

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
VIRTUAL MEETING  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2024  
APPROVED**

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

**Also Virtually Present:** Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant; Takashi Tada, Land Use Director/Town Planner; Melisa Doig, Human Resource Director; Jason Kauppi, Moderator; Megan Foster, Principal Assessor; Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair.

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Ms. Pine reminded everyone about the Presidential Election tomorrow, November 5, 2024. She urged everyone to go out and vote.

Mr. Cunningham announced that Groton's Annual Veterans Day Ceremony will take place at the Fire Station on Monday, November 11, 2024, at 11:00 a.m. He encouraged everyone to attend.

Town Planner Takashi Tada provided an update on the Master Plan. He said the Planning Board is expected to release a Final Draft Report as early as tomorrow, Tuesday, November 5th. This will be the first complete draft, and the Planning Board will present it on Tuesday, November 19, 2024, at 7:00 PM.

Ms. Manugian explained that during the Tuesday, October 29th Select Board meeting, the Pay Your Fair Share Initiative group made many comments. She chose not to engage in the discussion because she was waiting for a follow-up conversation with the Attorney of the Day from the Ethics Commission to confirm that she did not have a conflict of interest regarding the PILOT discussion. The attorney has since affirmed that she does not have a conflict. She said that there were issues raised by that group that were concerning. She encouraged everyone to stay tuned as the Working Group gathers more information and the budget develops. She explained that the town is fortunate to have a Town Manager who has increased PILOT revenues over the past decade.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD #1**

None

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

**1. Fiscal Year 2025 First Quarter Financial Report.**

Mr. Haddad said the First Quarter Financial Report was ready to review. Ms. Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Finance Director/Town Accountant, and Mr. Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair, were virtually present at the meeting to help answer any questions. He thanked Ms. DuFresne for putting the Report together.

Mr. Haddad explained that revenues are slightly behind last year's pace. He said they exceeded the previous year's figures for the Local Option Meals Tax and the Local Option Room Occupancy Tax. He said Marijuana Revenue has been received for the first time. Payments in Lieu of Taxes have also been received. The Groton Hill Music Ticket Fee continues to do well, and the Country Club revenue has increased by \$40,000 compared to last year and continues to do well. Building permits are similar to the previous year. He said that investment income has decreased to half of last year's amount but will make budget. The real estate collection is about the same as well. Mr. Haddad said he is very pleased with the results from the first quarter. He said they have been doing their best since FY22. Mr. Haddad said the economy is doing great in Groton. Regarding expenditures, he is comfortable with the level of expenditures and the Department Heads continue to do a great job managing their budgets.

**2. Update on FY 2025 Select Board Goals.**

Mr. Haddad reviewed the Board's goals and objectives and provided updates (reference the attached Goals of the Groton Select Board). He said that he would provide another update in February.

**3. Update from the Town Manager on the Town Manager's PILOT Working Group- Discuss/Consider Final Non-Profit Partners for PILOT Consideration.**

The Town Managers Working Group on Studying PILOTs continues to work diligently to determine the best way to address PILOTs from Groton's Nonprofit Partners. Mr. Haddad said they believe the Working Group's respectful and deliberate approach is in the best interest of the Town of Groton, its residents, and Non-Profit Partners. He stressed the methodical nature of their work and looked at every issue. He said the Working Group has done a great job and is working collaboratively with our non-profit partners. The Board received a memorandum from the Town Manager's Working Group, which provided an update on their activities and requested input on which additional organizations they should contact to seek a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT). He explained they completed their review of the 590 exempt properties/parcels in Groton and have established nine rules of exemption that eliminated a substantial amount of the 590 parcels from consideration.

Mr. Haddad reviewed a spreadsheet that listed the rules and the parcels under consideration. The nine rules of exemption are as follows: properties owned by the state; federal property; properties purchased with Community Preservation Act funds; properties under Conservation Restrictions; properties subject to Article 97; properties controlled by the Select Board; properties funded within the Tax Levy; entities with a total value under \$750,000 that fall below the average tax bill; properties owned by Enterprise Funds; and properties owned by separate political entities. Mr. Haddad hoped the Board would agree with the listed exemptions. As a result of these exclusions, the Group is considering approaching 21 organizations for PILOTs. He said that 9 out of the 21 organizations currently pay PILOTs. He said the Group would establish formal criteria for outreach to organizations. He said the Working Group would like additional input and advice from the Select Board before it can continue formulating a final proposal.

He explained that several organizations did not fall under the rules of exemption and wanted to discuss whether they would be comfortable requesting a PILOT. For example, this includes churches, the Community School, the Forestry Foundation, the Mass Audubon Society, and the Conservation Trust. Ms. Pine suggested that she would support an exemption for any house of worship. She said that most

of these institutions have no income source other than their members, who are already residents paying property taxes. She said they should understand when looking at the other organizations what sources of income they have to come up with to pay a PILOT and what they are providing to the town in a nonmonetary way. Mr. Cunningham said it was important to look at what municipal services these organizations receive from the town and that these should be factored in. Mr. Haddad asked how they felt about the Groton Conservation Trust and New England Forestry Foundation being on the list. Ms. Pine disclosed that her husband is a Trustee of the Conservation Trust. She mentioned that the Conservation Trust contributes significantly to the town and is exclusively a Groton organization. All of the land they own is open to the public, and they do not have any sources of income. Ms. Pine said the New England Forestry can sell their land, and they get income from logging it. She suggested looking into more information about the Mass Audubon Society. Mr. Haddad said that at their next Working Group meeting, they will look into community benefits and the impact on municipal services. Mr. Cunningham believes the impact on services is huge. Mr. Reilly pointed out that the Conservation Trust properties return to the tax rolls if no restrictions are in place.

The Board discussed whether places of worship should be exempt. Ms. DuFresne emphasized the importance of being cautious about whom they exempt and stressed the need to justify their exemption. Mr. Pisani agreed with Ms. DuFresne. Mr. Haddad said he wants to be careful when compiling the final report. He said they need to be cautious when going through the process. He feels comfortable leaving the 21 organizations on the list and figuring out the next steps. Then, reach out to the organizations to ask for a PILOT request. He recommended leaving the organizations on the list. Mr. Robertson suggested going through the process. Ms. Pine said they must be careful about sending letters, and they must be well thought out. Mr. Cunningham said there is value in contacting and conversing with the churches. Mr. Haddad believes that the property tax system in Massachusetts is unfair; individuals are paying for services they do not receive. He explained that it is based on your property value and the budget passed at the Town Meeting. He said they need to come up with a uniform approach so that everyone gets addressed fairly. Mr. Haddad said the feedback from the Board was very helpful and thanked them.

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

Mr. Haddad explained that, following the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Guidance provided by the Finance Committee and the Select Board, he would like to present his proposed timeline for completing the Proposed Budget. A Kick-off Budget meeting with the Department Heads is scheduled for November 14, 2024. He explained that Budgets will be due by Monday, December 2, 2024, and he plans to hold meetings with various Department Heads and Boards during the week of December 9th. After that, he will work with the Finance Team, the Towns of Dunstable, and the Groton Dunstable Regional School District to develop a Proposed Budget by January 31, 2025. The Proposed Capital Budget is due on December 31, 2024, and will be submitted then. He expressed excitement about the extra thirty days, which will make a big difference.

Based on the guidance from the Finance Committee and Select Board, limiting any municipal spending growth to \$475,000, would leave \$1,487,042 in remaining new revenues. This amount would offset the current anticipated GDRSD Assessment increase of \$2,466,882. He then shared a high-level Preliminary Summary for Fiscal Year 2026. Mr. Haddad explained that the Town of Dunstable would need to come

up with approximately \$466,000 to match the \$1.4 million in remaining new revenues, putting them into an override situation under the current Regional Agreement. He said there is a lot of work to be done in the next 60-sixty days.

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

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. Discussion- Improve Community Engagement at Town Meetings.**

Moderator Jason Kauppi was virtually present for the discussion. Ms. Manugian said this topic was raised at the 2024 Fall Town Meeting, and the speaker suggested that this be placed on a future agenda. Mr. Kauppi stressed that they would like every registered voter to attend Town Meetings and Elections. He questioned what they were striving for, whether there was a specific target, and which barriers they could address to encourage new participants to join. The turnout would have been much better if he had known all the answers. He said everyone has choices and priorities but is open to suggestions on actions they can take.

Ms. Manugian emphasized the importance of voting. Mr. Cunningham mentioned that turnout for Town Meetings is driven by what is included on the warrant. He expressed uncertainty about whether anyone can change the dynamic and suggested writing editorials explaining how Town Meeting functions. Mr. Kauppi suggested they may need to find new ways to reach people, possibly through a podcast or The Groton Channel. Ms. Pine stated that she did not have a perfect solution but that it was essential to boost attendance and explained that every vote matters. Ms. Manugian and Mr. Haddad proposed adding an email address on the website for the Town Meeting and also liked the idea of a podcast. Mr. Robertson said some people think the Town is being run efficiently unless there is a hot topic. Mr. Haddad and Mr. Kauppi will meet before the next Town Meeting.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

**SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS**

None

**Public Comment Period #2**

None

## **ON-GOING ISSUES**

B. Nashoba Valley Medical Working Group-Mr. Haddad mentioned that there will be a meeting next week to explore various options. There are many subgroups involved, and the group is very active.

Safe Street Working Group- Mr. Haddad said the Groton Police Department is gathering information about what it does and how it enforces speed limits. The Highway Department is looking into an engineering study to determine whether improvements can be made at the intersection of Route 40 and 119. Mr. Haddad will report back to the Board after their next meeting.

### **Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting Minutes of October 21, 2024**

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of October 21, 2024. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye; Cunningham-aye.*

### **Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting Minutes of October 29, 2024**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of October 29, 2024. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Roll Call: Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye; Cunningham-aye.*

### **Executive Session**

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to make a motion to enter Executive Session Pursuant to M.G.L., c.30A, §21(a), Clause 3 – “To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation If an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigation position of the public body and the chair so declares”- Purposes- Collective Bargaining.

And not to return to open session.

*Ms. Pine made a motion to enter into Executive Session. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pisani-aye.*

The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 p.m. Respectively submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager.