



**OFFICE OF THE  
Advisory Board  
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November 7, 2016

Present: Amie Stevens, Harold Simmons, Christine Muir, Dana Metzler, Pam Crocker, Ron Mikol  
Also present: Tracey Hutton

Dana made a motion to accept the October 3rd meeting minutes. Ron seconded. All approved.

- Tracy requested \$8,200 from the reserve fund toward the end of the year to cover unexpected additional employee health expenses etc.
- Christine discussed the library transfer requests:
  - \$1,865 for library energy to open on Saturdays.
  - \$2,143 for other supplies to purchase state requirement of spending 20% on supplies.
  - \$6,708 transfer to salary and wages to reopen on Saturdays.
  - \$10,716 is the total amount from above that is needed to remain certified.
- The Library board of trustees was in attendance and presented the following:
  - Current library budget will lose state certification resulting in losing privileges to participate with MVLC. It could take up to two years to become re-certified
  - The Director focused on that the state looks to see if all town departments took similar cuts to receive a waiver.
    - She motioned to the handout line one column 3 showed a decrease in other departments at .6% vs the 5.6% that the library was subject too.
  - Christine asked when we will hear about the waiver. Marybeth said that they will meet in February 2017. If we are denied we can appeal in march with a final decision in April.
  - Ron asked Mary Beth if we have ever gone through this process before. She replied that we have never done this.
    - Christine asked when is the loss of certification effective. MB replied that it is immediate. She also highlighted that they do not give out many waivers so its unlikely we would receive a waiver.
  - Tracy stated that if we fund this request, it will only leave \$8K in the town reserve fund.
    - During town meeting the town voted that the library would be closed on Saturdays.
  - Dana stated that reserve fund is for unexpected expenses, he argues that the library request is not unexpected, it was voted at town meeting. i.e. closing on Saturdays.
  - Tracy stated that its her understanding that waivers under 5% or under are more likely to get approved vs. the waivers that are over 5%.
  - Harold requested from Mary Beth how many households use the library.
    - She did not have those stats on her. This would be on the ARIS report. Christine requested Mary Beth supply this at our next meeting on December 5th.

- Pam asked if 2 years to get re-certified is the norm?
  - MB stated that 2 years is the minimum amount of time that it will take to re-certify.
- Christine had two committee updates
  - RFP committee: Interviewed a consultant to examine school expenses. the candidate was not qualified. It will go back out for RFP.
    - The RFP was for a complete operations and financial review, not just expenses. The candidate didn't address all aspects of the RFP to the committee's satisfaction so a new RFP will go out shortly.
  - RAC-regional agreement committee. DESE (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) came back with changes on the agreement which the committee went back and forth with. It is now in final review.
  - Tracey commented that the board of health is looking into different trash hauling options.
- **Christine introduced guests from the groton finance committee and school committees. There were 3 presentations: school committee, Groton finance and Dunstable advisory board.**
- First Presentation
  - Jeff Kubick and Alison Manugian presented from school committee (presentation is posted on the town website)
    - Jeff presented:
      - Top priority is to find a new superintendent. Acton/Boxboro superintendent will be interim superintendent this spring.
      - Frank Antonelli is interim business manager, looking for permanent replacement.
      - Union negotiations will be coming due in 2017.
      - Needs assessment is still active. They will now look at this over a multi year period.
      - They adopted a technology plan in 2015/16. There will be a financial impact from this.
      - Draft capital plans and other post employment benefits are other factors to consider.
    - Alison presented:
      - State has decreased chapter 70 funding to about 35% of the funding for schools.
      - 60% of operating budget is wages/salaries. This is standard, 14% is benefits, 26% is expenses.
        - This equals about a 3.5% annual increase.
    - Jeff next presented guidance for FY18:
      - Our top priority is not to go backwards.
      - Estimated need for FY18 is \$1,715,000:
        - 3.5% increase = \$1.160,000
        - Planned cost from technology plan =55,000
        - Needs assessment priorities=\$500,000
          - this is 20% of the total needs assessment number.
    - Ron asked how the capital plan was created/budgeted
      - Jeff noted that \$848,000 was allocated for this plan
      - Ron's concerned that there are a lot of aging buildings and that it will have a higher impact to the budget than expected. Are the needs being addressed when they should be?
  - Gary Green presented from the Groton finance committee

- Sustainable budget committee (SBC)
    - What steps should the town take for sustainable growth
    - They looked at 5 year trend.
      - Entire Groton municipal budget grew at 5.17% on average
      - Showed a model of a 3.4% expense growth and it shows that they are at a deficit of about \$400K year over year.
        - modeled to show that “one year cuts” does not solve the problem. We can’t cut our way out of this problem.
      - To avoid overrides, we need to reduce expense growth to 2.4%. Their FY18 town guidance was to target no more than 2.4% municipal growth. However current forecast is slated for a 3.67% increase in expenses. They would like the town manager to get down to 2.4% which would mean no overrides.
  - Short term actions:
    - Implement room occupancy tax of 6%.
    - How do we fund merit increases?
    - potential to decrease other expenses.
- Christine Muir presented from Dunstable Advisory committee:
  - 59% of our operating budget is for GDRSD. Total budget is \$9,159,647
  - Revenue and expenditure trends from FY12-17. Dunstable was cash flow positive in 2013 and 2014. Spending continued to increase year after year, revenue was flat.
    - Schools began to ask for more money in 2015. All municipal services remained flat.
  - Dunstable has erratic patterns of revenue and expenditures. They cut budgets to make them fit within revenues.
  - Master plan committee may help with revenue growth but it will take time.
  - Need to develop fiscal policies to help create a more predicable growth and opportunities.
  - FY 18 goals
    - Restore most of the cuts from 2017 budget, total of \$55,000 for municipal.
    - Capital plan =\$111,000
      - rescue engine =\$360,000
      - backhoe =\$110,000
    - Water infrastructure=\$2,500,000
  - FY revenue estimate is \$9,760,866
- Christine opened the floor for discussion
  - Groton finance member noted that it seems that both towns should aim for 2.4% growth or under for all services. Both towns seem to be in similar precarious situations. 3.5% growth in schools will be a detriment to Dunstable and will hurt Groton as well. It will cause another override.
    - Alison addressed what the school committee could look to decrease. Benefits can only be negotiated every three years and they are a member of the GIC which is standard. Wages and salaries are the highest line item.
    - Dana asked how much of the needs assessment of \$500,000 is new employees. Dr. Rodriguez stated that over 60% would be salaries.
  - Walter Alterisio stated that many of these items, i.e. salaries, contracts, state funds are out of both towns control.
    - As a broader message, the State needs to be part of the conversations.

- Christine mentioned that there have been discussions at the state level. Alison also chimed in on this and noted that the school committee has met with the State and the reality is that the State doesn't have additional revenue to give to the districts.
  - Dr. Rodriguez stated that Rep Harrington will help highlight some of the audits findings of underfunding but cannot guarantee any increase in funding. The state has similar issues, i.e. increases in benefits, wages etc.
  - We should push for regulation of increases to benefits etc.
- Ron Mikol expressed concerns about the capital improvements plans of the school.
  - School committee members addressed his concerns and said they are diligently working on the capital improvement plan but it takes time.
    - Ron thinks the improvements could be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Christine closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending tonight's meeting. It was agreed that we have the same goals, but how are we going to get there? There is no answer tonight but now we are all on the same page and having similar conversations. What are our limitations and our opportunities?

Amie makes a motion to adjourn, Dana seconded. All approved.