

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2024  
THE GROTON CENTER  
APPROVED**

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

**Finance Committee Members Present:** Bud Robertson, Chair; Mary Linskey, Vice Chair; David Manugian; Gary Green; Kristina Lengyel; Michael Sulprizio; Scott Whitefield;

**Groton Finance Team:** Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant; Melisa Doig, Human Resource Director; Megan Foster, Principal Assessor; Hannah Moller, Treasurer/Tax Collector;

**Also Present:** Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Brian Callahan, DPW Director in Training.

Ms. Manugian called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Pisani announced that during trick-or-treating hours, the Fire Explorers would be offering drinks and hot dogs at the Union Congregational Church. Mr. Cunningham said that Trick-or-Treating will take place on Halloween night from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Ms. Pine said they had a very well-attended celebration for Marion Stoddart on Friday, October 25, 2024. The Groton Channel filmed the event and the documentary movie, which is available to watch on the Groton Channel.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD #1**

Pay Your Fair Shares Initiative Group Members Ms. Ginny Babin, Mr. Jim Barisano, Ms. Ann Brady, and Mr. Paul Fitzgerald attended to share their concerns regarding the PILOT payments and the PILOT Working Group.

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

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

Mr. Haddad explained that the Governor signed the charter amendment on Friday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024, allowing an additional thirty days for the Proposed Operating Budget to be filed. It is now due to the Select Board and Finance Committee on January 31st. The Capital Budget is still due to the Finance Committee and Select Board by December 31st. The Capital Planning Advisory Committee held a meeting earlier, and they will meet with the Department Heads in the upcoming weeks.

**2. Proposed Select Board Meeting Schedule through the End of the Year.**

Monday, November 4, 2024	Discuss Town Meeting Attendance Executive Session-Collective Bargaining Update
Monday, November 11, 2024	No Meeting (Veteran's Day)
Monday, November 18, 2024	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, November 25, 2024	Tax Classification Hearing
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. Consider Appointing Cyndy Davidson to the Local Cultural Council.**

*Mr. Reilly made a motion to appoint Cyndy Davidson to the Local Cultural Council, with a term to expire on June 30, 2030. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

**2. Consider Approving a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott for Open Mic Night on Friday, November 8, 2024, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.**

*Mr. Pisani made a motion to approve a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott for Open Mic Night on Friday, November 8, 2024, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

**3. Consider Approving a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott for the Community Spelling Bee on Friday, November 15, 2024, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.**

*Mr. Reilly made a motion to approve a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott for the Community Spelling Bee on Friday, November 15, 2024, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

**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.**

*Mr. Cunningham 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. The motion carried unanimously.*

B. Nashoba Valley Medical Center Working Group—Mr. Cunningham said a Working Group meeting was held in Ayer, MA, on Tuesday, October 22nd, with Governor Healey. They discussed the impact on response time. He explained that it would be tough for another entity to reopen the facility, costing approximately \$100 million.

C. Charter Review Committee—Mr. Haddad said a public hearing to receive public input is scheduled for Thursday, December 5 at 7:00 p.m. in the Second Floor Meeting Room of the Town Hall.

**SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS**

None

**Public Comment Period #2**

None

**Approval of the Special Scheduled Meeting Minutes of October 17**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the minutes of the special meeting of October 17, 2024. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Chair Robertson called the Finance Committee to order.

**7:15 p.m. In Joint Session with the Finance Committee – Determine and Provide Budget Guidance to the Town Manager for Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget Development.**

Mr. Haddad provided the Select Board and Finance Committee with information to assist in setting Budget Guidance for the Town Manager for the Fiscal year 2026 Budget. He asked the Boards to consider the following:

1. Preliminary projections for Fiscal Year 2026 anticipate new revenues totaling \$1,259,514. Principal Assessor Megan Foster received confirmation that the Department of Revenue certified her values and new growth earlier today. The new growth was certified at a slightly higher amount than was estimated during the Fall Town Meeting. Therefore, the anticipated new revenues will be closer to \$1.3 million. Mr. Haddad said that based on the fact that the School Assessments total sixty (60%) percent of the Operating Budget and the Municipal Budget totals forty (40%) of the Operating Budget. He said an argument can be made that approximately \$503,807 in new revenues are available for new Municipal Spending in Fiscal Year 2026.
2. The Collective Bargaining Agreements with all six (6) unions are up for negotiation and will impact the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.
3. The Middlesex County Retirement Assessment for Fiscal year 2026 will essentially be level-funded based on projections from Middlesex County. Mr. Haddad said that based on the Agreement with MIIA when the Town joined their Health Insurance Consortium last year, the FY 2026 projected increase in Health Insurance is estimated to be seven (7%) percent, or \$151,281.
4. The initial proposed Assessment from the Groton Dunstable Regional School District anticipates an increase of 9.34% or \$2,466,882 over the FY 2025 Assessment. Mr. Haddad said the Town had appropriated an Operational Grant of \$619,000 in Fiscal Year 2025, which can be used to reduce the anticipated assessment to 6.84%, or \$1,847,882. Based on this anticipated assessment, the Town will not have enough new revenues to meet this Assessment without significantly reducing the Municipal Budget or seeking an override of Proposition 2 ½. Mr. Cunningham asked if the School District had settled on teacher negotiation. Mr. Haddad explained that they issued a Press Release stating that the Teachers' Union had settled at 9% over three years. In return, they will receive a 5% concession on health insurance, a three percent reduction next year, and a 2% percent the following year, saving the district over \$500,000 in health insurance. He complimented the School District and the Teachers Union for coming together and reaching one of the best deals in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
5. Mr. Haddad said that regardless of the Budget Projections, should the Town need to address the closing of the Nashoba Valley Medical Center by adding additional staff to the Fire Department, it will be necessary to seek an override of Proposition 2 ½ to fund this increase, which is expected to be at least \$1 million. Mr. Haddad explained they had gone from an eight-minute travel to the hospital to 24 minutes. The average is now approaching 2 hours round trip. He explained several times that they had experienced three ambulance calls simultaneously. The Fire Department

currently lacks the necessary manpower to handle these situations. Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks, Mr. Haddad, and the Board must address this issue. They are considering adding eight additional firefighters, which is approximately \$1 million. Groton is one of the eight towns affected by this closure. Ms. Pine inquired whether anyone could envision a regional approach for ambulance runs. Mr. Haddad responded that there are subgroups in place, including one for the Chiefs, and addressing this issue is one of their specific tasks.

Mr. Haddad said there is also an anticipated deficit of approximately \$1M going into FY 2026. He said this situation should not be a surprise, as it was predicted last year.

#### Comments/Questions

Finance Committee Chair Mr. Robertson asked about small towns that do not have a fire department and what alternative services they are using. Mr. Haddad explained that these towns rely on private ambulance services, but their response times are not as quick. He said that losing these fire services in Groton would result in a decrease in revenue, which is crucial for offsetting the Operating Budget. Finance Committee member Mr. Green believes that the closure of Nashoba Valley Medical should be addressed separately from the regular operating budget and, if an override is needed, it should be done separately from the Operating Budget. Mr. Haddad agreed.

Mr. Haddad shared the PowerPoint Presentation he presented at the Tri-Board Meeting held on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. (See included in the minutes). Ms. Pine pointed out that based on the Three-Year Budget projection, the beginning point would require an override in FY 2026. Ms. Manugian believed the Boards need to discuss the Groton Dunstable School's needs early on. Mr. Haddad explained that last year, the Assessment from the Groton Dunstable Regional School District was low, which left the Select Board with \$619,000 available under the levy limit. The Select Board, Finance Committee, and Town Meeting agreed to appropriate the funds as a one-time grant to the School District to cover one-time costs. He explained that the \$619,000 is a non-recurring amount and can be allocated to offset the Town's Assessment to approximately \$1.8M.

Mr. Green stated that according to the Charter, the Town Manager must present a balanced budget. He suggested that everyone come in with a balanced budget and justify any additional funding. Mr. Haddad stated that, based on the new revenues of approximately \$1.3 million, he is seeking guidance for a budget that, on the municipal side, increases by no more than a specified percentage or a specific amount, excluding the Fire Department issue in order to balance the budget. The remaining funds can be used for the Groton Dunstable Regional School District Assessment. He said whatever number the Boards give him will drive collective bargaining and other issues. Finance Committee member Ms. Linskey suggested they communicate the School Assessment as \$2.4M, less the \$619,000. Ms. Manugian agreed that using the \$1.9M available for New Revenues next year makes sense. Mr. Haddad proposed to the Finance Committee that \$475,000 of the approximately \$1.9 million in New Revenues should be allocated to the Town. Ms. Manugian inquired about Dunstable's situation. Mr. Haddad explained that Dunstable is facing a \$500,000 deficit in its combined operating budget, including municipal and district expenses.

Mr. Robertson said they should increase their revenue and reduce their expenses. Mr. Haddad said everyone from Groton must understand that if the Town of Groton provides the District with anything over \$400,000, would put Dunstable in a position for an override. Mr. Haddad said the Groton Spring Town Meeting was very generous with their one-time grant to the School District of \$619,000. Mr. Haddad said that whatever guidance he received, he would reach out to the Dunstable Town Administrator, Jason Silva, and Sherry Kersey, GDRSD Director of Business and Finance, in the morning to discuss how the guidance he received would impact them.

Ms. Lengyel questioned Mr. Haddad about how they would fund the two new firefighters hired within the current budget. Mr. Haddad said he would need to determine that. Ms. Pine said she believes the school district should work on revising the Regional Agreement.

After much deliberation, the Select Board and Finance Committee gave the following budget guidance to the Town Manager for Fiscal Year 2026:

Finance Committee Vote:

*Mr. Green moved to limit the FY 2026 municipal budget increase to \$475,000 and allocate the remaining funds to the School District. Ms. Lengel seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Select Board Vote:

*Mr. Cunningham moved to limit the FY 2026 municipal budget increase to \$475,000 and allocate the remaining funds to the School District. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

The Select Board meeting was adjourned at 8:34 p.m. Respectively submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager.