

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
SPECIAL VIRTUAL MEETING
FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2025
APPROVED**

Select Board Members Virtually Present: Alison Manugian, Chair; Becky Pine, Vice Chair; Peter Cunningham, Clerk; John Reilly; Matt Pisani;

Finance Committee Members Virtually Present: Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair; Scott Whitefield; Kristina Lengyel;

Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee Members Virtually Present: Lacey McCabe, Chair; Catherine Awa; An Hee Foley; Fay Raynor; Rohit Bhasin; Rosanna Casavecchia;

Groton Finance Team: Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Director of Finance/Town Accountant; Melisa Doig, Human Resources Director; Megan Foster, Principal Assessor; Hannah Moller, Town Accountant/Tax Collector;

Also Virtually Present: Takashi Tada, Acting Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Jason Silva, Dunstable Town Administrator; Brian Falk, Town Counsel; Dr. Geoff Bruno, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Superintendent; Sherry Kersey, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Director of Finance and Operations.

Ms. Manugian called the Select Board meeting to order at 11:00 A.M.

Ms. McCabe called the Groton-Dunstable Regional School Committee to order at 11:00 A.M.

Discuss the Outcome of the Override Election- Determine Next Steps- Consider Calling for a Special Town Meeting or Special Override Election to Balance the FY 2026 Operating Budget.

Ms. Manugian explained that the Fire Department Override did not pass, and the Override to fund the School's lost by thirty votes in the Annual Election held on May 20th. She stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss their options for moving forward. The Town Meeting vote authorizes them to allocate funds for both the municipal base budget and the school budget. She stated they could change the funding request and pursue another override vote on the ballot, or they could adjust budgets and hold another town meeting. She emphasized that the main objective is to ensure that the district has a budget in place by the start of the fiscal year, which is July 1, 2025. Ms. Manugian stated that they had received input from numerous individuals advocating for either honoring the voters' wishes or addressing the needs identified by the schools. Mr. Cunningham mentioned that the Town of Dunstable had successfully passed the override vote to fund the schools.

Ms. McCabe, the Chair of the Groton-Dunstable Regional School Committee, thanked the members of the Groton Select Board and Finance Committee for meeting with the School Committee. She emphasized the importance of having a budget that is approved and funded by the start of the new fiscal year. She explained that their objective was to maximize stability for the schools and the students as much as possible.

Dr. Bruno, the Superintendent of the Groton Dunstable Regional School District, thanked Ms. Sherry Kersey, the Director of Finance and Operations, for preparing a slide presentation to update the boards on

state funding and its potential impacts on the district's budget. He then presented the slides regarding the Budget Recertification, which reflect a different amount. Dr. Bruno explained that there have been some updates to the funding information for Chapter 70.

Dr. Bruno stated that the school district currently does not have an approved budget because the necessary funding for the assessments is unavailable. He emphasized that the school district has consistently advocated for the budget that was certified on March 12, based on the information available at that time. He said that an updated state projection for Chapter 70 minimum aid funding will provide an additional \$167,700 in relief. Dr. Bruno reviewed the FY26 Chapter 70 Timeline:

- January 22: Governor Healey released her budget, Chapter 70, at \$75 per student.
- March 12: The School Committee certified the budget at \$75 per student, and Assessments were sent to the Towns based on Governor Healey's proposal.
- April 16: House Ways and Means releases budget- Chapter 70 at \$150 per student (increase of \$167,7000 in state aid).
- May 6: Senate Ways and Means released budget- Chapter 70 at \$150 per student (increase of \$167,700 in state aid).
- May 23: Recertify budget using \$150 per student Chapter 70 projection to lower the assessment to each town. The total budget remains the same, but the revenue side of the budget is changing.

Dr. Bruno explained that the minimum aid increasing from \$75 per student to \$150 per student adds \$167,700 in state aid revenue, which proportionally reduces the assessments for both towns. The Groton reduction amounts to \$128,995, while the Dunstable reduction totals \$38,705. On March 12, the Certified Assessment for Groton required an operational override of \$673,250. Dr. Bruno stated that, as of May 23, with the additional Chapter 70 funding, the Re-certified Assessment number can be reduced to \$544,225. For Dunstable, the Certified Assessment on March 12 required an operational override of \$401,037. With the additional Chapter 70 funding, the Re-certified Assessment on May 23 would require an operational override of \$362,331.

Ms. McCabe said that, given the updated numbers from the State, they felt the best course of action was to recertify their budget. They would change the assessment numbers for the towns.

Ms. McCabe entertained a motion to set the total appropriation for the Groton Dunstable Regional School District for the fiscal year from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, at \$ 51,369,833, as presented by the following functions:

1,000 -District leadership in administration-	\$1,394,911
2,000 -Instructional services -	\$27,895,020
3,000 -Other school services-	\$3,650,708
4,000 -Maintenance -	\$4,059,995
5,000 -Fixed charges -	\$11,132,554
7,000- Fixed assets -	\$431,750
8,000- Debt retirement and service -	\$146,813

9,000- Programs with other districts - \$2,658,077

Ms. Casavecchia made a motion to set the total appropriation for the Groton Dunstable Regional School District for the fiscal year from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, at \$ 51,369,833, as presented by the following functions:

1,000 -District leadership in administration -	\$1,394,911
2,000 -Instructional services -	\$27,895,020
3,000 -Other school services-	\$3,650,708
4,000 -Maintenance -	\$4,059,995
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7,000- Fixed assets -	\$431,750
8,000- Debt retirement and service -	\$146,813
9,000- Programs with other districts -	\$2,658,077

Ms. Andriole seconded the motion. Roll Call: Andriole-aye; Casavecchia-aye; Awa-Aye; Raynor- aye; Foley-aye; Basin-aye; McCabe-aye.

Ms. McCabe entertained a motion for the member towns to be assessed by the education reform law and the terms of the agreement and amendments thereto as follows:

Groton Operating-	\$28,322,203
Groton Capital-	\$278,643
Groton Debt-	<u>\$110,389</u>
Groton Total-	\$28,711,235

Dunstable Operating-	\$8,664,157
Dunstable Capital-	\$83,607
Dunstable Debt-	<u>\$36,424</u>
Dunstable Total-	\$8,784,188

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Dunstable Debt-	<u>\$36,424</u>

Dunstable Total- \$8,784,188

Ms. Casavecchia seconded the motion. Roll Call: Casavecchia-aye; Andriole-aye; Raynor-aye; Bhasin-aye; McCabe-aye; Awa-aye; Foley- abstained.

Groton Finance Committee Chair Mr. Robertson stated that, after an extensive discussion with the Town Manager about the current budget shortfall, they believe the best course of action is to call for a Special Town Meeting to fund the schools at the level they seek, rather than pursuing another override. Mr. Robertson stated that when the Town Manager returns from his vacation, he will work with the School Committee and Department Heads to develop a new funding plan to avoid additional cuts at the schools. He said this would honor the outcome of the override and meet the needs of the school district.

Mr. Manugian explained that the town is now facing a budget shortfall of \$544,000 and needs to decide how to move forward. She believes that returning to a town meeting would be the cleanest way to address the school's needs and honor the failed override.

Ms. Dunbar, the Town Clerk, clarified the timeline for a Special Election. The Town Clerk must receive a ballot question at least 35 days before the election, making June 27th the earliest possible date. Town Manager Haddad proposed Saturday, June 28th, as a potential date for the Special Election if they choose to pursue that option. Ms. Dunbar explained that 2% of registered voters would be required for a Special Town Meeting, which would amount to 178.24 voters as of January 8, 2025. The Warrant must remain open for 20 days to allow for any citizens' petitions. Ms. Dunbar also stated that the Town Manager suggested June 28th as the date for the Special Town Meeting, should the Board decide to call for one.

Discussion

Mr. Pisani mentioned that there were two override votes on the ballot. He said that if they are considering cuts to the municipal budget, they must be very careful, as a municipal department is seeking additional funding and is also looking for additional personnel.

Ms. Pine inquired whether they could schedule a Special Town Meeting for Saturday, June 21st. Ms. Dunbar reviewed the posting requirements and deadlines with her since it would be tight. Ms. Pine emphasized that maintaining the school budget without cuts was paramount for her. Keeping the school budget intact would benefit the town, as another override vote is a very divisive option.

Ms. Manugian stated that using free cash is generally not recommended on the municipality's side and that this is not a move they can regularly take without some detriment. She said that there is a vacancy in the Department of Public Works that they could consider not filling, but there isn't a way to meet the school's needs without impacting services.

Mr. Reilly stated that he supported the school and fire override. He said that over 2,900 people voted, with 525 attending the Spring Town Meeting. He expressed concern that they would return to the smaller attendance at the Special Town Meeting. He asked Attorney Falk what would happen if the town took no action and what option the School Committee would have. Attorney Falk explained that under Chapter 41 of DESE regulations, when a new certified budget is submitted to the town, the town is obligated to hold a

Special Town Meeting within 45 days to consider the revised budget. He said that if the town takes no action, the district will not have a budget for FY26 and will need to request a 1/12th budget from DESE until the district's budget is approved.

Mr. Robertson reiterated that Mr. Haddad is recommending holding a Special Town Meeting for the Town and to find cuts on the municipal side to fund the school. He said the school is in trouble now, and Mr. Haddad will come up with proper cuts to cover the \$544,000 shortfall. He said this meeting was to determine if everyone agrees that there shouldn't be another override election and to address the needs of the school district.

The Board members and Town Counsel, Brian Falk, discussed potential dates and times for a Special Town Meeting. Mr. Falk confirmed that Saturday, June 21st, would be a suitable date to hold the meeting.

Ms. Manugian inquired whether any members of the Select Board opposed calling for a Special Town Meeting. No one responded. Ms. Pine expressed that she believes Saturday, June 21st, would be a better option than Saturday, June 28th, noting that some residents may be on vacation at that time. She explained that cutting the municipal budget is a less controversial decision than proposing an override. While some people may be dissatisfied with the budget cuts, it would be less upsetting than having another override vote. Ms. Pine mentioned that she would be able to attend the meeting on June 21st, but not on June 28th. Mr. Cunningham suggested holding the Special Town Meeting on a Monday to avoid conflicts with sports and proposed June 23rd as the date. He said that the cafeteria in the Performing Arts Center could be set up for overflow if necessary.

After much deliberation, the Select Board decided to proceed with a vote to call for a Special Town Meeting.

Vote to Call for a Special Town Meeting

Ms. Pine moved to call for a Special Town Meeting to be held on Monday, June 23, 2025, beginning at 7:00 p.m., to be held at the Performing Arts Center of the Marion Stoddart Building at 7:00 p.m. Ms. Pine further moved to open the Warrant on Friday, May 23, 2025, and close it at noon on Friday, May 30, 2025. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion.

Discussion

Resident Guy Alberghini suggested that the schools should operate within the override limit. Ms. Manugian expressed that they would all prefer to be in a situation where an override is not necessary.

Mr. Robertson called the Finance Committee to order at 12:05 p.m.

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

Attorney Falk requested that the Select Board consider revoting to close the Warrant on Tuesday, June 3rd, allowing twenty days for citizens' petitions to be submitted and accepted.

Ms. Manugian accepted a motion to reconsider the motion and to close the Warrant on Tuesday, June 3rd.

Mr. Cunningham moved to reconsider the motion and close the Warrant on Tuesday, June 3, 2025. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pisani-aye; Manugian-aye; Cunningham-aye; Reilly-aye; Pine-aye.

Mr. Cunningham moved to call for a Special Town Meeting to be held on Monday, June 23, 2025, beginning at 7:00 P.M., to be held at the Performing Arts Center of the Marion Stoddart Building. Mr. Cunningham further moved to open the Warrant on Friday, May 23, 2025, and close it by the end of business day on Tuesday, June 3rd, 2025. Mr. Pisani seconded the motion. Roll Call: Manugian- aye; Pine-aye; Reilly-aye; Cunningham-aye; Pisani-aye.

Ms. Pine took a moment to thank everyone involved.

Meeting adjourned at 12:13 p.m.

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