

SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2025
APPROVED

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

Also Present: Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Melisa Doig, Human Resource Director; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Finance Director; Takashi Tada, Land Use Director/Town Planner; Geoff Bruno, Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee Superintendent; Sherry Kersey, GDRSD Director of Business; Tom Orcutt, Groton Water Superintendent; Marian Dyer, Groton Dunstable Regional School District Assistant Superintendent;

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

Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee: Lacey McCabe, Chair; Rohit Basin; Fay Raynor; Christina Andriole, Clerk; Rosanna Casavecchia.

Chair Pisani called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and reviewed the agenda.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Haddad explained that the Town has received approval for a trail easement that was granted to the Conservation Commission, which requires the Select Board's signature for the Shepley Hill Road project. He requested that this item be added for review later in the meeting.

Mr. Cunningham reminded everyone that the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) will hold a meeting on Tuesday, October 7th, at 6:00 P.M. at the Groton Center. Representatives from DCR, along with a consulting firm responsible for permitting and engineering the Nashua River Rail Trail, will discuss and present an overview of their plans for reconstructing the trail. Mr. Cunningham also wanted to acknowledge that he attended the Groundbreaking for the UMass Satellite Emergency Facility. Mr. Haddad said it was a great day for the Town of Groton, and Fire Chief Cheeks represented the Town well at the Groundbreaking Ceremony.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Mr. Tom Orcutt, Groton Water Superintendent, announced an update on the Chicopee Row Waterline Project. He explained that interim final paving would occur on Monday, October 6th, and would take approximately two weeks to complete. He said it would be a semi-permanent trench patch to get the Town through the winter, and the final paving would take place next Fall.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- 1. Consider Ratifying the Town Manager's Appointments of Chad Ferreira as a Laborer for the Department of Public Works and Andrew Bernhardt as the Transfer Station Foreman.**

Ms. Pine made a motion to ratify the Town Manager's appointments of Chad Ferreira as a Laborer for the Department of Public Works and Andrew Bernhardt as the Transfer Station Foreman. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Proposed Select Board Meeting Schedule through the End of the Year.

Monday, October 6, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, October 13, 2025	No Meeting (Indigenous Peoples' Day)
Saturday, October 18, 2025	2025 Fall Town Meeting
Monday, October 20, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting (Possibly No Meeting)
Tuesday, October 28, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting (Budget Guidance)
Monday, November 3, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, November 10, 2025	No Meeting
Monday, November 17, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, November 24, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, December 1, 2025	No Meeting
Monday, December 8, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, December 15, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, December 22, 2025	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, December 29, 2025	No Meeting
Monday, January 5, 2025	No Meeting
Monday, January 12, 2026	Regularly Scheduled Meeting

ITEMS FOR SELECT BOARD CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL

1. Finalize Recommendations on the Various Articles in the 2025 Fall Town Meeting Warrant.

Mr. Haddad provided the latest draft of the Warrant for the 2025 Fall Town Meeting to the Select Board. He explained that it has been updated to include the Town Manager's Report to the Fall Town Meeting, the proposed amendments to the Charter, and the recommendations made by the Finance Committee on the various Articles. Mr. Haddad explained that the Board needs to take positions on the following Articles:

Article 1: Prior Year Bills-

Mr. Haddad explained that there is an unpaid prior year bill from Pete's Tire Barn to the Department of Public Works, totaling \$1,556, which needs to be included in the Article.

The Select Board was unanimously in favor to support this Article.

Article 2: Amend the Fiscal Year 2026 Town Operating Budget- (Please see the Town Manager's Report for proposed transfers).

The Select Board was unanimously in favor to support all line-item transfers.

Article 3: Transfer Money into Capital Stabilization Fund –

The Select Board was unanimously in favor to support this Article.

Article 4: Transfer Money into the Stabilization Fund—

The Select Board was unanimously in favor to support this Article.

Article 5: Transfer Money into the GDRSD Capital Stabilization Fund-

The Select Board was unanimously in favor of withdrawing this Article at Town Meeting.

Article 22: Citizens' Petition - Authorization to Create an Advisory Committee-

Mr. Haddad stated that the Finance Committee met last week and discussed this Article. The Finance Committee voted unanimously not to recommend it. Mr. Robertson, the Finance Committee Chair, said he believes that if this Article were to go to the Town Meeting, there would be a lot of confusion because it was unclear. He also explained that the Committee believes having a group appointed to explore areas is out of sync with the Town Meeting format. The Committee believes they do not need an official appointment to present their analysis and thoughts, and they do not need Town consent; they can do it now.

Mr. Robertson stated it was unanimous, with four of their seven Finance Committee Members present, not to support this Article. Ms. Pine clarified that she supported the idea the proponents brought forward, but did not support bringing the Article to Town Meeting, as she thought it was somewhat problematic to do so.

The Select Board was unanimously not in favor of supporting this Article.

Ms. Pine inquired about the number of articles on the warrant. Mr. Haddad confirmed that there are currently 22 Articles. Ms. Pine believes that Articles 11-15 should not be included on the consent agenda. Mr. Haddad stated that any article can be held for discussion at Town Meeting. He explained that the Select Board and the Finance Committee unanimously support these articles.

Ms. Pine noted that Articles 1-10 are routine, and Articles 11-14 are not recurring. Mr. Haddad believes that Article 15, Debt Service for the Middle School Track, is also routine. He suggested including Article 15 in the consent agenda. To do this, Mr. Haddad proposed moving Article 15 to become Article 11, making it part of the consent agenda, along with Articles 1-10. The Select Board agreed with this proposal.

Request to Open the Warrant and Add an Article for the Cow Pond Brook Fields Project

Mr. Haddad met with the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) to request additional funding for the Cow Pond Brook Fields Project so it can move forward and develop final drawings that will enable the project to go out to bid before the 2026 Spring Town Meeting. He stated that the CPC agreed to accept the out-of-cycle application and to fully fund the \$115,000 request, in addition to the \$100,000 already appropriated at the April 26, 2025, Spring Town Meeting. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to open the Warrant and add the article. He has a meeting with the Parks Commission on October 6 to discuss this further. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Select Board open the Warrant for the 2025 Fall Town Meeting and include this article.

Open the 2025 Fall Town Meeting Warrant

Ms. Pine made a motion to open the 2025 Fall Town Meeting Warrant. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to add an article to the 2025 Fall Town Meeting Warrant to increase the appropriation of CPC funds by \$115,000 for the Cow Pond Brook Field project. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The Select Board deferred taking a position on this Article until Town Meeting.

Close the 2025 Fall Town Meeting Warrant

Ms. Manugian made a motion to close the 2025 Fall Town Meeting Warrant. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Vote to Approve and Issue the Warrant for the 2025 Fall Town Meeting Warrant.

Mr. Haddad explained that Town Meeting postcards will be mailed to all households on Friday, October 3, 2025, and the Warrant will be posted by the Constable on that same day. There will be five hundred (500) copies of the Warrant available for anyone who wishes to have one. He said that several copies will be available at the Senior Center and the Library, and residents can visit the Town Clerk's Office to request that copies be mailed to their homes. Mr. Haddad respectfully requested that the Board vote to approve and issue the Warrant for the 2025 Fall Town Meeting.

Ms. Manugian moved to approve and issue the warrant for the 2025 Fall Town Meeting. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Consider Appointing Lynn Holdsworth to the Affordable Housing Trust

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to appoint Lynn Holdsworth to the Affordable Housing Trust, with a term expiring on June 30, 2027. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Consider Approving a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott's Open Mic Night to be held on Friday, October 10th, 2025, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Ms. Manugian made a motion to approve a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott's Open Mic Night to be held on Friday, October 10, 2025, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Consider Approving an All-Alcoholic Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott's "How to Make a Margarita" Night to be held on Friday, October 3, 2025, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Ms. Pine made a motion to approve an All-Alcoholic Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott's "How to Make a Margarita" to be held on Friday, October 3, 2025, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Consider the Approval of a Trail and Recreational Easement granted for the Groton Conservation Commission.

The Board members requested additional information for this request. Mr. Haddad will return with the agreement and further details at the next Select Board Meeting.

7:00 P.M. In Joint Session with the Groton Dunstable Regional School District Committee and Finance Committee- Review the Operational Audit for the Groton Dunstable Regional School District.

Ms. Lacey McCabe, Chair of the Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee, called the meeting to order.

Mr. Bud Robertson, Chair of the Finance Committee, called the meeting to order.

Ms. McCabe opened the discussion with the Groton Select Board, the Finance Committee, and the Groton-Dunstable Regional School Committee. The boards gathered to review the Operational Audit completed for the School District. Mr. Haddad provided the boards with a copy of the full audit for their review beforehand, along with a summary of key insights and recommendations. Dr. Geoff Bruno, GDRSD School Superintendent, stated that on August 27, a presentation was given during the School Committee Meeting on the Audit.

Ms. Sherry Kersey, GDRSD Director of Business, explained that during the FY 2025 budgeting season, the Town of Groton voted to Gift \$619,000 to the school district at the Annual Spring Town Meeting. She clarified that these funds came with two conditions: the Gift could only be used for non-recurring expenses, and the school district would have an independent Operational Audit to identify potential cost-saving measures. Dr. Bruno and Ms. Kersey presented a PowerPoint summary of the Audit findings (see attached presentation). The PowerPoint reviewed the three main areas of interest in the Operational Audit:

Administrator Staffing

The most recent fiscal years have brought numerous funding challenges, leading to staff reductions across the district. The district received feedback regarding the number of administrative staff and their relative salaries. An independent review was conducted to provide an unbiased assessment of the administrative positions.

Questions/Comments

Ms. Mary Linskey inquired about the number of responses the school received to the RFP. Ms. Kersey said there was only one. Then, Ms. Linskey asked about the school's market baskets. She pointed out that the market baskets differed between the Operational Audit and the Tri-Comm's. She wondered if that was eye-opening. Ms. Kersey responded that some of the criticism they received was due to the age of the market baskets. She explained that when the consultant suggested using a different set of markers, he was trying to see if the current market baskets were still valid. Ultimately, the results from the other markers aligned with their previous findings. Mr. Robertson asked if there was a document explaining why certain towns were selected as comparable communities. Ms. Raynor stated that Appendix B includes a list of the reasons for choosing those communities. Mr. Green noted that he was not surprised by the audit results. He hoped the report would highlight the organizations that achieved the highest efficiency at the lowest cost and provide insights on what changes the school district could implement to achieve those efficiencies.

Special Education and Student Services

Dr. Bruno explained that the consultations gathered a wide range of information about various aspects of Special Education and the students served. This included multiple years of data posted on the MA DESE

website, which provides a profile of Groton Dunstable with some comparisons to other districts and overall state trends. Additionally, the data covered Groton Dunstable's job descriptions, program descriptions, staff licensure, caseloads and schedules, special education referrals and eligibility, as well as IEP services. Dr. Bruno stated.

Dr. Bruno highlighted that they have successfully consolidated elementary specialized programs at Florence Roche, which increases efficiency through shared resources and a more seamless continuum of services. They also provide professional development to establish therapeutic programming, and Groton Dunstable offers specialized programming at all levels, demonstrating a cohesive and comprehensive service delivery model.

Questions/Comments

Ms. Pine said her main takeaway from this section was to refine job descriptions and clarify responsibilities. Ms. McCabe noted that there are many opportunities in this section. She believed the consultant provided a lot of feedback on how to run things as efficiently as possible. She explained that it leads to financial savings but also improves educational outcomes. Dr. Bruno emphasized that the findings in this section relate to what is most efficient and beneficial for children.

Building Usage

This section consists of two parts: the use of MSBA and current data to review building utilization, with a focus on effectiveness, productivity, and cost efficiency. It also includes assessing and reviewing building usage scenarios, such as relocating the ECC to another building, merging students into Florence Roche, and closing Swallow Union.

Dr. Bruno explained that the Building Usage Committee evaluated the inventory of GDRSD school buildings using a rating system from 1 to 4, where 1 indicates good condition.

Comments/Questions

Ms. Pine noted that 7-12 secondary schools existed until the 1980s. She stated that grouping 7th- to 12th- graders was not a good idea. Ms. Pine believes it would be unfortunate to close the Dunstable school and come to Groton.

Operational Audit Findings/Conclusion

The Operational Audit highlights the financial benefits of closing Swallow Union and relocating Dunstable students to the new Florence Roche (K-3), with 4th graders moving to GDRMS and 8th graders to the high school. However, this also involves significant educational costs for both towns and the district as a whole. Closing Swallow Union presents major challenges for Dunstable and disrupts developmentally appropriate educational programs across all district schools. After careful consideration, there was no support from the Select Board or Finance Committee to move forward with closing Swallow Union.

Mr. Haddad stated that, based on the audit, he asked the Superintendent and the School Committee chair if there was anything they could consider to implement measures for savings. Dr. Bruno said that based on the second section of the report, they could evaluate the full-time equivalents (FTEs). He noted that certain measures could be taken to improve efficiency. He said it is challenging, but there are definitely some

things they can take and are already implementing that could lead to better efficiencies. Mr. Haddad expressed his opinion that the School District appears lean.

Mr. Robertson stated that improving efficiency will not resolve this issue. He explained that the economy is the underlying problem. Ms. Pine said she was not surprised that the audit did not identify obvious areas where money could be saved. She said that people have been working hard for many years to run the school system efficiently and effectively, and they have succeeded in achieving effectiveness; they are close to being efficient. Ms. Pine said that the reality is they are heading into another budget year and will face the same challenges as they have in the past couple of years. She said the Town has experienced two years of failed override attempts, and she would hate to contemplate drastic cuts, so she's not sure what the solution is.

Ms. Pine stated that Representative Margaret Scarsdale has been actively working to understand why many school districts in the Commonwealth are not receiving the funding they deserve from the state. She is focused on addressing this issue. A regional forum is being planned to discuss state funding for public education under the leadership of Representative Scarsdale. Representative Scarsdale has secured a commitment from the Chair of the Committee on Education and other Representatives for the evening of November 20th, at a location yet to be determined. It was discussed that the North Middlesex Regional School District and the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District are among the top 10% of the most underfunded districts. Ms. Pine emphasized the need to advocate for increased funding for our district, and Mr. Cunningham highlighted the importance of advancing this issue. Ms. McCabe stressed the importance of having as many people as possible attend and that everyone's participation is crucial.

Mr. Haddad thanked everyone for attending that meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

On-Going Issues

- A. PFAS Issue- None
- B. UMass Satellite Emergency Facility –None
- C. Fire Department Staffing – None
- D. West Groton Dam-None

SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS

None

Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting of September 15, 2025

Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of September 15, 2025, with one amendment from Mr. Cunningham. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The Select Board adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

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