

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
HYBRID MEETING  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2024  
APPROVED**

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

**SB Members Virtually Present:** Becky Pine, Vice Chair;

**Also Present:** Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant; Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk; Bruce Easom, Peter Carson, and John Strauss, Members of the West Groton Rail Trails Committee.

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Cunningham would like to acknowledge the passing of Mr. Rick Perini, a member of both the Affordable Housing Trust and the Affordable Housing Partnership. The town will deeply feel this loss. Ms. Pine wanted to thank the family for suggesting that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to a fund for Affordable Housing.

Ms. Pine also reminded everyone of the celebration in honor of Marion Stoddart, which will take place on Friday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, from 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Marion Stoddart Building, Groton Dunstable Middle School.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD #1**

Ms. Dunbar, Town Clerk, announced that early voting started on Saturday, October 19, and will continue through Friday, November 1st. She addressed the residents' concerns about early voting ballots, noting a lot of angst regarding what happens with them. She explained the Town Clerk's Office counts every vote and the public should have confidence in this election. The Town Clerk's Office will continue to manage fair elections as they always have.

Mr. Easom announced a free tire drop-off at the Groton Transfer Station on Saturday, October 26, 2024, from 7:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. He encouraged residents to pick up tires wherever they are seen, which will be recycled.

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

**1. Fall Town Meeting Follow-up- Action Taken.**

Mr. Haddad provided an update on action taken by his office with regard to the various Warrant Articles from the Town Meeting:

Article 2- Budget Transfers

Town Manager Expenses: \$8,100- Mr. Haddad hired an electrician to bring power to the Storage Shed at Town Field.

Fire Wages: \$154,411- Fire Chief Art Cheeks has begun recruiting two additional Firefighters/EMTs for the Department.

Weed Management: \$88,500—Mr. Haddad will work with the Groton Lakes Association to put together a Bid/RFP to hire a company to conduct the herbicide treatment of Lost Lake/Knops Pond.

#### Article 11- Water Supply System

This Article was turned down at the Town Meeting. Mr. Haddad also stated that the Town did not receive the state grant. He said the Town has asked for feedback on the grant's denial. He recommended bringing this matter back to the Spring Town Meeting for reconsideration. Ms. Pine said they need to educate Groton residents about this article.

#### Article 12- Security Improvements at Sargisson Beach

DPW Director in Training Brian Callahan and Conservation Administrator Charlotte Steeves are managing this project and are in the process of ordering a facility to house the equipment and the various cameras. The project should be completed next Spring prior to the opening of the beach.

#### Article 13- Purchase of Budget Software

A kick-off meeting with ClearGov is scheduled for October 30<sup>th</sup>. All users will receive training; the conversion will likely take 3 to 6 months.

#### Article 15—Amend the Purpose of the CPA Project- Baseball Diamond

An initial kick-off meeting was held earlier in the day. Mr. Haddad stated that the next steps from this meeting will include scheduling a public hearing to review the plans. Ms. Pine emphasized the importance of understanding how the public bathrooms will be secured.

#### Article 16-Squannacook River Dam

Mr. Haddad has signed contracts with both engineering firms: Horsley Witten for the removal study and Haley Aldrich for the repair study. Mr. Delaney and Mr. Haddad will meet with both firms to discuss these matters in more detail. He will keep the Board informed about the work and progress of these concurrent studies.

#### Article 17- Authorize the Lease of Town Owned Land

Mr. Delaney and Mr. Haddad are drafting a Request for Proposals (RFP) to lease the land on Cow Pond Brook Road. Mr. Haddad said they would bring a formal proposal for the Board to consider when proposals are received and reviewed.

#### Article 24-Citizens Petition – Reduce Statutory Speed Limit.

Mr. Cunningham would like the Town Manager to consider creating a working group to examine the speed limit/safe street issue for reconsideration. Mr. Haddad said that he would form a Town Manager's Working Group for this purpose.

## **2. Consider Accepting the Nomination of the Town Manager and Appointing Amanda Chang to the Historical Commission.**

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to accept the Town Manager's nomination and appoint Amanda Chang to the Historical Commission. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye; Cunningham-aye.*

**3. Authorize the Town Manager to Sign the Host Community Agreements Waiver for Tree House Cannabis Express.**

Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board vote to authorize the Town Manager to sign a Host Community Agreement (HCA) Waiver for Tree House Cannabis Express on behalf of the Town. He explained that the Board had previously authorized him to sign a Waiver on Behalf of the Town for United Cultivation (the other Marijuana Establishment) at the August 26<sup>th</sup> Meeting.

*Mr. Pisani made a motion to authorize the Town Manager to execute the Waiver on behalf of the Town. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Roll call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye; Cunningham-aye.*

**4. Update on Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.**

Mr. Haddad said the Select Board would be meeting in a Joint Budget Session with the Groton Finance Committee, Dunstable Select Board, Dunstable Advisory Committee, and Groton Dunstable Regional School District Committee on Wednesday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, beginning at 7:00 p.m. at the Marion Stoddart Building Performing Arts Center. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the issues and to start planning for the Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget. There will also be a joint session meeting with the Finance Committee, which will be held on Tuesday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, at the Center starting at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Haddad said they will have an update on the PILOT Working Group.

**5. Update on Meeting Schedule through the End of the Year.**

Tuesday, October 29, 2024	In Joint Session with the Finance Committee-Provide FY 2026 Budget Guidance
Monday, November 4, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting (Remote)
Monday, November 11, 2024	No Meeting (Veteran’s Day)
Monday, November 18, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, November 25, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, December 2, 2024	No Meeting
Monday, December 9, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, December 16, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, December 23, 2024	No Meeting
Monday, December 30, 2024	No Meeting
Monday, January 6, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting

**ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL**

**1. Pursuant to M.G.L. c.268A, §17, Designate the Charter Review Committee as Special Municipal Employees.**

Mr. Haddad explained that Mr. Bob Collins contacted him and the Board about designating the Charter Review Committee as a Special Municipal Employee pursuant to M.G.L., Chapter 268A. According to Town Counsel, for volunteers like Mr. Collins, who sometimes represent clients before the Towns, it would be helpful to have the Charter Review Committee member position classified as “special municipal” by the Select Board. He said such specification would allow Mr. Collins and others to act as agents or attorneys for third parties before other Town agencies in compliance with M.G.L. c. 268A, Sec.

17. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Select Board vote to designate the Charter Review Committee as Special Municipal Employees.

*Mr. Reilly made a motion to designate the Charter Review Committee as Special Municipal Employees indefinitely, pursuant to M.G.L. c.268A. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye; Cunningham-aye.*

Mr. Haddad provided an update on the Charter Review Committee, which has seven members. Mr. Peter Cunningham was nominated as Chair, Ms. Rebecca Weksner as Vice Chair, and Mr. Haddad as Clerk. He said that their first meeting took place on Thursday, October 17<sup>th</sup>. The Charter Review Committee will convene each month on the first and third Thursdays. Mr. Haddad explained according to the Charter, they must hold a public hearing within sixty days of their organization, which is scheduled for December 5<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. He said it was a great first meeting, and if anyone has any suggestions or questions, please email [CharterReview@grotonma.gov](mailto:CharterReview@grotonma.gov). Mr. Haddad and Mr. Cunningham said they would update the Board as they go along.

#### **6:15 p.m. Introduction and Presentation by the West Groton Rail Trails Committee.**

Bruce Easom, Peter Carson, and Jon Strauss, members of the West Groton Rail Trails Committee, introduced themselves to the Board. They shared the history of their Committee, outlined its charter, and presented a map of the proposed rail trail project they are working on. Member Strauss explained that they are collaborating with the Squannacook River Rail Trail Committee. He said they would like to work with the Select Board to negotiate a lease agreement. Their goal is to partner with the Select Board and Town Counsel to investigate freight issues related to the right of way from the Groton/Ayer town line to Cutler Field in West Groton. Mr. Strauss said they aim to submit a CPC application for the July cycle. Mr. Reilly inquired about the MBTA's level of involvement in this process. Mr. Cunningham responded that there had been recent communication with them. Mr. Easom stated they aim to fund this project through Recreational Trails Grants from DCR. They would like the Select Board's support and approval to collaborate with the Town Counsel (A copy of the PowerPoint Presentation is included in these minutes).

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

None

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

- A. PFAS Issue—Mr. Haddad said the bids have been opened, and the low bid is \$11.1M, with a project budget of \$12.8M. He expressed excitement about this project. He explained that there were five bidders, and it was very competitive. He would like the project to start construction in November. He said the goal is to have clean, potable water at the High School by next summer. The town received SRF approval and will receive a 0 % interest loan and a possible potential earmark. They are doing everything possible for the taxpayers.
- B. Nashoba Valley Medical Center Working Group—Mr. Haddad explained that two Working Group meetings have been held on Zoom. During the last meeting, they discussed the impact of the closure. There is a plan to coordinate health care canvassing around Groton by going door to door. Mr. Haddad said more information is available on the Town of Groton website.
- C. Florence Roche Elementary School Construction Project—A temporary construction entrance was made during the school's construction. Police Chief Luth inquired about having a dedicated lane for parent

drop-off. Mr. Haddad explained that they presented this request to the Conservation Commission to convert the temporary construction road into a permanent lane. The Commission approved this request. He also said additional catch basins would be installed to help with water drainage.

- D. PILOTs—The Working Group met earlier today, and Mr. Haddad is pleased with the work that has been done. Mr. Haddad said they have been going through this methodically. Mary Linskey, a member of the Finance Committee, has joined the Working Group. Mr. Haddad will provide the Board with an update on the PILOT Working Group, review a proposed Press Release, and discuss the list of Non-Profit Partners for PILOT Consideration during the joint session with the Finance Committee next Tuesday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00.

### **SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS**

None

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

Mr. Cunningham explained that it was deer hunting season and that people should be mindful when walking on the trails.

### **Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting Minutes of September 30, 2024**

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of September 30, 2024. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye; Cunningham-aye.*

The meeting was adjourned at 7:07 p.m. Respectively submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager.

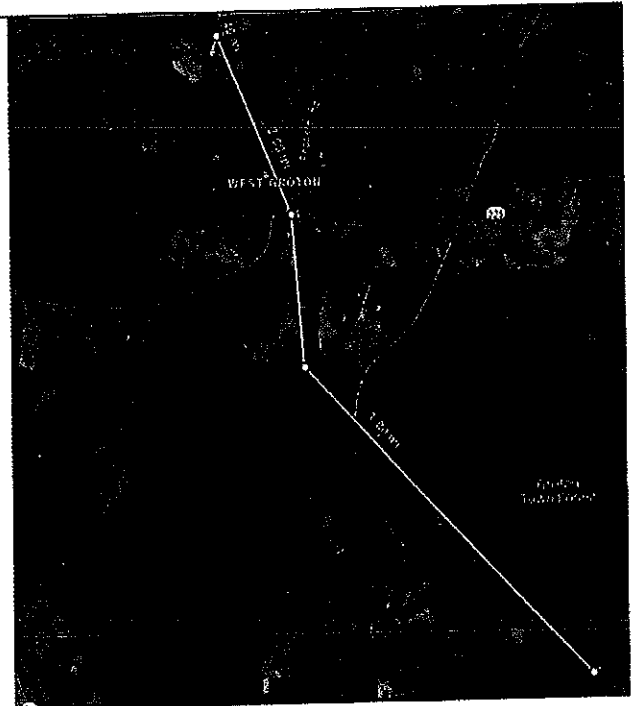
West Groton Rail Trail Committee

## BACKGROUND

- The West Groton Rail Trail Committee (WGRTC) will be dedicated to constructing a multi-use recreational path on the former Peterborough and Shirley Railroad right of way in West Groton. The portion of the right of way that will be the responsibility of the WGRTC starts on the Groton side of the bridge over the Nashua River on the Ayer/Groton town border and continues northwesterly to Cutler Field in West Groton, a distance of 2.4 miles. At Cutler Field, the path will meet the section extending to the Bertozzi Conservation Area that is being planned by Squannacook Greenways, a Massachusetts 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. Squannacook Greenways has already completed the Squannacook River Rail Trail from Bertozzi to downtown Townsend. The long-range development goal for the WGRTC is to extend this Rail Trail south over the river and into Ayer.

## SCOPE

- Roughly 1.8 miles from the bridge to West Groton center.
- Roughly 0.6 miles from West Groton Center to Cutler Field.



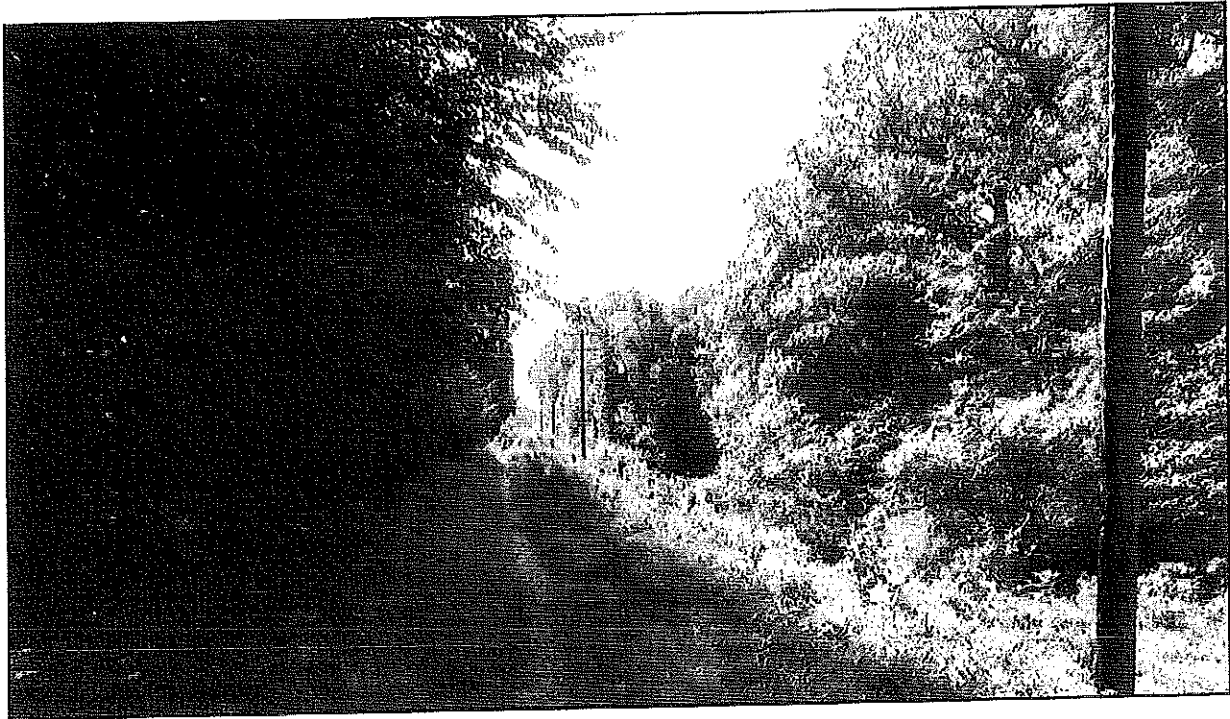


## SCOPE

- This is a photo of a completed section running into Bertozzi.
- The surface would be the crushed stone shown here.
- The cost of the recently completed 3-mile section was roughly \$900K, 80% of which was covered by grants.







## PERMITTING

- Work with the Select Board and Town Counsel to investigate the freight rights issues associated with the right of way from the Groton/Ayer town line to Cutler Field in West Groton.
- Work with the Select Board to negotiate a lease agreement between the MBTA (the lessor) and the Town of Groton (the lessee) allowing the construction of a crushed stone-surfaced multi-use path.

## Environmental and Engineering Assessment

- Assist the Town Manager in preparing a Request for Quotation (RFQ) for an environmental and engineering assessment to be conducted on the section of the right of way for the portion of the right of way for which the WGRTC is assuming development responsibility to assess the environmental risks to the town of entering into a lease agreement and understanding the engineering challenges ahead.

## FUNDING

- Money to cover the legal costs of investigating the freight rights issues and MBTA lease will be the responsibility of the WGRTC and may come from a Community Preservation Act (CPA) recreational grant application.
- Money to cover the cost of preparing the Environmental and Engineering Assessment RFQ will be the responsibility of the WGRTC and may come from a CPA recreational grant application.
- Money to pay for construction costs will be the responsibility of the WGRTC and is expected to come mainly from the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR's) Recreational Trails Program (RTP). The 20% match required by RTP is expected to come from a CPA recreational grant application.
- The WGRTC will seek to identify other sources of funding for the project that may become available as the project moves forward.

## STAGES

- Phase 1 would be to construct the finished path from the bridge in Ayer to the center of West Groton.
- Phase 2 would be to connect from West Groton center to Cutler Field.
- Phase 3 would be to extend the path into Ayer.

## BENEFITS

- Connecting valuable assets in conjunction with the Master Plan.
- Expanding recreation assets for the residents of Groton.