

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2025  
APPROVED**

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

**SB Members Virtually Present:** John Reilly;

**Also Present:** Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk; Lacey McCabe, Groton Dunstable School Committee Chair; Dr. Geoff Bruno, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Superintendent; Sherry Kersey, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Director of Business and Finance; Fay Raynor, School Committee Member; Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks; Shawn Campbell, Groton Country Club's General Manager;

**Finance Team:** Hannah Moller, Treasurer/Tax Collector; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Director/Town Accountant; Megan Foster, Principal Assessor;

**Finance Committee Members:** Bud Robertson, Chair; Scott Whitefield; Kristina Lengyel; Gary Green;

**Finance Committee Members Virtually Present:** David Manugian; Mary Linskey, Vice Chair.

Ms. Manugian called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Town Clerk, Dawn Dunbar, announced that nomination papers are now available at the Town Clerk's Office. The deadline to request these papers is March 28th at 5:00 P.M. She said Tuesday, April 1st is the final day to return and submit the completed papers. Each submission must include signatures from at least 55 registered voters. There are currently five vacancies on elected boards in Groton.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD #1**

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

**1. Consider Approving Bond Anticipated Notes for February Issue.**

Treasurer/Tax Collector Hannah Moller was in attendance to request that the Board approve and sign the Bond Anticipation Notes for the Middle School Track and the Whitney Pond Well in the amount of \$877,204. Mr. Haddad explained that this BAN included \$829,702 for the Middle School Track (CPC) and \$47,502 for the Whitney Well Improvements. The Town received four bids, and the low bid was received from M&T Bank with an interest rate of 3.96% interest. Due to the small size of this issuance, there was no premium bid requirement. Ms. Moller explained that the Town has accepted a bid with no additional premium offered, and as such, there are no issuance costs associated with this BAN. Ms. Moller believes that a 3.96% interest rate is a great rate in today's market.

*Mr. Cunningham moved to accept the Bond Anticipated Notes for Middle School Track and Whitney Pond Well in the amount of \$877,204. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pisani- aye.*

**2. Consider Ratifying the Town Manager’s Appointment of John Ponti as the Groton Country Club Superintendent.**

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to ratify the Town Manager’s appointment of John Ponti as the Groton Country Club Superintendent. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pisani- aye.*

**3. Consider Accepting the Nomination by the Town Manager and Appointing Tom Gulick to the Trails Committee.**

*Mr. Pisani made a motion to accept the nomination by the Town Manager and appoint Tom Gulick to the Trails Committee. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pisani- aye.*

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

The Select Board and Finance Committee will meet at 7:00 p.m. in Joint Session to present the Town Manager’s Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget.

**5. Update on Select Board Meeting Schedule through the 2025 Spring Town Meeting.**

Monday, February 10, 2025	Update from the Friends of Prescott Fiscal Year 2025 Second Quarter Financial Report Update on Annual Goals
Monday, February 17, 2025	No Meeting- President’s Day Holiday
Saturday, February 22, 2025	Joint Budget Review Meeting with Finance Committee
Monday, February 24, 2025	Review the First Draft of the Spring Town Meeting Warrant
Monday, March 3, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 10, 2025	Public Hearing on the Spring Town 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 <sup>th</sup>	Spring Town Meeting

**ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL**

**1. Approve the Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Town Clerk Appointment Policy.**

Mr. Haddad provided the Board with the Final Draft of the Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Town Clerk Appointment Policy, which was discussed at the Select Board meeting on January 27, 2025. He respectfully requested that the Board vote to adopt the Policy, subject to approval of the proposed amendment of the Groton Charter. Ms. Manugian thanked Mr. Haddad and Ms. Pine for their efforts on this.

*Ms. Pine made a motion to adopt the Policy, subject to the approval of the proposed amendment of the Groton Charter. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pisani- aye.*

**2. Consider Appointing Heather Puksta to the Destination Groton Committee.**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to appoint Heather Puksta to the Destination Groton Committee. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly- aye; Cunningham-aye; Pisani- aye.*

**On Going issues**

- A. PFAS Issue- The project is progressing well. Mr. Haddad explained that the contractor, DeFelice, initially started with one working crew but will now add an additional crew to meet the August 15<sup>th</sup> deadline. There will also be six detail officers assigned instead of four. On Wednesday, February 5, officials of Groton will meet with Dunstable officials. The pipe connection to the high school is scheduled for the week of April's vacation.
- B. Nashoba Valley Medical Center Working Group-There will be one more meeting of the Working Group held on February 19<sup>th</sup>, and then there will be a Final Report. Fire Chief Cheeks added that the Chiefs Subcommittee will continue its meetings. He said there had been discussions with UMASS Medical Center regarding searching for a location to establish a stand-alone emergency department, and this would be a long road ahead. Chief Cheeks said there is a lot of work to be done.
- C. Charter Review Committee- The next Charter Review Committee meeting is scheduled for February 13<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 p.m. to review various proposals. The Select Board has requested that the Charter Review Committee continue discussing the Park Commission proposal. They are specifically considering whether the Park Commission should be elected or appointed and whether the maintenance of park properties should fall under the Department of Public Works. Mr. Haddad explained that he met with the Parks Commission earlier that day to clarify that although he requested to withdraw his proposal regarding the Parks Commission to the Charter Review Committee, the Select Board wanted to continue the discussion. At the last Charter Review Committee meeting, Mr. Haddad said they approved approximately ten routine changes to the Charter. Ms. Pine noted that during the last Charter Review Committee meeting, a question was raised about the provision stating that members of the Select Board cannot serve on another elected Board. Mr. Haddad stated that this topic will be discussed at their next meeting.
- D. Florence Roche Elementary School Construction Project- The Open House for Florence Roche Elementary School is scheduled for Saturday, March 1, 2025, from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

On Wednesday, February 5, 2025, at 12:00 pm, Mr. Haddad and Groton Dunstable Regional School District Superintendent Dr. Geoff Bruno will be at the Groton Center for a Budget Presentation of the FY 2026 Budget.

**SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS**

Ms. Pine announced that the Non-Profit Council will meet on Thursday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, at 9:00 a.m. Ms. Pine was unsure of the location at this time, but please get in touch with her for more information if interested.

**Public Comment Period #2**

None

**Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting Minutes of January 27, 2025**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of January 27, 2025. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pisani- aye.*

A brief five-minute recess was held before the joint session meeting of the Finance Committee and Select Board.

**7:00 P.M.- In Joint Session with the Finance Committee- Presentation of the Town Manager’s Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Town Operating Budget.**

Mr. Bud Robertson called the Finance Committee meeting to order.

Mr. Haddad announced that Dr. Geoff Bruno, the new Superintendent of the Groton Dunstable Regional School District (GDRSD), was present for anyone who had not yet had the chance to meet him. Along with Dr. Bruno were Sherry Kersey, the GDRSD Director of Business and Finance, School Committee Chair Lacey McCabe, and School Committee member Fay Raynor. Mr. Haddad thanked them for attending.

Mr. Haddad explained that this was his seventeenth Proposed Operating Budget submitted as Groton’s Town Manager. He said this was the first year the Budget was due on January 31<sup>st</sup> under the new Charter Amendment. He said this Charter Amendment has allowed for better cooperation and collaboration with the GDRSD and the Town of Dunstable.

Mr. Haddad was happy to present the Budget to the Finance Committee and Select Board (See the complete PowerPoint presentation in these minutes).

The PowerPoint Presentation summarized the Budget Guidance given to the Town Manager by the Select Board and Finance Committee during the October, 2024 Budget Guidance meeting. The Guidance was to limit the FY 2026 Municipal Budget increase to \$475,000 and to allocate the remaining funds to the Groton Dunstable Regional School District.

The Budget process and development were outlined in the Presentation. Mr. Haddad explained that the approved Budget for Fiscal Year 2025 is \$684,352 below the Levy Limit. New Growth for Fiscal Year 2025 was certified at \$25.3 million, contributing an additional \$381,883 to the FY 2025 Tax Levy. He estimated that New Growth for Fiscal Year 2026 will be approximately \$15 million, adding \$228,750 to the Tax Levy. Mr. Haddad said they would continue to review this estimate, but Principal Assessor Megan Foster is not comfortable projecting New Growth above \$15 million due to a slowdown in construction in Town. Mr. Haddad believes it is better to be conservative. The Governor’s Budget has been released, and it is

proposed that Groton will receive \$1,192,703 in State Aid for Fiscal Year 2026, an approximate \$46,000 increase from the last Fiscal Year.

He stated that the Expected Levy Limit for FY 2026 for Revenue Projections is \$39,317,497. The Total Tax Levy calculation for FY 2026 is approximately \$44,575,547 in addition to the Tax Levy. There is approximately \$7.6 million in other estimated revenues available. The Finance Team anticipates a 2.61% increase in New Revenues for FY 2026, or \$1,179,554. Additionally, the Unexpended Tax Capacity, estimated at around \$654,000, will help balance the Budget. This will provide approximately \$1.8 million in available New Revenue to balance the budget.

The Fiscal Year 2026 Budget includes costs for health insurance and pensions. Mr. Haddad explained that on Tuesday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, he, Human Resource Director Melisa Doig, and Assistant Director/Town Accountant Patricia DuFresne will meet with the Towns health insurance company, MIIA, to discuss the insurance rate for Fiscal Year 2026.

Mr. Haddad explained that the Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Municipal Budget is \$17,773,298.

The GDRSD is facing significant challenges in Fiscal Year 2026. Mr. Haddad explained that the failed override in FY 2025 and the lack of support from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts forced the District to lay off 24 Full-time equivalent (FTE) employees last year. In FY 2025, the District's Budget only increased 0.91%. Mr. Haddad explained that pursuant to the FY 2026 Budget Guidance, after proposing a \$474,137 increase in the Municipal Budget, there is \$1,365,654 in available New Revenues for the GDRSD, or an increase of \$5.2%. Mr. Haddad recommends that the Select Board and Finance Committee consider and support an Override of Proposition 2 ½ in the amount of \$980,000 for the GDRSD in Fiscal Year 2026.

Mr. Haddad noted that this year, enrollment at Nashoba Valley Technical High School has stabilized compared to the last fiscal year, showing a slight decrease in four students. As a result, Groton's Anticipated Assessment will decrease by approximately \$55,000, bringing the total to \$911,000.

Mr. Haddad is proposing two Major Initiatives for consideration to the Select Board and Finance Committee in Fiscal Year 2026 and Fiscal Year 2027 Mr. Haddad is proposing:

1. FY 2026- Add six (6) Additional Firefighters to the Fire Department.  
This proposal has a total anticipated cost of \$780,904. If the Select Board and Finance Committee approve it, he will suggest an Override of Proposition 2 ½ to fund this.
2. FY 2027- Add an Additional Police Officer (Detective Sergeant) to the Police Department.  
This proposal has a total anticipated cost of \$153,917.

Mr. Haddad is proposing these two Major Initiatives because they affect the Town's Public Safety Departments and are important for the safety and welfare of the residents.

It was expressed that adding six firefighters would allow four firefighters to be on duty at all times. It may also reduce overtime expenses. Ms. Pine inquired about the proposal of an additional Police Officer FY

2027 for the Police Department. Mr. Haddad explained that he hopes to incorporate this need into the upcoming Budget. He wanted to bring this proposal to their attention so they are aware of the need.

#### Capital Budget

The Capital Budget was submitted to the Select Board and the Finance Committee by December 31, 2024. The total Capital Budget is \$1,987,614.

Mr. Haddad explained that based on the Anticipated Revenues, the Proposed Budget is balanced and has been presented to the Boards. It includes a \$474,137 increase to the Municipal Budget, a \$1,365,654 allocation for the GDRSD, and \$911,000 for Nashoba Tech. In Groton, the average taxpayer will see an additional \$375 on their tax bill within the Levy.

Mr. Haddad thanked Dr. Geoff Bruno, Ms. McCabe, Ms. Kersey, and Ms. Raynor for attending and for their collaboration. He also thanked the Finance Team. He is proud of the effort put into the Budget.

Mr. Robertson inquired when the Finance Committee could expect to discuss other issues with the School District. Mr. Haddad said he is in the process of scheduling a meeting for the Finance Committee to meet with the School Committee to discuss the School Budget. Mr. Haddad said they must meet so the GDRSD can Certify the Budget on March 12, 2025. The Finance Committee will be able to advise the Select Board during the Joint Meeting scheduled for Saturday, February 22, 2025.

Ms. Pine commented that she would like to receive comparative data on towns associated with Nashoba Medical Hospital, including staffing levels in the Fire Department.

The Select Board meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m. while the Finance Committee continued to convene for other business.

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Groton Country Club's General Manager, Shawn Campbell, was in attendance. The Groton Country Club submitted a request for a reserve fund transfer in the amount of \$65,000. Mr. Campbell indicated that the Country Club is experiencing record revenues this season. However, this has also led to an increase of \$134,000 in expenses. This request pertains to the current fiscal year. Ms. DuFresne pointed out that the Country Club only has \$238 left in its expenses budget. The requested \$65,000 is estimated to cover expenses until the end of the fiscal year. Mr. Green said that part of the increased expenses is due to the need for additional staffing. Mr. Haddad commented that the summer season has been very busy.

*Mr. Green made a motion to authorize the reserve fund transfer in the amount of \$65,000. Mr. Whitefield seconded the motion. Roll Call: Robertson-aye; Lengyel-aye; Green-aye; Whitefield-aye; Linskey-aye.*

The Finance Committee adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Respectively submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager.