



TOWN OF GROTON

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Board of Selectmen

Joshua A. Degen, *Chairman*
Barry A. Pease, *Vice-Chairman*
Alison S. Manugian, *Clerk*
John G. Petropoulos, *Member*
Rebecca H. Pine, *Member*

Town Manager
Mark W. Haddad

To: *Board of Selectmen*

From: *Mark W. Haddad – Town Manager*

Subject: *Weekly Report*

Date: *July 17, 2017*

1. Schedule on Monday's Agenda are two items. The Housing Partnership will be in attendance to request that the Board consider adopting a "Friendly 40B" process for Local Initiative Program Projects. There is a project proposed for Townsend Road that the Partnership is interested in and they will be seeking the Board's support. Second, based on the donations received, we have prepared and are ready to install five of the "All Are Welcome" markers. As you are aware, the Town Meeting Article authorized the "Town Manager to designate or approve the marker locations." To that end, I have chosen five locations for the markers as follows:

- Route 119 at the Littleton/Groton Border
- Route 225 at the Westford/Groton Border
- Old Ayer Road at the Ayer/Groton Border
- Townsend Road at the Townsend/Pepperell/Groton Border
- West Main Street at the Shirley/Groton Border

As we get more stones, we will install them on Chicopee Row at the Dunstable/Groton Border and Route 119 at the Pepperell/Groton Border. In order to make sure that we have done this to the letter of the law, I consulted with the Building Commissioner and the Land Use Director to determine what permits, if any, are necessary for the installation. (Please note that we are checking with MassDOT to determine if we need approval from the State on the Marker proposed for Route 119 at the Littleton/Groton Border). According to the Building Commissioner, pursuant to the Town of Groton Sign Regulations Chapter 196-2, a sign permit must be obtained from the Land Use Department, with approval from the Sign Committee. Both Selectman Degen and I serve as members of the Sign Committee. Due to the fact that I am responsible for the placement of the Markers, I would need to recuse myself from voting on this matter. Selectman Degen believes that he would need to recuse himself as well. Since it is a three-member Committee, the Sign Committee cannot act on this request. According to the Sign Bylaw, appeals of the Sign Committee are made to the Board of Selectmen. Based on the fact that the Sign Committee cannot act on this request due to the recusals, it would be appropriate for the Selectmen to approve the proposed signs. For your information and review, enclosed with this report is the Sign application for the five locations mentioned above, along with photographs of the proposed locations. I would request that the Board consider approving this application at Monday's meeting.

2. As you know, we have been searching for a Conservation Administrator to replace Takashi Tada, who was recently appointed as our Land Use Director/Town Planner. To fill this vacancy, I appointed a Search Committee made up of me, our Human Resources Director Melisa Doig, Land Use Director/Town Planner Takashi Tada, Selectmen Becky Pine, Personnel Board Member Bud Robertson, Conservation Commission Member Peter Morrison and Executive Assistant Dawn Dunbar. We received 19 applications and narrowed it down to five preliminary interviews by the Search Committee. Based on these interviews, we selected three finalists to send to the Conservation Commission for them to interview as well. One of the applicants dropped out after meeting with the Commission. The Commission ranked the final two applicants and we brought them before the Department Heads for an interview as well. Based on this extensive process, I am pleased to report that I have appointed Nikolas Gualco of Nashua to the position of Conservation Administrator for the Town of Groton. Nikolas is currently the Conservation Administrator for the Town of Townsend. I have enclosed a copy of his resume to this report for your review. Pursuant to Section 4-2(c) of the Groton Charter, please consider this as official notification of this appointment. I would respectfully request that the Board consider ratifying this appointment at Monday's meeting.
3. Robert Hargraves has retired from the Finance Committee creating a vacancy on the Committee. The Finance Committee interviewed two interested residents and have recommended that the Board of Selectmen appoint Scott Whitefield of McCarthy Drive to the vacancy with the term expiring on June 30, 2020. I have enclosed Mr. Whitefield's resume to this report for your review. I would respectfully request that the Board consider making this appointment at Monday's meeting.
4. I have appointed Meera Iyengar-Gupta as a Lifeguard and James Allen as a Camp Counselor at the Groton Country Club. I would respectfully request that the Board consider ratifying these appointments at Monday's meeting.
5. The Zoning Board of Appeals has recommended that the Board appoint Daniel McLaughlin as an Alternate to the Zoning Board of Appeals. I would respectfully request that the Board consider making this appointment at Monday's meeting.
6. As you are aware, we are facing some vacancies here at the Town Hall. Specifically, we have vacancies in the position of Principal Assessor and Assistant Town Clerk. At your last meeting, several members of the Board asked if it were possible to look at consolidation and reconfiguration/redistribution of resources. Obviously, this is something we discuss and look at each time there is a vacancy. It is not possible to always consolidate, but it is always best management practices to review each vacant position when the opportunity arises. To that end, our management team has thoroughly examined these two vacancies and we have developed a consolidation/redistribution of resources that are in the best interests of the taxpayers and residents of the Town of Groton. This plan will allow us to deliver the same level of services while decreasing expenses.

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Section 5-1 of the Groton Charter allows the Town Manager to create such proposals and bring them forward to the Board of Selectmen for approval. At your last meeting, the Board ratified the appointment of Jonathan Greeno as the Interim Principal Assessor for the Town of Groton. At that time, I told the Board that we would begin a search process for a permanent Principal Assessor. Based on the Board's input, a re-examination of the vacancies and taking into consideration the conflicting-challenge of saving money while maintaining services, I think that the best approach is to make the appointment permanent (after posting the job internally for five days) and move forward with a reconfiguration. The reasons in support of this proposal are as follows:

- a. Jonathan Greeno was hired five years ago as the Assistant Assessor with the intent of training him to take over the Principal Assessors' Position when Rena Swezey retired. Rena has spent the last five years training Jonathan. He proved himself last winter when Rena went on medical leave. Jonathan got the Town through a very difficult revaluation. Due to his efforts, tax bills went out on time, saving the Town thousands of dollars in TAN (tax anticipation notes) expenses
- b. Please note that the Greeno situation is similar to the Town Accountant situation, where our current Town Accountant was trained to take over after a retirement.
- c. The Board of Assessors voted unanimously at their meeting of June 14, 2017 to recommend Jonathan Greeno as the permanent replacement upon Rena Swezey's retirement.
- d. It would cost the Town in excess of \$2,000 in advertising costs to go through a search for a Principal Assessor. Once done, a new search would have to be created for an Assistant Assessor's position, with added cost in time and expenses.
- e. Appointing Jonathan immediately allows us to enact a tactical plan to create a hybrid position and save yet more taxpayer funds while creating fundamental cross-training and preparing for any future outcomes of the Municipal Audit.

As stated above, we would be left with two vacancies at Town Hall (Assistant Town Clerk and Assistant Assessor) once Jonathan takes over. Last year, we eliminated 20 hours within the Assessor's office. Currently, these two positions are scheduled for a combined 55 hours per week (35 in the Assessors' Office and 20 hours in the Town Clerk's Office). These are both benefited positions. The Board of Assessors would like to maintain the hours currently assigned to their office. It also serves the public's interest to maintain the current hours in the Town Clerk's office. In an effort to accommodate these requests and reduce expenses in Town Hall, I would like to propose the following:

- We create a new Position entitled "Assistant Assessor/Assistant Town Clerk (AA/AT).
 - o This would be a full time 40 hour per week position that would work 20 hours in the Assessors' Office and 20 in the Town Clerk's Office.
 - o This would leave the Town Clerk's Office with the same amount of hours as currently assigned.

6. Continued:

- We would then add hours to an existing employee, assigning 15 hours per week in the Assessors' Office to cover the hours when the AA/AT is assigned to the Town Clerk's Office.
 - o We currently have a 25 hour per week employee that is looking for full-time work.
 - o This employee can be assigned to the Assessors' Office for the 15 hours.
 - o This employee's benefits are actually paid for out of a CPC grant each year.
 - o This gives recognition to one of our most dedicated employees who consistently provides value directly to our citizenry and many volunteer committees.
 - o The training time for this employee is reduced compared to a new hire, since this employee already understands how Groton works. There is very minimal work within HR or Payroll for adding hours to an existing employee.

Should the Board approve Jonathan's permanent appointment, we can proceed with the plan as outlined above. There are several benefits to this proposal that I would like the Board to consider:

- a. By maintaining 55 hours within the Town Clerk's Office and Board of Assessors' Office while implementing a creative structure within Town Hall, we reduce the risk of negative impact to the people who utilize the services of the Town Clerk's office or the Town Assessor's office.
- b. We eliminate one benefited position from Town Hall. Since the part-time hours are being absorbed by a current employee, we reduce total head-count by one.
- c. We cross train employees in two departments allowing us more flexibility in covering vacations/sick time.
- d. We begin instituting a culture of cross-functional value within our employee base.

I believe this proposal provides the Town with greater flexibility, accommodates the request of the Board of Assessors, and reduces expenses. I look forward to discussing this proposal with the Board in more detail at Monday's meeting.

7. I am requesting the Board's approval of a proposal to allow me to hire contractors to take minutes for the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Finance Committee. As it stands now, Department Heads are taking minutes for these three Boards and it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to perform their required duties while taking minutes. As a Manager that is responsible to the Board of Selectmen, I know I could not participate in the meeting (as I am required to do, similar to the Town Planner, Conservation Administrator and Town Accountant) and take accurate minutes. It is my belief that we need to address this issue forthwith. Several years ago, I had proposed in the operating budget a line item for this purpose, but due to budgetary constraints, we eliminated it from the Final Budget. During recent searches for Land Use Director and Conservation Administrator, almost all of the candidates spoke about the difficulty of attending to their role as a Department Head during the meeting and taking minutes. During Laurie Bonavita's exit interview (she resigned last Winter as our Land Use Director) she cited taking minutes as the number one drawback to her effectiveness as Land Use Director/Town Planner.

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In addition, our Town Accountant should not be taking Finance Committee minutes. While Valerie Jenkins started this practice many years ago and Patricia DuFresne continued that task, the time has come to eliminate this duty from the Town Accountant. This coming fall, we will be undertaking seven union negotiations, health insurance plan redesign and a very difficult FY 2019 Budget preparation. Patricia is a crucial and very important member of the Finance Team and Collective Bargaining Team. Taking minutes (and the arduous task of typing them up for approval), in addition to her regular duties as Town Accountant, is an undue burden on her. Finally, I have a problem as the Town Manager paying \$35 to \$40 per hour to a Department Head to take and prepare minutes when it can be done for \$20 or less an hour. This takes away from time that can be spent performing their regular duties.

We considered many different alternatives to address this issue. One proposal would be to authorize overtime for current Administrative Staff to take minutes. This would be very costly and could lead to employee burnout since all of our Administrative Staff are currently taking minutes for various Boards. Another thought was to purchase a recording machine and have all meetings recorded and transcribed later. While on the surface this appears to be a viable option, unless the person transcribing the minutes knows the voices of everyone in the room (including the public) it would be virtually impossible to identify which Committee member says what statement. In addition, due to the complexities of the Open Meeting Law, minutes have to reference items handed out at the meeting. Without actually being in the room, it would be very easy to miss a document. For your information, I have attached to this report a spreadsheet that identifies all standing committees and how minutes are taken

To that end, I would like to request that both Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee allow me to hire contractors to perform the task of minute taking. We believe the cost would be \$20 per hour for 6 hours per meeting (that includes attending the meeting and then preparing the minutes for approval). The Planning Board and Conservation Commission meet 24 times per year and the Finance Committee averages about 20 meetings per year. Based on this, we would need \$8,160 to cover these three Boards. We could appropriate \$10,000 to cover other Committees on a case by case basis. Please note that the Board of Health, Board of Selectmen, Historic District Commission and Community Preservation Committee all have paid staff to take minutes. It should be noted here that we paid \$10,350 for someone to take minutes for the Charter Review Committee. I believe the Conservation Commission, Planning Board and Finance Committee should have the same administrative assistance. We could pay for this out of current funds and then reimburse that account at the Fall Town Meeting. The Finance Committee discussed this proposal at their meeting last week and was generally supportive of the request, but wanted a policy decision from the Board of Selectmen. I would respectfully request that the Board of Selectmen support this request. Thank you for your consideration.

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8. It is that time of year for the Board to consider calling for the 2017 Fall Town Meeting. According to our Bylaw, the Fall Town Meeting by default shall be held on the third Monday in October. If the Board of Selectmen determine it infeasible or undesirable to hold the Fall Town Meeting on the third Monday in October, then, on a year-by-year basis, the Selectmen may establish a different date, sometime during September, October or November, upon which to hold the Fall Town Meeting so long as they provide formal public notice of that date at least six weeks prior to the date. The third Monday in October is the 16th. However, there are five Monday's in October this year. The Board may want to consider calling for the Town Meeting on October 23rd to give everyone more time to prepare for the meeting. Enclosed with this report is the proposed Fall Town Meeting Schedule based on the third Monday in October (16th). Should the Board decide to call for the meeting on October 23rd, we would adjust the schedule by one week. We can discuss this further at Monday's meeting.
9. When we developed the Fiscal Year 2017 Operating Budget of the Groton Country Club in December, 2015, we estimated that the total cost of operation would be \$563,513 (Operating Expenses - \$396,995; Capital Expenses - \$31,600, and soft costs - \$134,918). We estimated \$428,600 in revenues and projected that the taxpayer subsidy to operate the Country Club would be \$135,913. During the year, we had to make emergency repairs to the Function Hall (Firewall in the basement) that added \$15,000 in unanticipated expenses. That said, I am pleased to report that we exceeded revenues and reduced expenses to lower the taxpayer subsidy in FY 2017 to \$105,405. I cannot express how pleased I am with the work of our General Manager Shawn Campbell. He has really turned around the Country Club in a short period of time. I am confident in his ability to continue to manage the Club in a cost-effective manner and meet the goal of having no taxpayer subsidy in FY 2018. The following Chart shows a comparison between the original budget and the final outcome:

<u>Line Item</u>	<u>FY 2017 Budgeted</u>	<u>FY 2017 Actual</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Country Club Salaries	\$ 137,750	\$ 137,750	\$ -
Country Club Wages	\$ 135,456	\$ 112,946	\$ (22,510)
Country Club Expenses	\$ 123,789	\$ 151,862	\$ 28,073
Capital Purchases	\$ 31,600	\$ 31,546	\$ (54)
Wages In Operating Budget	\$ 33,236	\$ 23,636	\$ (9,600)
Health Insurance	\$ 48,174	\$ 36,024	\$ (12,150)
Payroll Taxes	\$ 4,443	\$ 3,985	\$ (458)
Insurance	\$ 14,865	\$ 15,878	\$ 1,013
Unemployment	\$ 24,200	\$ 6,112	\$ (18,088)
Building Costs	\$ 10,000	\$ 13,011	\$ 3,011
Emergency Repairs	\$ -	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000
Sub-total - Expenses	\$ 563,513	\$ 547,750	\$ (15,763)
Anticipated Revenues	\$ 428,600	\$ 442,345	\$ 13,745
Taxpayer Subsidy	\$ 134,913	\$ 105,405	\$ (29,508)

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10. As the Board is aware, we are in the process of negotiating a lease with the Friends of Prescott for the Prescott School. I hope to have an update for the Board on where this stands at Monday's meeting. That said, one of the proposals from the Municipal Building Committee for the Prescott School was to establish the Prescott Redevelopment Committee to assist in developing a business plan and oversee the lease with the selected operator. As part of our negotiations with the Friends of Prescott, we are requiring the Friends to develop their own business plan. Therefore, I have redrafted the Committee charge to be more of an oversight authority. I would ask the Board to review this proposed charge and consider adopting it either at Monday's meeting or a future meeting. We can review this in more detail at Monday's meeting.

MWH/rjb

enclosures