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March 7, 2016

Present: Amie Stevens, Harold Simmons, Ron Mikol, Christine Muir, Pam Crocker, *Dana Metzler*

Also attending: Town Administrator Tracey Hutton; Selectmen Walter Alterisio, Ken Leva and Danny Devlin; GDRSD Superintendent Kristan Rodriguez and Business Director Jared Stanton; School Committee members Jeff Kubick, Alison Manugian, Stephanie Cronin and Leslie Lathrop; several community members

Meeting opened at 7:05 p.m.

#### Groton Dunstable Regional School District FY17 Budget Review

This was a joint meeting of the Advisory Board and Board of Selectmen to discuss the GDRSD FY17 budget request. R. Mikol introduced Superintendent Dr. Kristan Rodriguez, who in turn introduced School Committee Chair Jeff Kubick and Business and Finance Chair Alison Manugian. J. Kubick said the School Committee did not have a specific agenda but was there to answer any questions either municipal board had regarding the FY17 budget request. He noted that the SC plans to vote on the budget at their next meeting on Wednesday, March 9. This budget includes the funding for all items identified in the comprehensive Needs Assessment document compiled by the superintendent earlier in the year.

A. Manugian presented data she compiled to show that the school district budget grows between 2.5% and 3% annually, which should be a sustainable rate of growth. The flip side is the funding from the state, which has decreased annually to the point that the towns now have to contribute an additional 4.7% to 5% annually. This is clearly unsustainable under Proposition 2 ½.

J. Stanton confirmed that Dunstable's FY17 assessment without debt is \$5,712,832. R. Mikol noted that Dunstable tends to exclude any debt because we don't have the funds within our operating budget, so we prefer to see the assessment without debt.

D. Metzler commented that Dunstable is clearly looking at an override to fund all the budget requests for FY17. (Dunstable's assessment without funding the Needs Assessment budget is just about \$280,000 more than last year, which is affordable without an override.) D. Devlin asked if Groton has the funds within their operating budget and A. Manugian answered no, Groton is probably looking at an override as well. R. Mikol stated that Groton is considering one override spread over three years, to make the increase more tolerable to residents. A. Manugian said this is not a formal proposal at this time, and she has concerns about how the funding would be handled given any changes in boards or priorities.

W. Alterisio spoke of the need to "sell" the override to "the other 60%" of residents who don't have a child in the school system, and make their voices heard at the polls. He asked that the School

Committee provide progress on the "crosswalk" goals more frequently than the stated 6 years. J. Kubick said this would occur. W. Alterisio also said that any efforts to push back on the state for more funding require making people "uncomfortable" so they respond and act. A. Manugian explained the Resolution currently under consideration by many towns and school committees across the state; W. Alterisio responded that Dunstable is prepared to support such a resolution.

W. Alterisio asked about the technology spending from three years ago and whether any efficiencies were created by that expenditure. A. Manugian said there have definitely been benefits and efficiencies but it requires continued support. K. Rodriguez noted that the district has accepted donations from Lawrence Academy to supplement the technology, has moved away from expensive MacBooks to less expensive ChromeBooks and is considering a BYOD (bring your own device) policy at the middle school, which shifts expense away from school district.

W. Alterisio also brought up the expense of special education. K. Rodriguez said that it is the biggest uncontrolled cost in the district, and that it is unpredictable but mandated. We have no control over other schools raising their tuition costs. She sits on the board of the Merrimack Valley Collaborative, which has voted again this year not to raise tuitions. She also noted that the district has been working on developing its own programs so that we can bring other students into our district and use that tuition as a revenue stream. There are start-up costs to building such programs, though.

R. Mikol opened the floor to allow participation from members of the public. Susan Prescott asked the boards to consider their vision for the town, especially on such a tight budget. She and others noted that they moved to Dunstable in part for the schools, and not for a low tax rate. She also suggested that stronger leadership and better communication is needed to make changes such as improving the water infrastructure, for example. W. Alterisio and K. Leva replied that change is needed and that the Master Plan is going to be reviewed and revived shortly.

S. Cronin asked about the use of social media to communicate town events and discussion. T. Hutton said there are legal ramifications for towns using social media and Dunstable has not yet decided whether to take that path.

The joint meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

#### FY17 Budget Review

T. Hutton provided updated copies of the overview and line item budgets. Up to \$120,000 could potentially be excluded debt if passed at town meeting; this includes the Lowell Tech renovation debt, salt shed, Main Street engineering and Middle School roof.

The transfer station is listed as part of line item budget because it should not be an enterprise fund if it is not self-sustaining. T. Hutton will continue to pursue the Greater Lowell Vocational debt number and look into the \$12,000 tire purchase for the Highway Department.

We adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

