

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
VIA ZOOM  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2026  
APPROVED**

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

**Park Commissioners Virtually Present:** Jeff Ohringer; Mark Presti; Mary Jennings; Anna Eliot;

**Also Virtually Present:** Mark Haddad, Town Manager; Kara Cruikshank, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager; Patricia DuFresne, Assistant Finance Director/Town Accountant; Katie Kazanjian, Treasurer/Tax Collector; Megan Foster, Principal Assessor; Bud Robertson, Finance Committee Chair; Brian Callahan, DPW Director; Jack Petropoulos and Robert Hall, Park Commission Candidates; Grace Bannasch, Town Clerk; Melisa Doig, Human Resources Director.

Chair Pisani called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and reviewed the agenda.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Cunningham and Ms. Pine attended an event focused on the school funding crisis. Mr. Cunningham suggested that the Board formally send a letter to the Massachusetts Legislature, advocating for an increase in state funding for public education in the upcoming fiscal year and a revision of the Chapter 70 funding formula. Mr. Haddad said that he has posted a link on the Town's website to a draft letter that anyone can send to the Legislature. Ms. Manugian supports drafting a letter and emphasized the importance of the Board continuing to discuss their current efforts until the state takes action. Mr. Haddad will draft a letter on behalf of the Select Board and will include it in their packet for review at the March 2nd meeting.

DPW Director Mr. Callahan provided a report to the Board on the Blizzard conditions and said they will continue working hard to clear the roads. Mr. Haddad said the DPW was doing a great job and thanked Mr. Callahan.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

None

**TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

**1. FY 2026 Second Quarter Financials Update.**

Mr. Bud Robertson, the Finance Committee Chair, and Ms. Patricia DuFresne, the Assistant Finance Director/Town Accountant, attended the discussion virtually. Mr. Haddad took a few minutes to review the FY 2026 Second Quarter Financial Update with the Board. He reported that the Town is performing well on revenues, noting that both the local room occupancy tax and meals tax continue to exceed expectations. He explained that PILOT payments have increased this year compared with last year. The Groton School raised its payment by \$35,000, which is appreciated. Additionally, Mr. Haddad was very pleased with the revenue from the Groton Hill Music Center. The Country Club is performing well, with January revenues far exceeding last year's. Mr. Haddad noted that one area of concern is investment income, but he believes they will meet the year's

anticipated budget. Mr. Haddad said overall, revenues are on track, and the motor vehicle excise tax will be mailed on February 24th.

Expense-wise, Mr. Haddad explained that they are slightly ahead in a few categories. In the general government, there were a couple of vacation payouts for employees who had left. Public safety is up due to the addition of the Deputy Fire Chief, and this was the first year that the new Quinn payments for the Police Department were included. Mr. Haddad believes they are tracking well year over year, and the Department Heads continue to manage their budgets. Ms. Patricia DuFresne explained that Snow and ice will be a cost driver this year. Ms. Pine asked whether the state might provide funding for the Snow and Ice budget. Mr. Haddad does not believe they would receive any relief from the state and shared ideas to help offset the deficit.

**2. Update on the 2026 Select Board Annual Goals.**

Mr. Haddad provided an update on the Select Board’s 2026 Goals and Objectives (see the attached Memo, “Goals of the Groton Select Board”).

**3. FY 2027 Budget Update.**

Mr. Haddad provided a few updates on the Budget to the Board: he explained that the Select Board will meet in joint session with the Finance Committee on Saturday, February 28th, at 8:30 a.m. to review the Proposed FY 2027 Operating Budget with the various Departments. The Select Board requested that Mr. Haddad schedule a meeting with the Executive Director of the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health (NABH), Mr. James Garreffo. Mr. Garreffo plans to attend the Select Board meeting on March 2, 2026, to discuss the proposed increase in the NABH Assessment for FY 2027. Lastly, Mr. Haddad stated that the Town has received its health insurance rates from MIIA for FY 2027 and said it was excellent news. The Town will receive only a 6.24% increase in FY 2027. The average increase was 8.39%. Mr. Haddad has updated the Budget to reflect this change, as well as the proposed increase in State Aid contained in the Governor’s Budget and the final assessment from Nashoba Tech. Mr. Haddad said that based on this information, the proposed budget is now approximately \$85,000 under the anticipated FY 2027 Levy Limit. Mr. Haddad recommended setting the funds aside and increasing the overlay for one year, or using them to offset the snow and ice deficit. He stated that he does not want to commit the \$85,000 to recurring operating expenses.

**4. Select Board Meeting Schedule through the 2026 Spring Town Meeting.**

Saturday, February 28, 2026-	Joint Session with Finance Committee
Monday, March 2, 2026 -	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Tuesday, March 3, 2026-	Squannacook River Dam Public Hearing
Monday, March 9, 2026 -	2026 Town Meeting Warrant Public Hearing
Monday, March 16, 2026 -	No Meeting
Monday, March 23, 2026 -	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, March 30, 2026	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 6, 2026 -	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 13, 2026 -	Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Monday, April 20, 2026 -	No Meeting – (Patriots’ Day Holiday)
Saturday, May 2, 2026 -	2026 Spring Town Meeting

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

### **1. Review of the First Draft of the 2026 Spring Town Meeting Warrant.**

Mr. Haddad presented the Board with the first draft of the 2026 Spring Town Meeting Warrant. He noted that the warrant closed on Friday, February 20th, and includes twenty-two (22) articles. He also noted that this is the first time in many years that the Spring Town Meeting Warrant does not include any Citizens' Petitions. A public hearing on the warrant is scheduled for Monday, March 9th, at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Haddad briefly reviewed the articles with the Board:

Articles 1-4 will be presented as one Consent Motion.

**Article 1:** Hear Reports

**Article 2:** Elected Officials Compensation

**Article 3:** Wage and Classification Schedule

**Article 4:** Appropriate FY 2027 Contribution to the OPEB Trust Fund

Mr. Haddad will propose presenting the FY 2027 Budget as a Single Consent Motion.

**Article 5:** Fiscal Year 2027 Annual Operating Budget

**Article 6:** Fiscal Year 2027 Capital Budget -

Mr. Haddad explained that irrigation for the Country Club is a major Capital Budget expenditure of \$1.4m. He said there are currently only sprinkler heads around the greens, with no irrigation on the fairways. This project will make a significant difference for the Country Club and will be fully funded by the Country Club's revenues. Mr. Cunningham questioned the water source, and Mr. Haddad explained that it would come from the well located on site. Ms. Pine was surprised and struggled when she saw this costly project. Mr. Haddad explained that it had been in the Capital Plan for four years and vetted by the Capital Planning Advisory Committee. Ms. Manugian expressed her desire to establish the Country Club as an Enterprise Fund. Mr. Haddad welcomed this discussion and will add it to a future Select Board agenda.

**Article 7: Community Preservation Funding Accounts –**

Mr. Haddad will obtain and add the allocation numbers for the sub-accounts from the Community Preservation Committee.

CPA Funding Recommendations will be presented as One Consent Motion

**Article 8:** Community Preservation Funding Recommendations-

Mr. Haddad provided a brief overview of the various projects and noted that the CPC Proposal C: FY 2027 Conservation Fund has been withdrawn. He also noted that the CPC canceled their meeting scheduled for that evening due to the snowstorm, but will meet on March 9th to make their recommendations.

**Article 9:** Special Act to Exempt Certain Uncontrollable Costs from the Tax Levy-

When Mr. Haddad met with Senator Cronin, he expressed his hope that the legislature would exempt uncontrollable costs, such as health insurance and pension expenses, from the tax levy. Mr. Haddad believes that holding a Town Meeting vote to bring this issue before the legislature will be effective, so he is bringing this article forward. He is also reaching out to other communities in the Commonwealth to encourage them to do the same. Mr. Haddad hopes the Board will support

his proposal. Ms. Manugian recommended specifically including the regional school districts' costs in the exemption.

**Article 10:** Amend Chapter 168 of the General Bylaws-Stretch Energy Code

**Article 11:** Squannacook River Dam Repair-

Mr. Haddad explained that his original proposal for the repair, costing \$812,500, would require either a Capital or a Debt Exclusion, which would need a 2/3rds vote at Town Meeting and a ballot question requiring a simple majority. Instead, Ms. Pine inquired whether the funds could be borrowed and included in the capital plan, with the debt repaid from the Capital Budget. This approach would eliminate the need for a Capital or Debt Exclusion vote. Mr. Haddad clarified that this funding is not currently included in the Capital Budget. If it were added, other items would need to be cut to accommodate it. He said this proposal could be discussed during the public hearing on March 9th.

**Article 12:** Amend Zoning Bylaw- Clarify Appeal Process in Site Plan Review

Articles 13-22 are the Annual Consent Agenda and will be presented as One Motion.

**Article 13:** Funding for Destination Groton Committee

**Article 14:** Transfer Within the Water Sewer Enterprise

**Article 15:** Transfer Within the Sewer Enterprise Fund

**Article 16:** Transfer Within the Four Corner Sewer Enterprise Fund

**Article 17:** Prior Year Bills- This is a placeholder

**Article 18:** Appropriate Funding to Offset Snow and Ice Deficit

**Article 19:** Debt Service for the Middle School Track

**Article 20:** Funding on Main Street Traffic Study

**Article 21:** Appropriate to Fund Town Forest Expenses

**Article 22:** Establishing Limits for Various Revolving Funds

**2. Consider Appointing Deanna DeVito Kass as the Select Board's Representative to the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee.**

Mr. Cunningham made a motion to appoint Deanna DeVito Kass as the Select Board's representative to the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee, with a term expiring June 30, 2026. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine — aye; Reilly — aye; Manugian — aye; Cunningham — aye; Pisani — aye.

**3. Consider Approving a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Groton Historical Society for the Historical Society to host the Groton Business Association Monthly Meeting, to be held on Friday, March 18, 2026, from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.**

*Ms. Manugian moved to approve the One-Day wine and Malt Beverages License for the Groton Historical Society for the Historical Society to host the Groton Business Association Monthly Meeting, to be held on Friday, March 13, 2026, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine — aye; Reilly — aye; Manugian — aye; Cunningham — aye; Pisani — aye.*

**4 Consider Approving a One-Day Wine and Malt Beverage License for the Friends of Prescott for Open Mic Night, to be held on Friday, March 13, 2026, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.**

*Mr. Cunningham moved to approve the One-Day wine and Malt Beverages License for the Friends of Prescott for Open Mic Night, to be held on Friday, March 13, 2026, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Ms. Manugian seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine — aye; Reilly — aye; Manugian — aye; Cunningham — aye; Pisani — aye.*

**6:15 P.M.-In Joint Session with the Park Commission- Consider Appointing an Individual to Fill a Vacancy on the Park Commission until the 2026 Annual Town Election.**

Park Commissioners Ms. Anna Eliot, Mr. Mark Presti, Mr. Jeff O’Hringer, and Ms. Mary Jennings attended virtually.

Ms. Mary Jennings called the Park Commission to order.

Candidates Mr. Robert Hall and Mr. Jack Petropolous were virtually in attendance to interview for the current Commissioner vacancy until the 2026 Annual Town Election. Ms. Jennings started by asking Mr. Hall to introduce himself, but he had difficulty with the Zoom audio and was unable to speak. Ms. Eliot asked to postpone this decision until March 9th so both candidates could participate. Mr. Pisani and Ms. Jennings agreed. Mr. Haddad proposed March 2nd as a meeting date, and the Park Commissioners agreed to meet on that day. Ms. Manugian suggested that the applicants provide a one-page statement detailing their background and interest in joining the Park Commission. Ms. Jennings supported this idea.

The Select Board and Park Commissioners agreed to continue this consideration at the March 2nd Select Board Meeting at 6:15 p.m.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

The Historic Districts Commission is considering expanding the Historic District. This informational session will be held at the Senior Center on February 24<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 p.m.

**On-Going Issues**

- A. PFAS Issue – None
- B. UMass Satellite Emergency Facility – None
- C. Fire Department Staffing – None
- D. West Groton Dam- The public hearing on the Dam will be held on Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at the Groton Center.
- E. Main Street Study – None

**SELECT BOARD LIASON REPORTS**

None

**Approval of the Regularly Scheduled Meeting of February 9, 2026**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of February 9, 2026. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine — aye; Reilly — aye; Manugian — aye; Cunningham — aye; Pisani — aye.*

**Approval of the Special Joint Session Meeting of February 10, 2026**

*Ms. Pine made a motion to approve the special joint session meeting minutes of February 10, 2026. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll Call: Pine — aye; Reilly — aye; Manugian — abstained; Cunningham — aye; Pisani — aye.*

The Select Board adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

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

## FISCAL YEAR 2026

### GOALS OF THE GROTON SELECT BOARD

#### Category - Public Safety

Select Board Member Assigned – Peter Cunningham

In consultation with Police, Fire, and DPW Departments, establish a prioritized list of sidewalks, bicycle and roadway concerns and timelines for addressing them. Tasks to be considered:

- Striping Parking Spots on Main Street
- Narrowing Roads and/or other ways to create more pedestrian/bike access
- Paving section of roadway between Station Avenue and Broadmeadow Road
- Setting a Town wide speed limit

November 3, 2025 Update – The Town Manager has applied for a State Grant to hire an engineer to conduct a full study of Main Street. The purpose of the study would be to review the speed limit, crosswalks, parking spaces, bike lanes, etc. Grant award decision is expected in mid- November.

February 23, 2026 Update – While we have not yet received the State Grant to pay for the study of Main Street, the DPW Director received approval to utilize \$50,000 from the Town's Chapter 90 allocation to pay for the study. The Town has hired MDM Transportation Consultants to conduct the Study. The estimated cost of the Study is between \$75,000 and \$100,000. A placeholder article has been included on the 2026 Spring Town Meeting Warrant for the remaining funds should the Town not receive the Grant.

#### Budget Priorities – Funding

Select Board Member Assigned – Alison Manugian

##### Operating Budget

- Establish the process to determine the minimal staffing needed in all departments to continue functioning without an override.
- Beginning with the Groton Fire Department, establish process and requirements for, and conduct an in-depth cost benefit analysis of any proposed increase in staffing

November 3, 2025 Update – The Select Board and Finance Committee provided FY 27 Budget Development Guidance to the Town Manager. Now that Guidance has been provided, the Town Manager will begin developing the budget, including determining minimal staffing in all departments and staffing levels at the Fire Department.

February 23, 2026 Update – The Town Manager submitted a balanced budget (currently under review) that did not seek an override of Proposition 2½. As part of this budget, the Town Manager, in conjunction with the Finance Team, conducted a study (previously submitted to the Select Board and Finance Committee) comparing staffing levels to Towns with similar populations. The study showed that Groton is in line with other communities. In addition, the Select Board and Finance Committee voted unanimously to authorize a study of staffing the Fire Department with four Firefighter/EMTs on every shift over a six month period to determine if this is the proper staffing. A consultant will be hired to review/analyze the findings and submit a final report to the Select Board and Finance Committee in September, 2026 with the possible intent of seeking funding/override in the Fall of 2026 to permanently staff the Fire Department at this level.

##### Capital Budget

- Considering input from the Town Manager and the Capital Planning Advisory Committee, review all town property and capital spending priorities for coming years

November 3, 2025 Update – The Capital Budget is under way. A five year spending plan will be developed that will include a review of priorities and town property.

February 23, 2026 Update – The Town Manager submitted the Five Year Capital Budget on December 31, 2025 that reviewed Town property improvements and the capital spending priorities over the next five years. This portion of the Goal is Complete.

#### Grant Funding

- Conduct in-depth analysis of available grants to help offset operating budget pressures

November 3, 2025 Update – As part of the Budget Development, grants will be examined as well.

February 23, 2026 – The Town Manager provided the Select Board with an analysis of Grants received over the last two fiscal years that showed the Town has received over \$5.8 million in Grant Funding to offset budget pressures. This portion of the Goal is complete.

#### Structure of Government

##### **Select Board Member Assigned – Becky Pine**

- Review and determine action to be taken by the Select Board and staff on items identified in the Master Plan
- Develop a 3-year schedule to meet with all committees under the Select Board's purview. Consider combining or eliminating committees with similar or overlapping roles

November 3, 2025 Update – No action taken as of yet on this goal.

February 23, 2026 Update – The Town Manager is working with the Land Use Director/Town Planner to establish an action plan on items identified in the Master Plan. In addition, the Town Manager and Executive Assistant has established a schedule for the Select Board to meet with committees under the Select Board's purview. These meetings have already begun taking place.

#### Economic Development

##### **Select Board Members Assigned – John Reilly and Matt Pisani**

- Work with Groton Business Association and Destination Groton Committee to develop new sources of revenue.
- Encourage efforts to establish more restaurants in Groton, specifically in the former Station House property and available commercial sites in the Four Corners area

November 3, 2025 Update – The Town has been working with a prospective new buyer of the former Station Houe Restaurant. It is expected that a liquor license hearing will be held in early December.

February 23, 2026 Update – The potential sale of the Station House fell through, however, a new prospective buyer has come forward. There may be a liquor license hearing in the coming months. In addition, the Town Manager has been notified of a potential development in the Four Corners area. While it is in the beginning stages of investigation, there is some movement.

**Ongoing Goals**

**All Members**

- Continue advocating for a predictable increase in State support for education and municipal functions
- Present a FY 2027 Budget in conjunction with Peer Boards that meets the Town of Groton and GDRSD needs
- Continue support of DEI Committee and Affordable Housing Trust

November 3, 2025 Update – Budget development is underway.

February 23, 2026 Update – As stated above, the Proposed FY 2027 Budget has been submitted to the Select Board and Finance Committee. Boards, Committees and Staff have been advocating for additional state funding.