



**OFFICE OF THE
Advisory Board
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January 9, 2017

Present: Amie Stevens, Harold Simmons, Christine Muir, Dana Metzler, Pam Crocker, Ron Mikol
Absent: None
Also present: Tracey Hutton

• **Joint meeting with Groton finance and school committee.**

- Christine opened the meeting. She thanked the Groton school committee and finance committee for attending tonight and for the collaboration.
- Christine introduced Jeff Kubick from school committee. Jeff introduced Mr. Bill Ryan, the interim superintendent.
 - On 2/7/17 there will be a public hearing for the Groton budget Mr. Ryan suggested releasing copies of budget before then.
 - The district continues to work on sustainability.
 - They also have the operations RFP outstanding. How does the district improve operations and set benchmarks.
 - Initially looking at a single vendor. They have realized they may need multiple vendors for different specializations.
 - Operational v. special ed as an example.
 - Mr. Ryan gave an update on the district.
 - He has been here 6 days so far.
 - Met with all the principals and some staff so far. He commented that the culture of the district is very strong.
 - He has also worked closely so far with Frank Antonelli and Michael Knight.
 - Preparing an FY18 operating budget that is maintaining level services.
 - Hopes to add a few positions, 3 or 4 positions. Boutwell may need staff along with an ESL position (english second language).
 - Develop a budget that is consistent with the revenues that the towns have.
 - There are a lot of assumptions at this point, i.e. state funding etc.
 - We won't have some of those numbers until end of this month.
 - Anticipates a \$750K for the Groton assessment and less than \$250K for Dunstable's assessment
 - Health insurance premiums are rising this year.

- The district has October 1st enrollment numbers so far for the year. Looks like there may be a slight shift of costs going to Dunstable due to increased student population.
- Mr. Ryan opened the floor to questions.
 - is there a projection for total enrollment, i.e. trends?
 - Mr. Ryan said that that analysis is underway.
- Christine introduced Gary from the Groton Finance committee.
 - Town manager (TM) submitted a balance budget proposal by 12/31.
 - The committee did not want it to go higher than 2.4% increase.
 - TM was able to meet the number by maintaining current services but not adding new. See slides on the town website for details.
 - Employee benefits was biggest cost driver on the municipal side, grew 6.96% for 2018.
 - School line items are placeholders for now.
 - Nashoba valley has an increase of 7.27%.
 - Anticipated \$750K increase for schools, 4.08% increase.
 - From FY14-18 trends in municipal/education spending.
 - GDRSD line item increase from \$15.1MM to \$19.1MM or 26.7%.
 - Municipal increased from \$13.5MM to 14.8MM or 9.9%.
- Christine Muir presented the preliminary budget for Dunstable. See slides on town website.
 - Free cash was certified at \$284,617.
 - Implementing second year of personnel board recommendations. \$35K total across most departments.
 - Significant expenditures on technology, \$24.2K.
 - Health care increases, new members on plans.
 - Doubling reserve account.
 - New contract with transfer station which reduces costs by \$24K.
 - Significant cuts to highway department.
 - Unknowns
 - police union contract
 - library budget needs to be vetted by trustees
 - At this point we could balance budget with free cash but would want this to be the last year.
- Question from the audience: Is there discussion to move the school IT capital expenditure of \$55K to a separate warrant article.
 - Dunstable portion would be \$12K of the \$55K.
 - Dunstable has not discussed if we will treat this as a separate warrant article.
- Question from the audience: Dunstable passed a \$475K override last year but Groton did not approve so where are the funds.
 - Did that money go into the general fund?
 - Tracy confirmed that \$150K excess levy. Because the override was presented as a total override, i.e. municipal and schools the town can spend on either.

- Will people be concerned if we don't spend it on the schools there will be another override.
 - Christine confirm the last thing the towns want to do is another override.
 - There was a lot of discussion on how to fund the schools capital costs. District wide buildings would be split between the districts per the regional agreement.
 - How do we fund repairs for capital costs? Should each town create a separate account?
 - Ron Mikol expressed his concern that the district has not kept up with the capital improvements of the schools.
 - It should be run more like a commercial real estate company.
 - Christine asked if there is someone responsible for the capital plan.
 - Jeff from the school committee confirmed this is the capital committee which consists of multiple people.
 - Ron mentioned that there were 60 windows that needed to be replaced at the high school 2 years ago, he asked if that has been done?
 - Jeff confirmed that this has not been done.
 - Ron is concerned about the effective use of the facilities. He also is worried that the capital plan is over 2 years old so it is outdated.
 - Jennifer from the school committee agreed that she is concerned as well. Their priority is to update the current capital plan and to raise awareness within the community.
 - Marlena from the school committee has confirmed that Michael Knight has been tasked to come up with a "hot list" of emergency items.
 - She stressed that the school committee is focused on getting these improvements addressed but need to be smart about it.
 - Jennifer from audience asked if it was possible to reconvene the capital planning committee. We shouldn't wait until after the budget cycle as it might be too late.
 - Alison, school committee member, expressed concern that even if we move forward, there may not be funding to cover but understands the need.
 - Part of the reason for lack of upkeep is financial.
 - An audience member suggested we create a "stop the bleeding" list so we can fix what needs to be done.
 - i.e. windows, roofs etc, not building a new school.
 - Christine noted that the capital plan has been out on the website for over a year. She noted that the next steps sounds like the school committee needs to review the current capital plan and then the fin com boards can start discussions on how to fund capital commitments. They are scheduled to discuss capital plans at a meeting this March.
 - Dana asked if we have a preliminary list and what the cost would be?
 - Mr. Ryan chimed in that maybe we look to hire a professional firm to do a capital plan.
 - Alison noted that the current plan calls for \$300K for FY17, \$1MM for FY18.
 - An audience member chimed in that there seems to be a lot of talk and no action. Let the administration handle this and give them the tools instead of forming more committees.
 - Jeff asked Ron Mikol if he thinks it would make sense to reconvene the capital committee and include experts such as Bill Ryan and Frank Antonelli.
- Topic shifted from capital plan to the regional agreement

- Bill Ryan mentioned that this will be approved soon and will need to be approved at the spring town meeting.

- **Dunstable Finance committee business:**

- Tracy confirmed the deficit is down to \$59.9K without using any free cash.
 - Ron asked how we got to \$59.9K.
 - Part of it was from the cherry sheets. The difference from these was \$30K.
 - The deficit does not include any warrant articles yet.
 - Current warrant articles are GDRSD Tech, Fire ATV, Police chief sick buyback, high to highland, stormwater, replace engine 2. Totals close to \$500K
- The library budget is still in limbo as there was inaccurate information provided to the committee.
 - To meet MAR their budget needs to be \$140K, current budget is \$100K.
 - The FY17 proposed library budget was incorrect by about \$10K. The 2018 budget was also incorrect.
 - Can the trustees post the notice for their own meeting. Did the trustees delegate this authority to the library director.
 - Can we get a list of the number of households that use the library.
- Fincom is meeting with the water department on 1/24/17 at 7:00 as a joint meeting. This has been posted. Fincom will also have a meeting on 1/23/17.
- Harold commented on the capital plan of the schools
 - He stated that in the early 90's they came to the town with capital needs and passed funding and the school committee confirmed this would not happen again.
 - He commented that we are in the same position now that we were in the early 90s.
- Christine mentioned that there was a meeting at the Black Box Theater in the High School this Thursday to get feedback on what we are looking for in a new superintendent.
- Amie asked if the school reserves a percentage of their budget for capital improvements.
 - A majority of the committee did not think this was the case
- There seems to be little to no accountability at the capital level on either the committees or school employee side to own the capital improvements.
- Answering a question from the audience, Christine confirmed there was one last meeting for the regional agreement committee.
 - Groton wants to sell/lease the Prescott building to a third party.
 - Adding a third party would dilute Dunstable's voice further.
 - The regional agreement committee met and decided to NOT allow this type of transaction in the agreement.
 - Leases should only be within the districts.
- Motion to approve meeting minutes from 11/7 and 12/5.
 - Motion to approve the 11/7 minutes. all approved
- Dana motioned to approve the 12/5 minutes as amended on the police trailer discussion.
 - Harold seconded, all approved.
- Next meetings will be 1/23 and 1/24.
- Harold motions that we adjourn, Amie seconded, all approved.