th, by 5:00 pm. In the hope of eliminating confusion during the Primary Election, she explained that Groton has two different representatives for general court districts. Precinct One votes for the representative of the 37th Middlesex District, while Precincts Two and Three vote for the representative of the First Middlesex District. Sample ballots can be found on the website, but if you have any questions, please contact the Town Clerk's office.

RATIFY THE CONTRACT AND SWEAR IN FIRE CHIEF ARTHUR CHEEKS

Deputy Chief Arthur Cheeks was present, accompanied by family, friends, and colleagues from the Groton Fire and Police Departments.

Mr. Haddad explained that the Select Board's packet contained the Final Negotiated contract negotiated by Mr. Haddad, Chair Manugian, and Deputy Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board vote to ratify and sign the Agreement that evening and have the Town Clerk swear in Chief Cheeks.

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to ratify the Agreement of Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll call: Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Manugian-aye; Pisani- abstained.

Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks signed the contract along with the Board. Ms. Dawn Dunbar, the Town Clerk, was present to swear in Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks, and his wife pinned him. Mr. Haddad and members of the Board Congratulated Groton's new Fire Chief, Chief Cheeks.

While Chief Cheeks was present, Ms. Pine explained that, unfortunately, the Nashoba Valley Medical Center was announced to close due to bankruptcy. Chief Cheeks and Mr. Haddad crafted a letter to explain why the medical center should remain open and send it to Governor Healey, Senator Cronin, and Representatives Scarsdale and Sena.

Mr. Reilly motioned to approve the letter for issuance to the state delegation. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion.

Discussion

Mr. Cunningham expressed he was upset by the news. Mr. Haddad announced that a press conference would take place at the Ayer Town Hall on Tuesday, July 30th, at 9:00 a.m. to discuss the closure of the Nashoba Valley Medical Center. Chief Cheeks commented that it was encouraging to see people voicing their concerns and emphasized the need for all the support they could get.

Roll call: Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD #1

None

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Consider Ratifying the Town Manager's Appointments of Ian Pereira and Tyler Melanson as Police Officers for the Groton Police Department.

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to ratify the Town Manager's appointment of Ian Pereira, effective August 8, 2024, and Tyler Melanson, effective August 9, 2024, as Police Officers for the Groton Police Department. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll call: Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye.

2. Consider Ratifying the Town Manager's Appointment of Allison Knell as a Lifeguard and Donald Atwood to the Golf Staff at the Country Club.

Mr. Pisani made a motion to ratify the Town Manager's appointment of Allison Knell as a Lifeguard and Donald Atwood to the Golf Staff at the Country Club. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Roll call: Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye.

2. Update from the Town Manager on the PILOT Annual Goal.

Mr. Haddad said one of the Annual Goals of the Select Board is to work with various non-profits to codify PILOT Agreements that support the strong relationships in place. Principal Assessor Megan Foster provided Mr. Haddad with a list of exempt properties in Groton. He refined the list and removed all properties owned by the Town of Groton, the Groton Conservation Trust, the Groton Conservation Commission, the Groton Water and Sewer Commission, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the

Groton Cemetery Association, New England Forestry Foundation, and the West Groton Water District. He noted they would not seek PILOTs from any of those organizations and that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides Groton with \$131,855 in State Aid for properties owned by the Commonwealth in Groton (Please see the included list with the minutes). Ms. Pine suggested removing places of worship. Ms. Manugian expressed concerns about the process and emphasized the need to clarify the criteria for elimination with the community. Mr. Haddad said he would like to collaborate with Ms. DuFresne, Ms. Foster, and Ms. Moller and then provide an update to the Board. Mr. Haddad said he would issue a press release concerning PILOTs from the Select Board and Town Manager. He said there is a lot of information out there. Mr. Haddad wanted to clarify that attacking private schools is not the way to go. He works closely with Groton School Headmaster Temba Maqubela and Lawrence Academy's Assistant Head for Finance and Operations, Bob Kramer.

Comments/Concerns

Resident Mayra Rosco mentioned that the PILOT discussion was initially raised during the April 22 Select Board meeting. Ms. Rosco said the town was seeking transparency and asked about the status of the Home Rule Petition with Town Counsel.

Mr. Haddad explained that the Home Rule Petition will be prepared and submitted within the next 30 days. There have been no prior successful instances of this in the legislature. Ms. Pine mentioned that the alternative proposal being reviewed by the legislature might entail a 25% payment for any amount over \$15 million. Ms. Pine questioned whether they should proceed with the Home Rule Petition due to the uncertainty of its passing with the legislature.

Mr. Pisani believes they need to move forward to establish a foundation or building block, which he said needs to be properly documented.

Ms. Pine said they are trying to build a community and stick to the facts. They are releasing a statement and asking everyone to be patient. She said they hope there is some improvement in the amount.

Resident Ms. Eliot expressed concern that the Home Rule Petition could backfire on the Town. She suggested it would be beneficial to look into why non-profit organizations in Concord, MA, are not making PILOT payments and whether there was a Home Rule Petition related to the issue.

Mr. Haddad said there will be an article on the warrant for a Home Rule Petition for the Select Board to consider for the 2024 Fall Town Meeting.

Proposed Select Board Meeting Schedule through Labor Day.

Monday, August 5, 2024	No Meeting
Monday, August 12, 2024	Call for Establishment of Charter Review Committee Decision on Island Road Bridge
Monday, August 19, 2024	No Meeting
Monday, August 26, 2024 (Remote)	First Review of the Fall Town Meeting Warrant
Monday, September 2, 2024	No Meeting

ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL

1. Consider Approving and Releasing the Annual Performance Evaluation of the Town Manager

Mr. Haddad said the Annual Performance Evaluation of the Town Manager has been completed. According to the Policy, the next step was for the Select Board Chair to present the final Evaluation to the full Board at a public meeting for the Board's approval. Once the Evaluation is approved, it will be filed with the Town Clerk. Ms. Pine said she put together a summary of the Evaluation. She mentioned that it was no surprise that Mr. Haddad received an overall rating of outstanding. All five Board members were consistent with his evaluation. His work on the PFAS problem and financial management of the Town was excellent. Mr. Haddad thanked the Board for their review. He explained that his success as the Town Manager was only possible due to the support he received from the Board, outstanding employees, and Department Heads.

Mr. Reilly made a motion to accept the Town Manager's Annual Performance. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll call: Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye.

2. Consider Appointing Thomas Naughton to the Capital Planning Advisory Committee.

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to appoint Thomas Naughton to the Capital Planning Advisory Committee. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye.

3. Consider Approving a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the First Parish Church for Open Mic Night to be held on Friday, August 23, 2024, from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

M. Reilly made a motion to approve a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the First Parish Church for Open Mic Night to be held on Friday, August 23, 2024, from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Roll Call: Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye.

6:15 DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE- ANNUAL REPORT/REVIEW SELECT BOARD GOAL

Ms. Raquel Majeski and members of the Committee attended the discussion. The Select Board invited the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Committee (DEI) to attend the meeting to update the Board on their activities and review and refine the Select Board's Goal concerning the DEI. Ms. Majeski started by thanking the Select Board for their continued support. The Committee would like to combine the two versions into one, as they felt both were complementary to each other.

Version #1- Collaborate with DEI on consistent unified responses to incidents of hatred, bigotry, or injustice. Develop a phased approach to increase awareness of and inclusion of individuals, groups, and cultures in Groton now and in our history who may have previously been unrecognized or marginalized.

Version #2- Provide guidance and assistance in identifying policies and documents that have worked to suppress cultural and socioeconomic diversity. Develop a phased approach to create inclusionary practices.

Ms. Pine said that she and Ms. Manugian could work collaboratively to merge the two versions of Goals.

Ms. Pine wanted to thank them for organizing the Juneteenth celebration. Ms. Majeski announced upcoming events, and Ms. Pine asked her to add the events to the Community Calendar on the town's website.

The DEI also wanted to discuss converting single-stall restrooms to all-gender restrooms. The Select Board was okay with this proposal, and Mr. Haddad said new signage could be ordered. The Board thanked the DEI for their attendance.

6:30 DISCUSSION/NEXT STEPS- SQUANNACOOK RIVER DAM REPORT

DPW Director Tom Delaney and DPW in Training Brian Callahan were present. Mr. Jonas Procton from the Horsley Written Group and Susie Bresney from the Massachusetts Fish and Game attended virtually to review the Squannacook River Dam Report, now available on the Town of Groton website. Other interested parties were also in attendance. Ms. Pine stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the next steps. Mr. Delaney suggested adding this to the Town Meeting Warrant to accept or reject the dam. This would allow the town to accept or reject the dam, enable the town to vote, and provide the Board with direction.

Mr. Procton provided a presentation on the Squannacook River Dam Removal Feasibility Study. He outlined the goals, which include safety, resilience, and nature. He said the Squannacook River Dam is 18 feet tall and creates an impoundment. The presentation explained the potential full removal of the Squannacook River dam and discussed areas needing further study. One concern is the potential impact on homes in Shirley near the impoundment area that rely on well water. It is important to assess the potential drawdown of wells if the impoundment area is lowered.

The next step in the project is a decision about the dam removal. Permits will be required, and several state agencies, including DEP and MHC, will be involved in the review process.

Ms. Susie Bresney explained the benefits of removing the dam. While the construction costs are high, various state and federal funding options can help offset these expenses.

Board Comments/Questions

Ms. Manugian inquired whether the river might break free elsewhere. Mr. Procton explained that rivers sometimes have a memory and changing their course would require significant effort.

Mr. Procton said this change would result in less vegetation and a more natural landscape and wetland environment.

Mr. Pisani asked how far the distance was from the Dam to Hollingsworth & Vose (H&V). It was shared that it was 1.3 miles away. Mr. Cunningham said that below the H&V dam, there is a facility they use for their water treatment.

Members of the Public Comments/Questions

Mr. Charles Shadan from Lost Lake Drive mentioned that Mr. Procton explained the direction of water flow into Thompson Mill Pond. Shadan emphasized the importance of educating the public at a Town Meeting to ensure everyone is fully informed and can make well-informed decisions. He also highlighted the opportunity to revitalize West Groton through future business development. Mr. Shadan suggested taking measures to ensure bank stabilization, including removing the dam and planting afterward.

Resident Mr. Carl Canner stated that the river would drain if the dam were removed. He mentioned that fixing the Shirley side would require remedial repair, estimated at \$300,000. He said the cost to fix the dam is

\$400,000, with an extra \$300,000 needed for dredging. He expressed that the ecology is already beautiful and does not need enhancement. Mr. Canner also provided the Board with a packet for review and expressed interest in forming a committee.

Ms. Pine said that, as a Board, the option of rejecting this plan alone is unviable. If so, a plan or an alternative plan needs to be developed.

Resident Ms. Ginger Vollmar mentioned that the dam has been in place for over 300 years, and if it were to be removed, it's uncertain how the area would look. She suggested that the Town Counsel could take legal action against the Town of Shirley to repair their side of the dam, as Shirley is responsible for it due to the owner's neglect and unpaid taxes.

Ms. Carol Carter said the Squannacook River is beautiful, and people kayak and fish there. She is opposed to removing the dam.

Mr. Haddad asked the Board if they wanted him to investigate Ms. Vollmar's suggestion, determine their legal options, and reach out to Town Counsel, although he is against suing another town. He also asked if the Board would advise him to craft a Warrant Article for the 2024 Fall Town Meeting and have the Town decide. Ms. Pine thought Mr. Haddad should ask Town Counsel to see what legal actions exist and believes it should go to a Town Meeting.

Ms. Bresney wanted to make clear that not all grants are open to private dam owners. She also explained that advancing doesn't commit the town to removing the dam but to moving forward with the next phases of the study. Dam removals require multiple permits, extensive investigation, and regulators to proceed with these projects.

Mr. Haddad believes it would be premature for this matter to be discussed at the 2024 Fall Town Meeting until they get more information. The Board directed him to work with Ms. Bresney, Mr. Procton, and Mr. Delaney to determine the next steps. Ms. Pine recommended gathering information in the most neutral way possible.

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. Manugian made a motion to authorize the Town Manager and one member of the Select Board to sign the Warrants for the next 30 days. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye.

ON-GOING ISSUES

- A. PFAS ISSUE- Mr. Haddad said they need to buy back land that the Town Meeting authorized for the chlorine booster station. He said they are prepared to move forward, and several documents require signatures. Town Counsel has requested the Board to vote to authorize the Town Manager to sign all documents relative to that purchase on behalf of the Town of Groton.

Mr. Pisani motioned to authorize the Town Manager to sign on behalf of the Town of Groton to purchase the land at the Groton Cemetery as authorized by the Town Meeting. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll call: Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye.

- B. Fiscal Year 2026 Budget—Mr. Haddad said the first Tri-COMM meeting would be held on August 28, 2024. The Tri-Comm members will consist of representatives from Groton, such as Finance Committee Member Bud Robertson, Select Board Chair Alison Manugian, Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant Patricia DuFresne, and Mr. Haddad. The Dunstable representatives will include Select Board member Leah Basbanes, Jake Lewon, Advisory Committee member, and Town Administrator Jason Silva. The School Committee representatives are Lacey McCabe and Fay Raynor. Director of Finance Sherry Kersey and Groton Dunstable Regional School District Superintendent Geoff Bruno will also work with the Committee.

- C. Florence Roche School Construction Project—All inspections for the Florence Roche School have been completed, and affidavits have been submitted. The teachers will start moving in on August 5th. The old building has been demolished, and the asbestos removal went as expected, so there will be no additional costs. The soil will be tested as the final step. Mr. Haddad mentioned that everything is progressing very well. Substantial completion is expected on July 30th. The school will be added to the Town's insurance starting Tuesday, July 29th

SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS

None

Public Comment Period #2

Ms. Manugian wanted to provide an update that Representative Margaret Scarsdale organized a meeting with the six communities in her area. They met with various school committees, town administrators, superintendents, the Department of Education and DESE, and Representative Margaret Scarsdale to discuss Chapter 70 and address their concerns about it not working. They are still working on the next steps to advocate with other surrounding entities. Mr. Haddad mentioned that the meeting was hosted at the Center and went well.

Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting Minutes of July 15, 2024

Mr. Cunningham moved to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of July 15, 2024. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll call: Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m. Respectively submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager.