

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2025
APPROVED**

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

SB Members Absent: John Reilly;

Also Present: Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Finance Director/Town Accountant; Melisa Doig, Human Resource Director; Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair; Mary Jennings;

Destination Groton Committee Members: Greg Sheldon; Jeff Gordon; Brian Bolton; Joni Parker Roach.

Friends of Prescott: Megan Donovan, Director; Jeff Gordon, President.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Haddad announced that the town received a check from Groton Hill Music Center in the amount of \$35,534 from the 2024 Fourth Quarter proceeds from the Groton Community Fund. He said the average quarterly payment ranges between \$12,000 and \$16,000. This check is the largest one received to date. Mr. Haddad expressed his gratitude to the Groton Hill Music Center for their continued support of the Town.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD #1

None

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Fiscal Year 2025 Second Quarter Financial Update.

Mr. Haddad wanted to take a few minutes to review the FY 2025 Second Quarter Financial Update with the Board. He reported that the Town's revenue receipts have increased compared to last year. He explained that Motor Vehicle/Boat Excise, Meals Tax, and Local Option Room Occupancy Tax are up from last year. Additionally, revenues from the Country Club rose from \$217,000 over the first two quarters of last year to \$261,000 this year. They continue to perform well.

Mr. Haddad explained that investment income has decreased compared to the previous year, which was anticipated based on the fact that the Florence Roche Construction Project was nearing completion. He was pleased with the revenues and said Groton is in very good shape. The first commitment of motor vehicle excise tax will be sent out soon, and expenditures are right on track. Mr. Haddad anticipates a deficit related to snow and ice expenses. He said department heads continue to do a great job managing their budgets. Finance Committee Chair Mr. Robertson said he would be pleased if they maintained this positive trend.

2. Update on Select Board's 2025 Goals.

Mr. Haddad provided the Board with the following updates on the Select Board Goals for FY 2025 (said update was contained in the Board's Meeting Packet):

1. Support Boards and Committees

Sustainability Commission: The Working Group provided a report and recommendation to the Select Board at their meeting on December 16th. At the meeting, the Working Group Recommended that the Select Board bring an Article to the Town Meeting recommending adopting a resolution supporting the goal by the Commonwealth of reducing state-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The Select Board voted unanimously to bring this to the 2025 Spring Town Meeting.

Mr. Haddad said that Ms. Charlotte Weigel, a member of the Sustainability Committee, is doing a phenomenal job leading the committee. He explained that they applied for a grant to hire an Energy Manager in partnership with the towns of Harvard, Shirley, and Ayer. This Energy Manager would serve all four municipalities.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee: There is No New Update. This Goal is on-going.

Affordable Housing Trust: There is No New Update.

Ms. Pine respectfully requested that the Select Board draft a Letter of Support for the Affordable Housing Trust for their application to the Community Preservation Committee. This application is for funding to build reserves, which is a new approach to building affordable housing. Ms. Pine said this was a request for funding to the CPC for \$400,000. The Select Board supported Mr. Haddad in drafting this letter.

Planning Board: There is No New Update. The Planning Board still plans to bring the matters of updating the Accessory Dwelling Unit Zoning Bylaw, the Master Plan, and MBTA Zoning amendments to the 2025 Spring Town Meeting.

2. PILOTS: Mr. Haddad stated that this goal was essentially completed with the Report provided to the Select Board from the PILOT Working Group. The next step would be for the Select Board to consider implementing the recommendation. This matter would be scheduled for a future Select Board Meeting.

3. FY 2026 Budget Development/Implementation: The Town Manager has completed his proposed Budget and submitted it to the Select Board and Finance Committee in compliance with the Charter. The Budget is now under review.

Mr. Cunningham inquired about having the Town's State Delegation attend a future meeting to provide an update on local aid, including Chapter 70 Aid. Mr. Haddad said he would contact the Delegation (Senator Cronin and Representatives Scarsdale and Sena) and invite them to attend the February 24th Select Board meeting.

4. Provide Tax Relief for Seniors: The Assessors have updated the Select Board on various pieces of legislation before the legislature to provide Tax Relief to Groton's Seniors. Principal Assessor Ms. Foster has been actively lobbying for these acts.
5. Charter Review: The Charter Review Committee held its Public Hearing on December 5th and has begun finalizing its various recommendations on proposed changes to the Groton Charter. The main recommendation is to change the way the Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Town Clerk are appointed by having the Town Manager appoint them subject to ratification by the Select Board. The Select Board reviewed this proposal and developed an Appointment Policy for the Town Manager and Select Board to follow when filling these vacancies. The Select Board is in favor of this change. The Charter Review Committee will finalize its recommendation and provide a final report to the 2025 Spring Town Meeting.

Mr. Haddad stated that the last three items for the Charter Review Committee to discuss and review are the Park Commission proposal, the Appointment of Police Chief, Fire Chief and Town Clerk Policy, and the Personnel Board. The Committee's meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 13th, at 4:30 p.m., where these topics will be discussed.

3. Update on Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.

The Select Board and Finance Committee will meet in a Joint Session on Saturday, February 22, 2025, at 8:30 a.m., to review the Budget with various Departments. Mr. Haddad said that a meeting between the Finance Committee and School Officials will be held on Tuesday, February 25, 2025, beginning at 7:00 p.m. for the Finance Committee to review the Superintendent's Budget. Mr. Haddad said that he would post this meeting as a Select Board meeting in the event that a quorum of the Board wishes to attend the meeting. Mr. Haddad is in the process of setting up a Joint Meeting between Groton, Dunstable, and Groton Dunstable Regional School District Officials to be held on Monday, March 3, 2025, to review FY 2026 Budget issues. This meeting will be held at the Groton Center in West Groton.

Mr. Haddad shared some unfortunate news with the Board. He explained that last year, the Town of Groton decided to leave its health insurance provider, Minuteman Nashoba Health Group, due to an unprecedented rate increase of 13.5%. The Town then joined the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) as the unions allowed it and only saw a 5% increase in insurance. Mr. Haddad said this was outstanding. MIIA guaranteed the Town the average increase in health insurance for the second year. They indicated that the average has been between 5% and 7% over the last several years. Initially, MIIA provided Groton with a preliminary increase of 7%. This initial figure was later raised to 10% and then 12%. Based on this, Mr. Haddad budgeted for a 12% increase in health insurance in his proposed Budget. He also incorporated all Union obligations in the Budget based on the proposed Health Insurance increase to remain in compliance with the Guidance of keeping any increase in the Municipal Budget to \$475,000.

Last week, MIIA notified the Town of an anticipated increase of 14.8% for FY 2026. Mr. Haddad is extremely disappointed with MIIA regarding this increase. Due to the 14.8% increase in health

insurance, his previously balanced budget is now out of balance by \$25,000. He will need to return to the Finance Committee to discuss this matter.

He explained that MIIA promised the Town that any increases would be based on individual member usage history, rather than group history. The Town currently has a usage rate of 77%, yet it will still receive a 14.8% increase. Mr. Haddad will draft a letter to MIIA regarding the proposed health insurance increase to the Town of Groton for FY 2026.

Mr. Haddad said that revenue has increased in some of the estimates he initially projected when preparing the budget. He plans to discuss with the Finance Committee the possibility of revising the Guidance of limiting the FY 2026 Municipal Budget increase to \$475,000 based on the higher revenue projections. They will discuss this during the joint session meeting of the Select Board and Finance Committee on February 22nd.

Mr. Haddad also wanted to share some potential good news with the Board.

When he presented the Budget last week, he said \$1,365,654 was available in New Revenues for the Groton Dunstable Regional School District (GDRSD), which would result in a shortfall of \$980,000 under a level service budget.

Mr. Haddad explained that since he presented the Budget last week and the Governor's Budget was released, the School Committee reviewed their Budget and voted to modify the Guidance provided to the Superintendent. As a result, the shortfall was reduced from \$980,000 to \$827,090. This remaining shortfall would still require an override in both the Towns of Groton and Dunstable. This represents Budget Scenario #1- the Superintendent's Proposed Budget. This Scenario proposes a 6.95% increase in the Operational Budget.

Scenario #2.- Mr. Haddad explained that this scenario was discussed last week during the Budget Presentation. It requires the Town of Groton to allocate \$1,365,654 in available New Revenues for the GDRSD. The Town of Dunstable would proportionally match Groton with approximately \$333,000. If an override passes in Dunstable to match Groton's available funding, the School District would still need to reduce its Budget by approximately \$1.2 million. This Scenario would require an override in the Town of Dunstable and would represent a 4.22% increase in the Operational Budget.

Scenario #3 – In this Budget Scenario, the assessment can only be based on available funds if no override passes. This would result in a 1.66 % increase in the Operational Budget. The School District would have to cut \$2.5 million from its Budget. Mr. Haddad said this was the worst scenario and he would never recommend it.

Mr. Haddad stated that it was important for Groton, Dunstable, and Groton Dunstable Regional School District Officials to meet on Monday, March 3rd, for a Joint Meeting to review the FY 2026 Budget issues. He emphasized that cooperation and collaboration with the School District and the Town of Dunstable officials is outstanding.

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

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	Potential Budget Meeting
Monday, March 10, 2025	Public Hearing on the Spring Town Meeting
Monday, March 17, 2025	No Meeting
Monday, March 24, 2025	Review Prescott Building Assessment- Determine if any Action Needs to be taken
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

None

6:15 P.M.- Destination Groton- Annual Report

Greg Sheldon called the Destination Groton Committee meeting to order.

Members of the Destination Groton Committee in attendance were Greg Sheldon, Brian Bolton, Jeff Gordon, and Joni Parker Roche. They attended the meeting to present their Annual Report to the Select Board. Mr. Sheldon shared a PowerPoint Presentation to the Board that reviewed a summary of their activities and accomplishments over the past year.

Mr. Haddad and Mr. Sheldon are working with the committee on an RFP (Request for Proposals) to hire a consultant for the Town Wide Center Vision Plan. The RFP has been drafted and will be advertised for bids in the upcoming week.

The Destination Groton Committee also plans to submit a warrant article for the 2025 Spring Town Meeting requesting \$15,000 in funding from Free Cash.

They established a Destination Groton Committee Gift Fund and have received two major donations: \$3,500 from Lawrence Academy and \$10,000 from Groton School. Mr. Gordon gave a shout-out to Groton School and Lawrence Academy. He said that he walked into the offices of Lawrence Academy and Groton School, and they generously provided funding to the Destination Groton Committee. Mr. Haddad expressed his desire to maintain a positive relationship with the non-profits. Ms. Pine thanked the Committee for the extensive list of accomplishments and said it was impressive.

6:30 P.M.-Friends of Prescott- Annual Report

The Friends of Prescott's Executive Director, Megan Donovan, and their new President, Jeff Gordon, were in attendance. Ms. Donovan announced that this is Prescott's 10th anniversary. She stated that the Friends of Prescott promotes and supports community education.

A PowerPoint Presentation was given to the Board, highlighting the impacts of Prescott's programs. Prescott operates seven days a week and has seen a 40 percent increase in class participation. The list of towns served by Prescott in 2024 has expanded. Programs are available during school vacation weeks, half days, and throughout the summer. They have seen growth in the number of participants attending the programs from 2023 to 2024. Ms. Donovan explained that they have a total of seventeen (17) total tenants. Among them are 11 artists/makers, 10 women-owned companies, 3 nonprofits, and 10 entrepreneurs. She said that this year, they received \$8,600 for a mass cultural grant.

Mr. Haddad wanted the Board to see how Prescott has grown over the last ten years. He congratulated Ms. Donovan and Mr. Gordon for their efforts. Mr. Gordon acknowledged the support of numerous volunteers working behind the scenes. Mr. Haddad thanked the Friends of Prescott for attending.

On Going issues

- A. PFAS Issue—Despite a few snow days, the project is going well. Mr. Haddad stated that the intent is to connect to the high school during school vacation. He said the contractor, DeFelice, and the engineers are doing an excellent job. Mr. Haddad explained that they are currently completing the paperwork for SRF funding.
- B. Nashoba Valley Medical Center Working Group- No update.
- C. Charter Review Committee—Mr. Haddad said one of the original recommendations to the Charter Review Committee was to change the Park Commission from an elected to an appointed body. The proposal also included whether the maintenance of park properties should fall under the Department of Public Works. The Select Board requested that the Charter Review Committee continue discussing the Park Commission proposal. At the last Charter Review Committee meeting, members expressed their desire to continue reviewing the proposal.

Mr. Haddad said that based on the request of the Select Board and the Charter Review Committee, he drafted a memo as Town Manager to continue discussing how the Park Commission will be addressed in the Charter. Mr. Haddad proposed that the DPW continue to maintain the various parks, commons and fields and that the Park Commission be eliminated and the Select Board become the Park Commission as authorized by State Statute. He has already shared the memo with this proposal with the Select Board and the Park Commission. However, he will provide and present the proposal to the Charter Review Committee during their upcoming joint meeting with the Park Commission. This upcoming meeting has been posted as a Select Board meeting if the Board also wishes to attend.

Ms. Pine inquired if the Department of Public Works is responsible for maintaining all fields not owned by the school. Mr. Haddad confirmed they are.

Mr. Haddad explained that he would like to create a stipend position for a park advisor. He believes this role would benefit the Town and stated that the Charter Review Committee needs to review this proposal. Mr. Haddad wanted to emphasize that he has requested to withdraw his original proposal. The Committee expressed a desire to keep this matter under consideration, so he presented a new proposal. Ms. Pine believes that the Park Commission should be consulted. Mr. Pisani mentioned that there is a lot of information to review, which will take time. He thinks it makes sense for the Department of Public Works (DPW) to manage the fields since they are already maintaining them. Ms. Pine said that it is important to understand the workload for the Select Board to become the Park Commission. Ms. Manugian believes there is still much to learn about this proposal.

The next Charter Review Committee meeting is scheduled for February 13th at 4:30 p.m. to review various proposals.

- 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

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 the Select Board Chair to sign Warrants for the next 30 days. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS

None

Public Comment Period #2

None

Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting Minutes of February 3, 2025.

Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of February 3, 2025. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:33 p.m. Respectively submitted by Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager.