

MINUTES

Warrant, Summary, and Recommendations

TOWN OF GROTON



SPECIAL TOWN MEETING SEPTEMBER 12, 2022

Groton-Dunstable Middle School Auditorium
344 Main Street, Groton, Massachusetts 01450

Beginning Monday, September 12, 2022 @ 7:00 P.M.

Attention – Voters and Taxpayers

Please bring this Report to Town Meeting
SPECIAL TOWN MEETING WARRANT

SEPTEMBER 12, 2022

Middlesex, ss.
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
To any Constable in the Town of Groton

Greetings:

In the name of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, you are hereby required to notify and warn said inhabitants of the Town of Groton qualified to vote on Town affairs to assemble in the Groton-Dunstable Middle School Auditorium in said Town on Monday, the twelfth day of September, 2022 at Seven O'clock in the evening, to consider the following:

Article 1: Additional Funding for the Florence Roche Elementary School Construction

To see if the Town will appropriate a sum of money to pay costs of designing and constructing a new kindergarten through fourth grade elementary school with an approximate square footage of 109,855 square feet located at 342 Main Street in Groton, Massachusetts, inclusive of abatement and demolition of the existing school structures on said property, new parking lots, relocation of the existing track, various other site improvements, and all other costs incidental and related thereto, which amount shall be expended in addition to the \$76,495,360 previously appropriated for this project under Article 8 of the Warrant at the Town Meeting held on May 1, 2021; to determine whether this amount shall be raised by borrowing or otherwise provided, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Select Board

Select Board: Recommended Unanimously

Finance Committee: Recommended Unanimously

Summary: *Permission is respectfully sought for authorization to increase the borrowing for the Florence Roche Elementary School Project by \$9.5 million. As a Town, we recognized the importance and need for a new elementary school for our youngest residents when the Town authorized funding for the Project. This need has not changed, and the reasons why this school is needed in our Town are the same.*

Voter approvals in May of 2021 authorized borrowing for \$76,495,360 for the construction of the project, which is funded in part by a grant from the Massachusetts School Building Authority. The grant is anticipated to be \$26.1 million, with the remaining amount funded by the Town of Groton. Construction of the project is well underway.

There has been unprecedented escalation in construction costs across the Commonwealth since the project was approved in May of 2021. The current estimated project cost is \$85.9 million, \$9.5 million more than was previously authorized.

Therefore, permission is respectfully sought for authorization to increase the borrowing for the Florence Roche Elementary School Project by \$9.5 million.

MINUTES

The Chair called meeting to order at 7:28pm with 402 voters present.

A motion was made and seconded to waive the reading of the warrant. The motion passed by majority vote.

ARTICLE 1: Ms. Manugian made the motion which was seconded: I move that the Town appropriates Nine Million Five Hundred Thousand (\$9,500,000) Dollars to pay costs of designing and constructing a new kindergarten through fourth grade elementary school with an approximate square footage of 109,855 square feet located at 342 Main Street in Groton, Massachusetts, inclusive of abatement and demolition of the existing school structures on said property, new parking lots, relocation of the existing track, various other site improvements, and all other costs incidental and related thereto, which amount shall be expended in addition to the \$76,495,360 previously appropriated for this project under Article 8 of the Warrant at the Town Meeting held on May 1, 2021, and that to meet this appropriation, the Town Treasurer, with the approval of the Select Board, is authorized to borrow said amount under and pursuant to G.L. c. 44, §7(1) or pursuant to any other enabling authority, and to issue bonds or notes of the Town therefor.

Ms. Manugian introduced a number of school building officials present. Mr. David Saindon was permitted to speak and he and Ms. Manugian made a presentation to the Town Meeting.

479 voters were present at 7:39pm.

Ms. Leslie Lathrop made a presentation as the primary opponent of Article 1.

Mr. Robertson, Chair of Finance Committee said that if they didn't build this project, the current Flo Ro would need to be renovated because it was inadequate and would cost \$40M with no reimbursement from the state. He said that including the additional \$9.5M, the Groton portion would be \$60M. He said that burying the concrete foundation and steel currently there would cost \$20M and would not enable them to bring the Groton students back from Swallow Union.

494 people were present at this time.

DEBATE: Ms. Jenifer Evans said there was a 10% increase coming from this project that taxpayers had not seen yet. She talked about the Groton seniors who were on fixed incomes and how this would affect them.

Mr. Al Neff moved that the debate be limited to 3 minutes from each speaker with the XXX. The motion was seconded. The motion carried by 2/3s majority vote.

Mr. Eric Fisher moved to amend the main motion by adding after the Town therefor...no additional funds shall be allocated under this motion unless the design of heating/ventilation/Air conditions (HVAC) system of the building is modified to become zero-emission (all electric). The motion was seconded.

Mr. Eric Fisher said they had an emissions problem and the study was focused on furnaces and stoves. Ms. Manugian said that they had many meetings where HVAC was discussed with different professionals. Mr. Saindon said that going electric was going to cost a million dollars more. He said that any change in the design of the building at this point because they were going out to bid next month would cost substantial delays.

The Moderator said that the Chair determined that this was in the scope of the motion. Brian Falk, Town Counsel said that the town's MSBA reimbursement might be in jeopardy if they moved forward with this. Mr. James McMath said he hadn't seen anything that talked about the life cycle costs.

The Chair called for a motion on the amendment which required a simple majority vote. The motion to amend failed due to lack of majority.

Mr. Lockett asked if the prices had been locked with final contract prices. Mr. Saindon said that there were contingencies in place and that all contracts would be 100% awarded in the next 4-5 months.

Mr. Josh Degen said the Board knew about potential for escalators back in May of 2021 when the Town voted to approve this project. He said they couldn't fix anything at this point. He proposed that the ticket tax from Groton Hill, and ARPA money be used to put toward this.

Mr. Degen offered a motion to amend the main motion to:

- **Delete the words "said amount" and replace it with "\$8.5 million"**
- **and add "to meet the remaining balance of this appropriation, appropriate \$500,000 from ARPA funds and transfer \$500,000 from the stabilization fund."**

The motion was seconded.

Mr. Degen said that he would like to see the number cut in half but the funds had to be available immediately. He said his motion would be to reduce the amount request to \$8.5M. Mr. Haddad said that the ARPA funds were available, but the stabilization fund was a slippery slope and asked them to not touch that. He said that they needed to keep 5% of the operating budget in the stabilization fund in order to maintain their AAA bond rating. He said any reduction of that fund would hurt their interest rate when they go out to bond. Mr. Robertson said he would not move any funds adding they didn't know what next year was going to look like adding their budget process didn't start until next month. He said that if \$9.5 wasn't needed, it wouldn't be spent.

Ms. Marlena Gilbert moved the question to amend and the final main motion. The motion was seconded. The motion carried by a 2/3 majority vote.

The Chair stated that the motion to amend required a 2/3's majority vote because of the proposed transfer from the stabilization fund. The motion failed and did not achieve a 2/3's majority vote.

The Chair said that the main motion under Article 1 required a 2/3's majority vote to pass.

Tellers were called to count the votes and were sworn in by the Town Clerk.

VOTE ON THE MAIN MOTION:

A 2/3's majority vote was achieved with 366 voting in the affirmative and 101 voting against.

A motion was made and seconded to dissolve the Special Town Meeting at 9:26pm on September 12, 2022. The motion carried unanimously.

Hereof fail not and make return of your doings to the Town Clerk on or before time of said meeting.

Given under our hands this 22nd Day of August in the year of our Lord Two Thousand Twenty-Two.

John F. Reilly

John F. Reilly, Chair

Rebecca H. Pine

Rebecca H. Pine, Vice Chair

Matthew F. Pisani

Matthew F. Pisani, Clerk

Alison S. Manugian

Alison S. Manugian, Member

Peter S. Cunningham

Peter S. Cunningham, Member

OFFICERS RETURN
Groton, Middlesex

Pursuant to the within Warrant, I have this day notified the Inhabitants to assemble at the time, place, and for the purpose mentioned as within directed. Personally posted by Constable.

Constable

Date Duly Posted