

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, JANUARY 13, 2025
APPROVED**

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

SB Members Virtually Present: Becky Pine, Vice Chair;

Park Commissioners Present: Anna Eliot; Brian Edmonds; Mary Jennings; Jeff Ohringer

Finance Committee Members Present: Bud Robertson; Mary Linskey; Gary Green; Scott Whitefield; Mike Sulprizio;

Finance Committee Members Virtually Present: Kristina Lengyel

Also Present: Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Melisa Doig, Human Resource Director; Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant; Rob Foley, Applicant for the Park Commission Vacancy; Hannah Moller, Treasurer/Tax Collector; Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks; Jaydeep B. Patel; Donald Black; Bruce Easom.

Ms. Manugian called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

Executive Session

Ms. Manugian requested that the Board enter Executive Session Pursuant to M.G.L., c.30A, §21(a), Clause 2 – “To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with non-union personnel. -Purpose- Town Manager Contract.

And to return to open session.

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

The Board returned to regular session at 6:00 PM.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Pisani announced that the Annual Christmas Tree Bonfire would be held at Town Field on Friday, January 17th, at 6:00 pm. Also, the American Legion will be retiring flags that evening as well.

Mr. Cunningham advised caution when walking on ice in ponds or lakes and ensuring it is at least 4 inches thick.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD #1

None

TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT

1. Presentation of the Town Manager’s Report on PILOTs to the Select Board.

Mr. Haddad said he was pleased to report that he completed his review on PILOTs and has drafted a Report/Recommendation for the Select Board’s review and consideration. The Report was provided to the Board for their review. Mr. Haddad said this Report was completed with the assistance of the Town Manager’s PILOT Working Group. The Working Group did a lot of research on PILOTs, and the Report has been mailed to all the local non-profits. Mr. Haddad said the Report may be controversial but believes the Report's information justifies it. At the January 27th Select Board meeting, the PILOT Report will be presented and discussed, and it will also be posted on the Town of Groton website. Mr. Haddad said the Report meets the Select Board Goal, and the Board can advise Mr. Haddad on whether or not to implement it. Ms. Pine expressed her appreciation for the amount of work completed. She said that Groton is one of the towns in the state that receives funding from its non-profit partners. Mr. Cunningham clarified that the proposal for the Groton Hill Music Center's Ticket Tax was rejected at the Town Meeting years ago. Mr. Pisani stated that the Report is a comprehensive foundation for moving forward.

2. Update on Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.

The FY 2026 Budget update will be discussed in Joint Session with the Finance Committee at 7:00 p.m.

3. Proposed Select Board Meeting Schedule through the 2025 Spring Town Meeting.

Monday, January 20, 2025	No Meeting- Martin Luther King Holiday
Monday, January 27, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, February 3, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, February 10, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, February 17, 2025	No Meeting- President’s Day Holiday
Monday, February 24, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 3, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 10, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 17, 2025	No Meeting
Monday, March 24, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 31, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 7, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 14, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 21, 2025	No Meeting- Patriot’s Day Holiday
Saturday, April 26 th	Spring Town Meeting

ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL

1. Consider a Change of Manager for Indralok, Inc. from Romulo Roma to Jaydeep B. Patel.

Applicant Jaydeep B. Patel attended the discussion. Mr. Haddad explained that in 2024, the Select Board granted Indralok, Inc. an All-Alcoholic Beverages License for its location at 127 Main Street. Mr. Patel has requested to change the Manager of Indralok, Inc. from Romulo Roma to Jaydeep Patel. Mr. Haddad provided the application to the Board separately for review due to personal

information. Mr. Patel stated that he now has the necessary experience and that things are going very well.

Mr. Reilly made a motion to approve the Change of Manager for Indralok, Inc., from Romula Roma to Jaydeep B. Patel. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pisani-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye.

2. Discussion- Discuss/Review/Consider Charter Review Committee's Proposal to Change the Way the Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Town Clerk are Appointed and Former Proposal to Change the Park Commission from Elected to Appointed.

Mr. Haddad explained that as part of the Charter Review process, they are looking at recommendations/proposals. He had proposed changing how the Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Town Clerk are appointed. He has proposed that the Town Manager appoint these positions subject to ratification by the Select Board. He said there would be no change in the status of the Strong Chief with this proposal. The difference is that the Town Manager would bring one person forward (instead of two), there would still be an Assessment Center, and the Select Board would still be in control.

Ms. Pine shared her comments regarding the Charter Review proposals with the Board. The Committee has not yet met to discuss these comments, but they are scheduled to meet on Thursday, January 16, 2025. Mr. Haddad stated that the Town Manager appoints many Department Head positions. Ms. Pine expressed her disagreement with the Town Manager's recommendation. She believes the Select Board should be responsible for making these appointments, as she views these positions differently from Town Hall employees. Ms. Pine shared her recommendations with the Board (Refer to the attached memo to the Charter Review Committee from Becky Pine).

Mr. Haddad pointed out that the Town Manager conducts the Search according to the Charter. Town Counsel advised against including everything in the Charter and suggested that the process could be addressed in bylaws or policies. The Select Board can set the policy and direct the Town Manager on how to do the Search. He explained that 15 out of 16 communities that have a Town Manager, the appointment of Police Chief and Fire Chief are made by the Town Manager subject to ratification by the Select Board. Mr. Cunningham stated that he believed they could address Ms. Pines's concerns within the policy. Mr. Pisani said the Search process is very in-depth, with multiple people evaluating the candidate. He believes that when a candidate is brought forward, they are viable after they go through the Search. Ms. Pine doesn't believe listing a number of candidates should be left in the Charter. Ms. Manugian was concerned that bringing only one candidate forward would prevent them from comparing and knowing the options. Mr. Haddad explained to the Board that they must trust their Town Manager. Mr. Reilly inquired about the issues that arose when they could not appoint an interim chief. Fire Chief Cheeks, who was in attendance, stated that it was challenging to manage the Fire Department's day-to-day responsibilities without an interim chief.

After discussing the proposals, Mr. Haddad and Ms. Pine will draft a policy to provide to the Charter Review Committee.

Former Proposal to Change the Park Commission from Elected to Appointed.

Mr. Haddad explained that he drafted a proposal for the Park Commission to become appointed. Park Commission Chair Mr. Edmonds said that Mr. Haddad presented this proposal to the Commission, but he has no recommendation either way on this matter. Ms. Pine believed the Commission should remain elected for now. Ms. Manugian thinks it would be beneficial to have the Commission appointed due to the day-to-day challenges. Mr. Reilly agreed with Ms. Manugian. Mr. Haddad explained that he withdrew this proposal but would have the Charter Review Committee discuss it further.

3. Consider Letters of Support to the CPC on Cow Pond Brook and Town Field Projects.

Mr. Haddad explained that he was submitting two applications to the CPC: one for Town Field improvements and another for Cow Pond Brook Field improvements. The Park Commission has voted to support the Town Field and Cow Pond Brook Field projects. Mr. Haddad prepared two support letters for the Board's review. Ms. Manugian asked about the parking situation at the Cow Pond area. Park Commission Chair Brian Edmonds explained that the project would create around 100 new parking spaces. Mr. Haddad said the Town Field plans will go out to bid before the 2025 Spring Town Meeting. Ms. Pine inquired about installing restroom facilities at Town Field, and Mr. Haddad said that the project had been scaled back to remain within budget. Mr. Pisani expressed his support for the Town Field project but raised concerns about the Cow Pond Brook Field project and the timing of the budget, saying that it was a big expense. Mr. Haddad informed the Board that they are waiting for grant funding approval for a Land and Water Conservation Grant of \$1M to offset costs for the Cow Pond Brook Field project.

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to authorize the Select Board Chair to sign the Letter of Support for the Town Field project to the CPC. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pisani-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye.

Once Mr. Haddad receives more information about the Cow Pond Brook Field project, he will return to the Board to discuss a Letter of Support.

6:15 P.M. IN JOINT SESSION WITH THE PARK COMMISSION- CONSIDER APPOINTING ROB FOLEY TO THE PARK COMMISSION TO FILL A VACANCY UNTIL THE 2025 TOWN ELECTION.

Mr. Brian Edmonds called the Park Commission meeting to order.

Park Commissioners Ms. Eliot, Ms. Jennings, Mr. Ohringer, and Mr. Edmonds attended the meeting. Rob Foley, the applicant for the vacancy, also attended. Mr. Haddad announced an opening on the Park Commission, which had been advertised. Two individuals submitted letters of interest. The Park Commission voted unanimously to recommend Mr. Foley for the vacancy until the 2025 Spring Election. If Mr. Foley runs in the 2025 Spring Election, it will be for a full three-year term.

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to appoint Rob Foley as a Park Commissioner until the 2025 Spring Election. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pisani-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye; Edmonds-aye; Ohringer-aye; Jennings-aye; Eliot-aye.

7:00 P.M. IN JOINT SESSION WITH THE FINANCE COMMITTEE- UPDATE ON THE FISCAL YEAR 2026 PROPOSED OPERATING BUDGET. DETERMINE IF BUDGET GUIDANCE TO THE TOWN MANAGER NEEDS TO BE ADJUSTED.

Finance Committee members Mr. Green, Ms. Linskey, Mr. Sulprizio, Mr. Whitefield, and Mr. Robertson were present. Ms. Kristina Lengyel attended virtually.

Finance Committee Chair Bud Robertson called the Finance Committee to order.

Mr. Haddad said the Select Board and Finance Committee gave Mr. Haddad and the Finance Team Guidance in October to create the Fiscal year 2026 Budget. The following Guidance was given:

- A. The Town Manager shall keep any increase in Municipal Spending in Fiscal Year 2026 to a total increase of \$475,000.
- B. Any remaining new revenues in Fiscal Year 2026 shall be used to cover the Proposed FY 2026 Operating Assessment of the Groton Dunstable Regional School District.

Mr. Haddad explained that he and the Finance Team were finalizing the Proposed Budget, which complies with the guidelines by limiting Municipal Spending in FY 2026 to a total increase of \$475,000. Currently, the proposed increase stands at \$379,168. Mr. Haddad provided a Chart that gave an updated summary of what revenues are expected for FY 2026, along with the current spending plan.

Mr. Haddad said they are under the Guidance due to the Enterprise Funds paying directly for health insurance. He anticipates that \$1,405,701 in levy capacity will remain for the Groton Dunstable Regional School District. Within the \$379,168 budget increase, Mr. Haddad mentioned he is also reducing the assessment from Nashoba Tech. The District is in the process of finalizing its Budget. During the January 8, 2025 meeting of the Groton Dunstable Regional School District Committee, Superintendent Dr. Geoff Bruno presented the School Committee with two budget scenarios:

- Scenario One is a Level Services Budget, which maintains the current level of services provided by the School District.
- Scenario Two is a balanced budget that sets the budget at a level that does not require an override in either Groton or Dunstable.

The \$1.4 million that Groton has available for the School District in FY 2026 is not enough to cover the anticipated Assessment under Scenario One. The proposed Assessment is a 10.25% increase over the FY 2025 Assessment, or \$2,692,398, a shortfall of \$1,292,398. This would put the Town in an override situation to cover the Assessment.

Scenario Two proposes an increase in the Assessment of 1.4%, or \$365,862. Groton would still be \$1,039,839 below the projected FY 2026 Levy Limit. Mr. Haddad believes this scenario is unacceptable, as it would devastate the District. He suggests that they focus on a solution that is somewhere between the

Town of Groton's capacity to provide funding within the Levy Limit (around a \$1.4 million increase) and the Level Services increase, which is approximately \$2.7 million.

Mr. Haddad asked the Board and the Finance Committee about the direction of the Guidance. Finance Committee member Ms. Linskey said she was uncomfortable setting the Guidance under \$475,000. Finance Committee member Mr. Green inquired when the School Committee would provide their number to Mr. Haddad. Mr. Haddad hopes to meet with Dunstable and the School District to develop a budget 45 days before April 26th. Mr. Robertson said he was unsure about what was included in the school's budget numbers. Mr. Haddad stated that he would have a balanced budget that meets the Guidance and plans to propose a public safety override. Mr. Green said he believed that the Guidance should remain the same. Ms. Linskey stated that she feels uncomfortable changing the Guidance since the School District Audit has not been completed and no request for proposals (RFP) has not been issued. Mr. Sulprizio also expressed his disappointment regarding the situation. Mr. Haddad said even if the audit started in August, it would not impact the FY 2026 Budget. Mr. Sulprizio suggested setting a deadline for the release of the RFP.

After a lengthy discussion, the Select Board and Finance Committee agreed to keep the original Guidance to the Town Manager.

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

On Going issues

- A. PFAS Issue- The PFAS construction is well underway. Mr. Haddad wanted to thank Water Superintendent Tom Orcutt for his hard work.
- B. Nashoba Valley Medical Working Group- Fire Chief Cheeks updated the Board about the Working Group. He mentioned that they are still awaiting a response from the Governor's office. Mr. Haddad added that the area Chiefs are doing an excellent job.
- C. Charter Review Committee- Mr. Haddad intends to present a memo he drafted to the Charter Committee.
- D. Florence Roche Elementary School Construction Project-There was no update at this time.
- E. PILOTS- On January 27th, the draft PILOT Report will be presented to the Select Board.

SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS

None

Public Comment Period #2

Mr. Cunninham has a meeting with the Housing Partnership on Tuesday, January 14th. He said there are three vacancies in the Housing Partnership.

Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting Minutes of January 6, 2025

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of January 6, 2025. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried 4 in Favor, 1 abstained-Pine.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m. Respectively submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager.