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Advisory Board  
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March 25, 2013

Present: Joe Dean, Ron Mikol, Kevin Welch, Harold Simmons and Dana Metzler, Christine Muir

Meeting opened at 7:00PM

#### GDRSD FY14 Budget Update

Jim Frey, Gerry Martin, and Lou DeLoureiro joined the Advisory Board to discuss several items related to the school district's budget – new maintenance truck, technology warrant article, and outstanding questions.

Gerry Martin clarified the reasons why the maintenance truck cannot be purchased from existing E&D funds. The district cannot spend money directly from E&D so they must either increase the towns' FY13 assessments or add the truck to the FY14 budget. Harold asked if the truck can be leased instead of purchased outright, because Dunstable would have an easier time making smaller lease payments than spending one-third of the Reserve fund (\$8000) for the purchase, even though Gerry indicated that they were able to secure an excellent purchase price. Jim said they will check on the lease option and return with additional information.

Jim and Gerry also addressed a question raised after reading an article in the *Lowell Sun*, in which it was indicated that other nearby school districts are receiving additional state aid money in significantly higher amounts than Groton-Dunstable. Jim said these numbers are derived from the state's foundation formula, and the towns receiving higher amounts are paying higher percentages of the foundation money. The state wants to see towns contribute up to 87% of the foundation amount per student, and Groton-Dunstable are only giving about 65%. The other towns listed also have non-regionalized schools within their boundaries. Kevin pointed out that he thinks the foundation formula is flawed in its assessment of a town's ability to contribute and said he thinks the state aid money should be distributed based on a town's budget. In particular, Kevin pointed to Lowell as an example of a town that pays a smaller percentage than other towns in the area but reaps more benefits than the more affluent communities. Kevin said he thinks the communities at the highest and lowest end of the financial spectrum get the majority of aid and the middle class communities foot the bill. He also stated that he had contacted Rep. Harrington's office regarding this matter but did not get a reply.

Jim reiterated several points made at a joint presentation of the technology article, including the fact that the purchase prices indicated for the wireless infrastructure as well as hardware purchases include up to five years of support services and all necessary licensing. It is not expected that the school district will return to the towns next year asking for additional funding to support these upgrades. The Advisory Board indicated that Dunstable would likely want to secure a three-year statehouse note in order to pay the school district for the upgrades, and then roll the \$40,000-50,000 annual payments into the budget if possible. It would be ideal not to have to request an override for this article.

#### Town Accountant

Ken Leva and Rich Larkin attended the meeting to discuss the inter-municipal agreement regarding the Town Accountant, who currently works approximately 21 hours/week in Townsend. The agreement essentially allows Dunstable to “rent” the accountant for ten hours/week, paying Townsend for her time instead of compensating her directly. The Advisory Board would like the contract to clarify the hourly rate that Dunstable must pay Townsend.

#### Town Administrator

Ken and Rich remained at the table to discuss the Town Administrator job description, which has been shared with the board for feedback. This position is likely to pay between \$38,000 and \$48,000 annually, and will not be in place before the start of FY14. Dana noted that the description doesn't clarify who reports to whom, and who has hiring and dismissal rights. Rich noted that the Town Administrator cannot have supervisory authority over elected boards. Ron suggested that there needs to be clarity regarding reporting lines, especially for performance and salary reviews. This could lead to the board revising the entire municipal budget so that some positions are listed under a Town Administration budget instead of under various departments.

#### Advisory Board Projector

The board voted unanimously to approve the purchase of a projector to be used at Town Meeting for displaying the recommended budget as well as any other presentations. Ron obtained a quote for approximately \$1500 to include the projector, carrying case, and spare bulb. The money will come from the Technology budget.

#### Transfer requests

The Zoning Board requested a transfer of \$625 from the Reserve Account to their Wages line item, to cover anticipated administrative costs related to several appeals currently in progress. The board unanimously approved the transfer.

#### Reserve Account

Dana informed the board that we are likely to hit a zero balance in our reserve account this year. Bonnie Ricardelli will be submitting a request to transfer \$6000 to pay for short-term debt service, due by May 15. We will need to add an article to the Annual Town Meeting to transfer money, probably from free cash, to the Reserve Account for FY13.

#### FY14 Budget Review

Dana suggested several changes to the Recommended Budget in order to balance the overall budget for FY14. Some items to consider include a COLA of 1% and reducing several line items, including Special Legal, Police Overtime, and Veterans' Benefits. He also suggested adding a non-excluded debt line to the school budget, with \$50,000 to cover the statehouse note for technology.

At 9:20 p.m., we voted to continue this meeting on Wednesday, March 27 at 7 p.m.

### **March 27, 2013 Continuation**

The meeting began at 7:00. Present were Ron Mikol, Kevin Welch, Joe Dean, Harold Simmons and Dana Metzler. Absent was Christine Muir.

Selectman Leva brought before the board a proposal from Townsend to share Kim Fales as Town Accountant. After a review of the proposal, all parties agreed to have Mr. Leva continue to negotiate to what the Board felt would be a more palatable contract.

The Board then began the process of going line item by line item down the 2014 budget. As the Board agreed to or modified the recommended amounts, Joe highlighted the recommended columns to show completion of that specific area of the budget. Mr. Leva stayed at the meeting to offer his insight as chair of the Selectmen. There was much discussion around the largest budgets: Police, Fire and Highway. It is the intent of the Advisory Board to meet with these department heads and discuss potential budget reductions.

With regard to the school budget, the Board is proposing to seek a State House note of \$136,000.00 to fund the technology capitol upgrade for the district. This note will be paid off over a three year timeframe and will be funded within the town's current levy limit. This will require an article at Town Meeting to authorize the borrowing. We do not anticipate this to be excluded debt.

The Board proceeded to finish the review of the entire budget, including a 1% pay increase for all employees and a review of all requested money articles.

We adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

*Paul J. Michel*  
*Kim Fales*  
*Harold & June*  
*Joseph P. Leva*