

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
THE GROTON CENTER
MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2025
APPROVED**

Select Board Members Present: Alison Manugian, Chair; Peter Cunningham, Clerk; Matt Pisani; Becky Pine, Vice Chair; 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; Hannah Moller, Treasurer/Tax Collector; Megan Foster, Principal Assessor; Geoff Bruno, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Superintendent; Sherry Kersey, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Director of Business; Jason Silva, Dunstable Town Administrator; Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk; Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks;

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

Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee Members Present: Lacey McCabe, Chair; Christina Andriole; Fay Raynor; Rohit Bhasin; Rosanna Casavecchia;

Dunstable Select Board Members Present: Leah Basbanes, Chair; Kieran Meehan, Vice Chair; Ronald Mikol;

Dunstable Advisory Members Present: Jacob Lewen, Chair; Clinton Keeney; Leo Tometich; Matthew Naughton.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Pisani announced that Representative Margaret Scarsdale nominated Chief Arthur Cheeks for the Black Excellence Leadership Award. Chief Cheeks was presented with the award at a ceremony last Friday at the State House.

Mr. Cunningham announced that the Open House at Florence Roche was a great success. Ms. Pine said the School is beautiful and inviting and thanked the School Building Committee for their efforts. Mr. Haddad said refreshments were provided, and he thanked Forge and Vine for sponsoring the vendor for the event.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD #1

Mr. Phil Francisco from the Planning Board attended the meeting as the appointed liaison to the Select Board. He reported that the Planning Board unanimously approved the 2025 Master Plan Update on Thursday, February 27th. This update will be presented as a warrant article at the Town Meeting to seek the town's endorsement. The final version of the Master Plan is now available on both the Town of Groton and Planning Board websites. He encouraged the Board to meet with the Planning Board for a more in-depth discussion about the Master Plan.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- 1. Consider Approving a Letter of Support to Make Remote and Hybrid Meetings Permanent.**

Mr. Haddad explained that the legislation authorizing remote, hybrid, and virtual meetings will expire on March 31, 2025. A bill before the legislature (HD 2863/SD 1850) would make this permanent. At the request of Select Board Member Cunningham, a letter of support was drafted for the Chair to sign and to be sent to the State Delegation. The Board received a copy of the draft letter for their review. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Select Board vote to approve the issuance of the letter. Mr. Cunningham said he recently attended an MRPC meeting, and it was discussed, so he thought it was appropriate to bring it forward. Mr. Haddad believes that remote, hybrid, and virtual meetings have promoted more public participation. Ms. Pine thanked Mr. Cunningham for bringing this forward.

Ms. Pine made a motion to approve issuing the letter of support to make remote and hybrid meetings permanent. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Update on the 2025 Spring Town Meeting Warrant.

Mr. Haddad explained that since the Warrant closed on February 21st, he received requests to add the following three Articles to the Warrant:

Article: Repair Sprinkler System at Town Hall
Article: Disposition of Town-Owned Land on Hoyts Wharf Road
Article: An Act Authorizing the Town of Groton to Adopt Alternative Methods for Notice of Public Hearings

Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board vote to open the Warrant and allow him to add these three Articles to the Warrant.

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to open the warrant for the 2025 Spring Town Meeting. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Pine made a motion to add the three additional articles to the warrant. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Pine made a motion to close the warrant. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Update on Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.

Mr. Haddad explained that the Groton Select Board, Groton Finance Committee, Dunstable Select Board, Dunstable Advisory Committee, and Groton Dunstable Regional School District Committee would be meeting in joint session at 7:00 p.m. to discuss the FY 2026 Budget. They will also determine whether or not to seek an override(s) of Proposition 2 ½ to balance the Budget.

Mr. Haddad said that a decision needs to be made on whether to seek an override(s) of Proposition 2 ½ to cover the anticipated Assessment from the Groton Dunstable Regional School District to fund the Superintendent's Proposed Budget and to cover the addition of six (6) Firefighter/EMTs for the Groton Fire Department. He explained that the School Assessment would require an additional

\$827,090. The Town Manager’s Proposed Budget has \$1,365,564 set aside for the Assessment, and the anticipated increase is \$2,192,654. He said adding six (6) Firefighters/EMTs for the Groton Fire Department in FY 2026 would require an additional override of \$780,904.

Mr. Haddad informed the Board that if they decide to pursue an Override, they need to determine whether to include one or two questions on the Ballot. To place the Override question(s) on the Annual Election, these must be submitted to the Town Clerk by April 7th, the deadline for posting the warrant. He would like the Board to make a decision this evening. Mr. Haddad also thought it was important to explain that the total amount of \$780,904 for the additional (6) six Firefighters/EMTs includes \$150,000 allocated for pension costs. He said this expense would not impact the town for another two or three years but wants to incorporate it into the levy capacity now.

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

Monday, March 10, 2025	Public Hearing on the Spring Town Meeting Executive Session
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

1. Consider Appointing Po Tse to the Diversity, Equity, And Inclusion Committee.

Mr. Pisani made a motion to appoint Po Tse to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, with a term expiring on June 30, 2025. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Consider Approving a One Day All Alcohol Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott’s for Whiskey 101 to be held on Friday, March 7, 2025, at the Prescott Community Center from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to approve a One Day All Alcohol Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott’s for Whiskey 101 on Friday, March 7, 2025, at the Prescott Community Center from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Consider Approving a One Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott’s Open Mic Night to be held at the Groton School on Friday, March 14, 2025, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Ms. Pine made a motion to approve a One Day Wine and Malt Beverages License for the Friends of Prescott’s Open Mic Night to be held at the Prescott Community Center on Friday, March 14, 2025, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

On Going issues

- A. PFAS—Mr. Haddad said the construction for the PFAS waterline will be completed in Groton next week. He said North Street would be the only remaining street in Groton and a Road Opening permit had been filed in the Town of Dunstable. Mr. Haddad said the parts for the Chlorine Booster station currently have a long lead time, which is necessary to provide clean, potable water to the High School. He explained that if the waterline pipe is ready, irrigation water could be provided to the high school. Mr. Haddad said this is one of Groton’s best projects.
- B. Nashoba Valley Medical Center Working Group—Mr. Haddad explained that the committee co-chairs wanted to disband the Working Group after releasing the Final Report. Mr. Haddad said that the Working Group does not wish to disband, as its work is ongoing. He said Representative Margaret Scarsdale is leading the effort and is doing an excellent job.
- C. Charter Review Committee—The Committee’s next meeting will be held on Thursday, March 6th at 4:30 p.m., located at Town Hall, to finalize some of their recommendations. The public hearing will be held on March 27th,
- D. Florence Roche Elementary School Construction Project—Mr. Haddad thanked the Building and School Committees for a job well done organizing the Open House on Saturday, March 1st.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS

None

Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting Minutes of February 24, 2025.

Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of February 25, 2025. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

At 6:50 p.m., the Select Board held a 10-minute recess.

7:00 P.M. In Joint Session with the Groton Finance Committee, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Committee, Dunstable Select Board, and the Dunstable Advisory Committee- Review Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Proposals- Determine Whether or Not to Seek an Override of Propositions 2 ½ to Balance the Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget.

Ms. Manugian resumed the Select Board meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

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

Ms. McCabe called the Groton Dunstable Regional School meeting to order.

Mr. Meehan called the Dunstable Select Board Committee meeting to order.

Mr. Lewen called the Dunstable Advisory Committee meeting to order.

Mr. Haddad thanked everyone for attending that evening. He said that with regard to Groton’s Fiscal Year 2026 Budget, a decision needs to be made on whether to seek/consider an override(s) of Proposition 2 ½ to cover the anticipated Assessment from the Groton Dunstable Regional School

District to fund the Superintendents Proposed Budget and to cover the addition of six (6) Firefighter/EMTs for the Groton Fire Department. He explained that the Groton Select Board and Finance Committee would later discuss the proposal for adding six (6) additional Firefighters/EMTs, but he wanted to focus on the Assessment now. He explained that based on the latest estimates received since he submitted the Proposed Budget on January 31, 2025, the Town would need an additional \$827,090 to cover the full anticipated Assessment from the Groton Dunstable Regional School District (the Town Manager's Proposed Budget has \$1,365,564 set aside for the Assessment and the anticipated increase is \$2,192,654). An override of \$827,090 would add \$0.29 to the FY 2026 Anticipated Tax Rate and cost the average taxpayer (a home valued at \$707,877) an additional \$205 per year. He hoped that during the meeting that evening, the Towns of Groton and Dunstable would decide whether or not to proceed with an override. Mr. Haddad explained to include an override question(s) on the Annual Town Election Ballot; they must be submitted to the Town Clerk by April 7th. He emphasized the sooner they make a decision, the better.

Ms. McCabe, Chair of the Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee, thanked the Boards for their collaboration and thoughtful questions. She said that in light of the impacts of last year's Budget cuts, she hopes they will allow voters to weigh in on an override question for the Ballot and get support from Dunstable and Groton. Ms. McCabe stated that the School Committee is voting on the Superintendent's Budget on March 12th.

Dunstable Town Administrator Mr. Jason Silva explained that the Town of Dunstable faces an approximate deficit of \$209,000 if it has to match the Town of Groton. He stated that the total deficit for maintaining level funding for the schools is approximately \$547,000. He proposed a draft schedule and timeline to the Dunstable Select Board regarding two Overrides, stating it would be a tight timeline. Mr. Silva stated that an Override was necessary to fund the school and Town budget. Ms. Pine asked Mr. Silva if they would ask for a combined amount. Mr. Silva stated that the Dunstable Select and Advisory Board had not made any decisions or held any votes. He believed they would propose a single figure to include both the Municipal and the School Budget. Dunstable Select Board Chair Ms. Leah Basbanes clarified that there would not be two separate Override questions on the Ballot, as they considered it one Budget. A third option for a Budget has not been considered, as it isn't an option at this point.

Mr. Cunningham asked the School Committee if they were inclined to follow the Superintendent's Budget. Ms. McCabe confirmed that they were.

Mr. Cunningham said he was in favor of including an Override question on the Ballot to fund the Schools. Mr. Silva suggested that presenting three different budgets at the Annual Town Meeting might lead to confusion. Ms. Pine said she would prefer voters to have some options but agreed that having multiple choices may be confusing. Mr. Haddad stated that it would be his intention to propose a contingent budget at Town Meeting so that if the override failed, the Town would not need another Town Meeting to balance the budget. School Committee member Ms. Fay Raynor asked whether the Town of Groton would be willing to go for two Overrides. Mr. Haddad said the Select Board and Finance Committee needed to discuss that matter during their meeting that evening.

Dunstable Select Board Vice Chair Mr. Kieran Meehan asked the Boards if this year felt different from the previous year. Mr. Reilly responded that it felt different from the previous year and expressed his support in two Override questions. He believes there is an appetite for pursuing it this year. Mr. Meehan stated that coordinating the Boards to hold a meeting requires a lot of effort. Ms. Linskey believes this issue will be revisited annually, indicating a problem with the state funding. Mr. Robertson said this issue wouldn't be resolved this year, but it's important to start working on a solution. Dunstable Advisory member Mr. Matthew Naughton expressed that his children felt the effects of the Budget cuts made by the Schools, and he believes that any parent with a child in the school has noticed the same. He thanked Mr. Haddad and Mr. Silva for bringing Groton and Dunstable together and said this collaboration feels like a team effort. Mr. Lewon said if an Override doesn't pass, there would be more significant cuts to the Fire and Police Departments, and a building would close. He emphasized the need for people to recognize the need. School Committee member Ms. Rosanna Casavecchia asked Mr. Haddad to provide the anticipated tax rate per hundred thousand for the taxpayers. Mr. Francisco suggested bringing Budget information to the voters in various locations. Mr. Clinton Keeney stated they need to explain to the residents why this year's request differs from last year's.

Mr. Cunningham made a motion for the Groton Select Board to place a ballot question on the May 20th Annual Town Election to support the Groton Dunstable Regional School District Superintendent's Budget with a maximum of \$827,090. Ms. Pine seconded the motion.

Discussion

Mr. Reilly said they cannot keep returning to the taxpayers yearly. He said it was important to inform taxpayers what they would do better. Ms. Manugian expressed her concern that this situation feels similar to last year's and that they might lose credibility if they don't prove how things will change. Ms. Pine suggested they might consider doing something differently if the vote fails. Mr. Lewon believes that conducting an operational audit demonstrated an effort and provided information to the public. Mr. Silva believes this year is different from last year, and it has been communicated. He explained that the state needs to address Chapter 70 funding, as they seek a level service budget but cannot maintain it. He stated that numbers simply do not add up. Mr. Silva said many things are in the queue with Dunstable; they are working on long-term solutions. He believes there must be a better way to reach people so they can make an informed decision.

The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Haddad explained that the Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee will certify its Budget on March 12, 2025. The Dunstable Select Board needs to decide whether to place a question on the Ballot and to determine the proposed amount. Ms. Manugian asked how to develop a plan for this process. Mr. Haddad stated that he would begin planning public hearings and reach out to the School and the Town of Dunstable. Ms. McCabe discussed potential strategies for reducing the override amount.

Ms. McCabe adjourned the School Committee Meeting.

Mr. Meehan adjourned the Dunstable Select Board Meeting.

Mr. Lewon adjourned the Dunstable Advisory Board Meeting.

Groton Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks attended the discussion regarding the proposal for an Override to fund six more Firefighters/EMTs for the Groton Fire Department.

Mr. Haddad said adding six (6) Firefighters/EMTs in FY 2026 would cost an additional \$780,904. This would result in an increase in the anticipated FY 2026 Tax Rate of \$0.28 or an increase in the average tax bill of \$198. Should both Overrides be presented and passed, the total tax increase would be \$403.

Mr. Haddad said Chief Cheeks was looking at the need for FY 2026 and stated the Fire Department has been seeking additional manpower since 2019. Mr. Haddad said the Nashoba Valley Medical Center exacerbated the situation, and there was a need for additional Firefighters/EMTs. He stressed the importance of communicating this need. Chief Cheeks wanted to address the current availability issue and the timing of calls.

Ms. Pine inquired about the proposal of six new Firefighters/EMTs, specifically asking whether it would be possible to have more personnel available during daytime hours to respond to calls and if it was possible to implement this in phases. Chief Cheeks explained that the number of calls during daytime hours was comparable to those in the evening. He described two Firefighters as a band-aid or a temporary solution. Mr. Haddad stated that pursuing these options would involve many implications for the union.

Mr. Robertson stated that the closing of the Hospital has created additional problems. There are now fewer people to do inspections, and handling the administrative part of the job will be more challenging. He said they need to decide whether to follow the Chief's suggestions or continue to live with what they have. The Chief explained that new developments, such as 500 Main Street, are being constructed. Hiring more Firefighters would provide an appropriate response to calls and allow the department to maintain in-house staffing during incidents. He said they are experiencing burnout among the staff.

Mr. Pisani said the call department is dwindling. He said it was only a matter of time before this imploded and staffing would become an issue.

Mr. Green appreciates the need for six additional Firefighters but has requested supporting data for this proposal. He wants to fund these six new Firefighters without an Override. Mr. Haddad explained that there is no flexibility within the operating budget unless cuts are made to another department. He also said that the Chief has provided information regarding the number of calls, overlaps, shifts, and costs. Ms. Linskey inquired about how to get the entire town involved in this initiative. Ms. Pine would like the data broken down from 8:00 am to midnight, including inspections and calls.

The Boards discussed how to effectively explain this to the voters to gain support for the Override question to fund six (6) additional Firefighters/EMTs. Mr. Reilly said this is a safety issue. After a lengthy discussion, Mr. Robertson asked if the Select Board was prepared to take a vote that evening. Ms. Pine, Ms. Manugian, and Mr. Green said they needed more information to understand the numbers fully. Ms. Pine requested that the Chief provide a plan detailing how two or four firefighters could operate effectively. Mr. Haddad then asked the Chief to prepare a Presentation for the Select Board and Finance Committee for the upcoming Select Board Meeting on March 10th, at 6:00 p.m.

The Select Board Meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m. while the Finance Committee continued to convene for other business.

The Town Manager's Office received an invoice from MIIA for a Property and Casualty Endorsement in the amount of \$5,818. The Finance Committee reviewed this request.

Mr. Green made a motion to authorize the reserve fund transfer in the amount of \$5,818. Mr. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

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