

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES**  
**MONDAY, MARCH 24, 2025**  
**APPROVED**

**Select Board Members Present:** Alison Manugian, Chair; Becky Pine, Vice Chair; Peter Cunningham, Clerk; Matt Pisani; 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; Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk; Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks; Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair.

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

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Haddad read aloud a Press Release outlining the Town's ongoing efforts to provide information to the public and address questions regarding the Budget and overall operations of the Town and School District. The Select Board, Groton-Dunstable Regional School District Committee, and Groton Town members are scheduling various events to meet with the public. He announced that there will be a "Coffee and Conversation" event at the Groton Inn on April 3, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Haddad, Select Board Member John Reilly, School Superintendent Geoff Bruno, and Groton-Dunstable Regional School Committee Chair Lacey McCabe will be present to discuss the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget and answer any questions from the public regarding School and Town issues. On the same day, the Groton Public Library will host a Pre-School Family "Meet and Greet" at 10:30 a.m. The same group will meet with parents of young children (3 to 5 years of age), introduce them to the School District, and discuss the budget. Lastly, a Community Budget Forum is scheduled for April 16, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. at the Groton-Dunstable Regional High School. Mr. Haddad explained that representatives from the Groton Select Board, Groton Finance Committee, Groton-Dunstable Regional School Committee, Dunstable Select Board, and Dunstable Advisory Committee, along with the Dunstable Town Administrator and Groton Town Manager, will present the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget. They will also be available to answer any questions.

Mr. Haddad explained that the Town of Groton has a history of generosity among its residents. He announced that on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Groton Dunstable Regional School District and the Dunstable and Groton Council on Aging will host a citizen appreciation dinner at the Groton Dunstable Regional High School from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. He emphasized that they did not want to use taxpayer funds for this event. Attorney Bob Collins has generously offered to sponsor the dinner. Mr. Haddad wanted to thank Mr. Collins.

Ms. Pine announced that when a wonderful member of the Affordable Housing Trust, Rick Perini, passed away last fall, his family, in recognition of his work, requested donations through a GoFundMe in lieu of flowers. Last week, the family attended an Affordable Housing Trust meeting and presented a donation to the committee of \$30,500. Ms. Pine stated that Mr. Perini was an important member of the committee and had a real passion for affordable housing.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD #1**

A resident of Groton described the community as filled with kind people who care for one another. She urged the Board to reconsider splitting the override vote. She said everyone recognizes Groton's need for funding for the schools and first responders. By separating these two essential needs, she said the community is forced to debate which one is more urgent. She feels that a divided override could lead to divisions within the town.

## **TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

### **1. Consider Ratifying the Agreement between the Town of Groton and SEIU 888, Highway/Water/Transfer Station Employees.**

Mr. Haddad stated that the Board received a copy of the Tentative Agreement between the Town and SEIU 888, Highway/ Water/and Transfer Station employees for their review. He explained that the Union has ratified this Agreement and includes a 3% cost-of-living (COLA) increase for each year for three years, totaling a 9% increase over a three-year period. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board consider ratifying the Agreement.

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to ratify the Agreement between the Town of Groton and SEIU 888, Highway/Water/and Transfer Station Employees. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

### **2. Consider Ratifying the Agreement between the Town of Groton and AFSCME Council 93 Local 1703-Groton Supervisor's Union.**

The Board was provided a copy of the Tentative Agreement between the Town of Groton and AFSCME Council 93 Local 1703- Groton Supervisor's Union for their review. He explained that the Union has ratified this Agreement and includes a 3% cost-of-living (COLA) increase for each year for three years, totaling a 9% increase over a three-year period. Mr. Haddad said this Agreement would also impact the three Bylaw employees in the town. The Union has ratified this Agreement. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board consider ratifying the Agreement.

*Mr. Cunningham made a motion to ratify the Agreement between the Town of Groton and AFSCME Council 93 Local 1703- Groton Supervisor's Union. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Mr. Haddad provided an update on collective bargaining, stating that the Select Board has ratified five of the six union contracts. He said one is outstanding but hopes to settle all contracts by the Spring Town Meeting.

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

Wednesday, March 26, 2025,	Joint Meeting with Town Moderator and Groton Contingent of the GDRSD Committee to consider reappointing Rob Flynn and John Ellenberger to the Nashoba Tech School Committee
Monday, March 31, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 7, 2025	Issue the Warrant for the 2025 Spring Town Meeting

Monday, April 14, 2025  
Monday, April 21, 2025  
Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup>

Public Hearing for the Monarch Path Layout Hearing  
No Meeting- Patriot's Day Holiday  
Spring Town Meeting

**6:15 P.M. Discussion- UMass Memorial Health's Plan to Build a Satellite Emergency Facility in Groton.**

Chief Arthur Cheeks was in attendance for the discussion. Mr. Haddad said that the Board's packet included a letter the Town received from UMass Memorial Health explaining that they are proposing a Satellite Emergency Facility in Groton in response to the Closure of the Nashoba Valley Medical Center. Mr. Haddad and Fire Chief Arthur Cheeks were members of the Working Group, which met over the past several months to address the closure. Chief Cheeks also participated in several subcommittees. Mr. Haddad explained that UMass attempted to purchase the old Nashoba Valley Medical Center (NVMC) site but could not, so they want to acquire a location within a three-mile radius of NVMC to build a satellite facility. The proposed center will be located at 468 and 500 Main Street in Groton, subdivided into a six-and-a-half-acre lot known as 490 Main Street. They have secured a deal with the owners of these parcels to construct an approximate 35,000-square-foot, single-story building that will include a helipad. Mr. Haddad explained that ambulances from the surrounding towns used to pass this site on their way to Nashoba Hospital. Last week, representatives from UMass, including Mr. Haddad, Chief Cheeks, and Police Chief Michael Luth, met to discuss the proposed project. Mr. Haddad explained this would require a Special Permit, a Site Plan Review from the Planning Board, and Wetlands and Stormwater Earth Removal permits. He said they hope to create one comprehensive application for all the Boards and Committees to review simultaneously. He also explained that they have started separate conversations with Seven Hills Pediatric Hospital in Groton because an important relationship needs to happen. Chief Cheeks said there would be many questions regarding the proposed facility, but they are optimistic that if everything goes well, there will be opportunities for expansion. He said this is a positive step for the community. Mr. Haddad said this marks the beginning of the process and that there is still much to be done, including public hearings. Mr. Haddad said UMass's goal is to have the proposed facility up and running by November 2026.

**Public Comments**

Groton resident Mr. Campbell asked when the public would have the opportunity to speak about the proposed Emergency Facility. Mr. Haddad said it would be during the Planning Board public hearing.

Groton resident Debbie Campbell expressed concerns about the Emergency Facility, stating that it was not the best location due to noise from ambulances, helicopters, traffic, and the nearby school. Mr. Haddad explained to Ms. Campbell she could express her concerns during the Planning Board's public hearing.

**CONTINUE OF THE TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

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

Mr. Haddad explained that the Finance Committee has approved the proposed Balanced Budget in the amount of \$52,448,239. He said additionally, they voted to present a Contingent Budget to the Town Meeting for an additional \$673,250 for the Groton Dunstable Regional School District Assessment and \$630,904 to add six (6) Firefighter/EMTs to the Groton Fire Department. The Finance Committee

requested Mr. Haddad prepare a three-year projection based on the contingent budgets. He provided the Board with a memo outlining the projections and reviewed the assumptions with them. Mr. Haddad included the two override questions and a combined question in the packet for the Select Board's review. He emphasized that the staffing request for the Fire Department to operate 24/7 is not new; it was initially proposed in 2021. Mr. Haddad said the Board would need to make a decision. (Refer to the memo included with these minutes.)

Mr. Haddad stated that, based on the assumptions provided, the Town is projected to have a surplus of \$150,000 in FY26, also a surplus of \$925,590 in FY27, and \$1,320,889 million in FY28. These surpluses will be available to fund increases in the Operating Assessment for the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District.

#### **ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL**

##### **1. Determine Whether or Not to Combine the Two Override Questions (One for the School and One for the Fire Department) on the May 20, 2025, Election Ballot Into One Question or Keep them Separated.**

Mr. Haddad explained that they have received a lot of community feedback regarding whether to combine the override questions. He explained the Select Board had a divided vote during the Tuesday, March 18<sup>th</sup> Finance Committee meeting, with two members in favor of and two against, combining the two override votes. He provided the Board with the two Proposed Override Ballot Questions to be added to the May 20, 2025 Annual Town Election Ballot. He said that given the new news regarding the proposed Emergency Facility, he had received several comments from people on whether or not they would still need six (6) Firefighters/EMTs moving forward. Still, he would leave that up to the Select Board to decide. Ms. Pine believes the UMass Emergency Facility changes the situation. She pointed out that the distance an ambulance would have to travel is a good reason to revisit this question. Three members were in favor of the six (6) Firefighters/EMTs, while one was against them. Mr. Pisani said they hire professionals in the field to do their jobs, and the previous and current Fire Chiefs recommend six. Chief Cheeks said they aren't looking to increase staff for other towns but are looking to keep Groton whole. Ms. Manugian is worried about staff burnout. Mr. Cunningham applauded the Chief for all the information that he had provided. He said even though the Emergency Facility is good news, it is optimistic that it will be up and running in November 2026. Ms. Pine said she didn't dispute the need for six, but they have been living with what they have. Her reasoning for asking for only two (2) Firefighters/EMTs is the balance between the Schools and the Fire Department. She believes they should increase the number of firefighters gradually for the taxpayers. Chief Cheeks said the cost of overtime is significant. Ms. Pine said two (2) Firefighters would be a big improvement for Groton's Fire Department. Chief Cheeks said he has to look at the liability of his crew and that they have been adapting and found a way to make things work the best they could but incurred many expenses.

A resident of 57 Longhill Road inquired about the time required to recruit and train a new firefighter. She also asked how realistic it would be to train six (6) Firefighters in a single year. She suggested that a gradual approach to training might be more effective. The Chief responded by explaining that

they aim to attract individuals with prior experience and that the last firefighter they hired came from Groton's recruit class.

Groton Resident Ms. Mary Jennings joined the Select Board meeting late but understood there was no reconsideration regarding the number of Firefighters. She asked what the Chief's plan was if they were unable to fulfill six (6) Firefighters. Chief Cheeks said they would make do with what they have. The Chief explained that the overtime budget was appropriated at \$160,000. Mr. Haddad indicated that there would be a \$130,000 shortfall.

Mr. Reilly believed they were in their current situation because they had kicked the can down the road. He asked what the morale was at the department. Chief Cheeks said they were facing burnout.

At the Finance Committee on March 18<sup>th</sup>, Select Board members Manugian and Pisani voted to keep the override questions separate, while Members Pine and Cunningham voted to combine the questions. Mr. Haddad stated that the decision was whether to keep the questions separate or combine them. Ms. Pine stated she would not vote to keep the override questions separate with six (6) Firefighters/EMTs. She believes they are far less likely to pass and said they are different. The Board received letters today from two School Committee members stating they would have no objections to combining the proposals if the number of Firefighters was reduced to two. Mr. Robertson said they discuss growth and believe the questions should be separated. He would also like to know the Town's opinion on these separately. Mr. Pisani said he agreed with Mr. Robertson and that they would see where the community lies at the end of the day. Ms. Manugian said there would be more clarity by keeping them separate. Mr. Haddad explained that this is a two-step process, as it needs to pass at the Town Meeting and the Ballot.

Mr. Haddad wanted to explain Proposition 2½. He stated that the law was enacted to limit spending to 2.5% growth unless voters choose to allocate more funds. He said it is the voters who make that decision.

After a lengthy discussion and feedback from members of the public, the Select Board agreed that the override vote would consist of two separate questions.

## **2. Consider Opting into In-Person Early Voting for the May 20, 2025, Annual Town Election.**

Ms. Dawn Dunbar, the Town Clerk, was present for the discussion. The Board of Registrars voted unanimously to opt into In Person Early Voting for the May 20, 2025, Town Election. Mr. Haddad said if the Select Board agreed, they would need to vote to opt into Into Person Early Voting for the May 20, 2025, Town Election and vote to include the following hours during the early voting Period:

<i>Saturday, May 10:</i>	<i>9am-3pm</i>
<i>Monday, May 12:</i>	<i>8am-7pm</i>
<i>Tuesday, May 13:</i>	<i>8am-4pm</i>
<i>Wednesday, May 14:</i>	<i>8am-4pm</i>
<i>Thursday, May 15:</i>	<i>8am-4pm</i>

Friday, May 16: 8am-1pm

*Ms. Pine made a motion to opt into In Person Early Voting for the May 20, 2025, Town Election. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion.*

Discussion

Mr. Cunningham inquired whether they would have mail-in voting. Ms. Dunbar clarified that mail-in voting is automatic.

*The motion carried unanimously.*

Ms. Dunbar said that the deadline to pull nomination papers for the Annual Town Election is Friday, March 28, at 5:00 p.m., and the deadline to return papers is April 1, by 5:00 p.m.

**3. Consider Taking Positions on Some/All of the Warrant Articles Contained in the 2025 Spring Town Meeting Warrant.**

Select Board Positions

Article 1: Hear Reports –

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 2: Elected Officials Compensation-

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 3: Wage and Classification Schedule-

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 4: Appropriate FY 2026 Contribution to the OPEB Trust Fund-

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 5: Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Operating Budget- Mr. Haddad explained that the main motion will be on the balanced budget, totaling \$53,634,483, which will be voted on for each function of government.

Additionally, there will be two contingent motions:

1. An increase for the School District by \$673,250, contingent on an override of Proposition 2 ½.
2. Two additional contingent votes: one under public safety, totaling \$630,904, and another for pensions, amounting to \$150,000, both contingent on an override of Proposition 2 ½.

Mr. Haddad explained that the \$150,000 allocation for health insurance (related to pensions) is an expense for FY 2028.

Article 5: Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Operating Budget:

Base Budget-The Select Board was unanimously in favor to support.

Question # 1- Additional Funding for Groton Dunstable Regional School District Assessment

The Select Board was unanimously in favor to support.

Question # 2- Additional Funding to Add Six (6) Firefighters to the Groton Fire Department

The Select Board recommended (4 in Favor, 1 Against-Pine)

Article 6: Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Budget –

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 7: Community Preservation Funding Accounts-

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 8: Community Preservation Funding Recommendations-

Mr. Haddad recommended postponing the CPC positions until next week.

Article 9: Proposed Amendments to the Groton Charter –

Deferred until the Select Board meeting on March 31st, following the Charter Review Committee's public hearing scheduled for March 27th.

Article 10: Act to Adopt Alternative Methods for Notice of Public Hearings-

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 11: Amend Chapter 81, "Town Meetings" of the Code of the Town of Groton-

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 12: Disposition of Town Owned Landon Hoyts Warf Road-

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 13: Amend Chapter 125, "Demolition Delay" of the Code of the Town of Groton-

4 Deferred to Town Meeting, 1 Against-Manugian.

Article 14: Adopt Resolution- Reduce Statewide Greenhouse Gas Emissions-

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 15: Amend Flood Plain Zoning District-

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 16: Endorse Master Plan-

Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 17: MBTA Communities Multi-Family Overlay District (MCMOD)-  
Unanimously in favor of support.

Article 18: Accessory Dwelling Unit Amendments-  
Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 19: Accept Monarch Path as a Town Way-  
Deferred to Town Meeting.

Mr. Haddad updated the Board on some changes to the warrant since the Select Board's public hearing. The Citizen's Petition for a Town-Wide Speed Limit has been withdrawn at the proponent's request. Also, the Sustainability Commission has informed Mr. Haddad that they still have \$6,500 remaining from this year's appropriation. They will not require these funds for the remainder of the year, but they have proposed a budget of \$5,500 for FY 26. He said they would encumber \$6,500 and remove that article from the warrant.

Article 20: Funding For Destination Groton Committee-  
Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 21: Transfer Within the Water Enterprise Fund-  
Deferred to Town Meeting.

Article 22: Transfer Within the Sewer Enterprise Fund-  
Mr. Haddad said that there will be a transfer of approximately \$50,000.  
The Select Board was unanimously in favor to support.

Article 23: Transfer Within Four Corner Sewer Enterprise Fund-  
Mr. Haddad stated that they are requesting \$20,000.  
The Select Board was unanimously in favor to support.

Article 24: Prior Year Bills-  
Deferred to Town Meeting.

Mr. Haddad said the current Year Line-Item Transfers article has been removed from the warrant.

Article 25: Appropriate Funding to Offset Snow and Ice Deficit-  
Mr. Haddad estimates that the snow and ice removal deficit is approximately \$150,000.  
Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 26: Debt Service for the Middle School Track-  
Unanimously in favor to support.



Article 27: Transfer Bond Proceeds-  
Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 28: Establishing Limits for Various Revolving Funds-  
Unanimously in favor to support.

Article 29: Funding For the Repair of the Town Hall Sprinkler System-  
Unanimously in favor of support.

**4. Consider Appointing Veronica O'Donnell to the Sustainability Commission.**

The Sustainability Commission requested that the Board appoint Veronica O'Donnell to the Sustainability Commission.

*Mr. Reilly made a motion to appoint Veronica O'Donnell to the Sustainability Commission. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

**5. Consider Disbanding the Commemorations and Celebrations Committee.**

Mr. Haddad stated that the Commemorations and Celebrations Committee has requested to be disbanded. The main purpose of this Committee was to plan various town-wide events, including the Memorial Day Parade, the Veterans Day Memorial, and the 250th Birthday Celebration of the United States. Many of their plans, if discussed publicly, could lead to confusion if certain events or locations do not come to fruition. He said rather than maintaining a Committee that must post agendas, take minutes, and complies with Open Meeting Law requirements; the Committee believes it would be more effective to function as a Town Manager's Working Group. This would allow the Town Manager and Committee to coordinate and manage the planning of these events. He explained that the issue was that they had not been complying with the Open Meeting Law. Town Clerk Ms. Dunbar confirmed this was the issue. Ms. Manugian said that she would not support this proposal. Mr. Cunningham said he would like to find support for the committee to comply with the Open Meeting Law. The Board did not favor disbanding the Commemorations and Celebrations Committee. Mr. Haddad will continue to work closely with the Town Clerk to resolve the issue.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

**SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS**

None

**On Going issues**

- A. PFAS—Mr. Haddad stated that the contractor, DeFelice, completed the Dunstable work and did an outstanding job. He said they would run the waterline down the driveway from Chicopee Row to the Groton Dunstable Regional High School. Groton Water Superintendent Tom Orcutt personally delivered letters to the abutters regarding this project. Connections and a Chlorine Booster station will be established after the waterline installation.

Mr. Haddad informed the Board that the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is expanding the number of properties that need to be connected due to the plume contamination

issue. The Town prefers not to perform any work on private property due to liability concerns. Homeowners may need to initially cover a significant portion of the costs, which the Town will later reimburse. A public meeting will be scheduled to discuss this further. It will be more cost-effective for homeowners to carry out the work themselves since the Town's reimbursement is approximately 30% less. Mr. Haddad wanted to bring this to the Board's attention.

- B. Nashoba Valley Medical Center Working Group— Ms. Manugian requested that this agenda item be changed to "Emergency Facility."
- C. Charter Review Committee— There will be a public hearing on the Charter on Thursday, March 27, 2025.
- D. PILOTs- No update.

**Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting Minutes of March 3, 2025.**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the regularly scheduled meeting minutes of March 3rd and March 10th, 2025. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

**Executive Session**

Mr. Haddad requested that the Board enter Executive Session Pursuant to M.G.L., c.30A, §21(a), Clause 3— "To conduct strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining to litigation position of the public body and the chair so declares.

And not to return to open session.

**Select Board**

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

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