

Town of Dunstable
**Joint Meeting of the Selectboard, Advisory Board
& School Committee**
Meeting Minutes
July 12, 2017
Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827

Convened: 6:30 pm

Present: Walter F. Alterisio, chair, Leah D. Basbanes, vice chair, Ronald J. Mikol member; Tracey Hutton, Town Administrator; Christine Muir, chair, Leo Tometich, Harold Simmons, Bob Nelson, Kieran Meehan, Advisory Board; Marlina Gilbert, chair, Jennifer McKenzie, Jeff Kubick, Peter Cronin, Brian LeBlanc, Angela Donahue, Ryan McLane, GDRSD School Committee; Lorraine Leonard, Town Account; Dr. Laura Chesson, GDRSD Superintendent, Mr. Knight, GDRSD Director of Business & Finance; Jack Petropoulos, Alison Manugian, Groton BOS; James Dow, Chief of Police

GDRSD Capital & Technology Plans

Ms. Muir started off by conducting some introductions noting that there are some new members since the last time all three boards have meet. After introductions Ms. Gilbert went over the Capital & Technology Plans being proposed by the school district. She then provided the Board and Advisory Board with some of the expenses and projected costs. The School Committee wishes to get buy in from both towns. They understand the financial challenges faced by both Groton and Dunstable. As part of that, the school wishes to have a strategy for dealing with expenses, some of which are likely to be unforeseen. Going into FY19 there are some big ticket expenditures. In order to better facilitate the process between the towns and the school, they are bringing this to the towns at this stage to discuss the expenses and how to fund. The School Committee understands that each town is unique and the committee is open to suggestions from both communities for how to meet these challenges. Ms. McKenzie then elaborated on some of the expenses. There are two underground oil tanks at Swallow Union. The tanks are being used. The soil was tested and there is no evidence of any leakage.

Nonetheless, the School Committee wants to complete Swallow Union's conversion to gas. Most of the building is on gas, but there remain parts of it that are oil. Ms. Muir thanked the School Committee for this information. She noted that this is something that the towns have asked for in the past, in particular looking for a list of what is needed and what the projected expenses would be. Having this so far in advance to the process helps greatly. She then went over the total costs as well as the break downs. Ms. Gilbert noted some budget figures and funding sources that could pay for them. Ms. Muir followed by making some inquiries into the timing. Mr. Knight responded by elaborating on some of the funding sources and some reimbursement opportunities from the Commonwealth. Ms. Muir inquired further as to reimbursements. Mr. Knight explained how they work and how they can be used to reduce the assessments to the towns. In essence to pay the towns back for funding up front on projects that qualify. Ms. Gilbert then gave some history behind past reimbursements. Mr. Knight had some cautions over doing things in the exact same way as the past explaining how projects have been slowed down. Ms. Gilbert stated that by having a plan in place we know what we expect to do in FY19 and in FY20. Where there is a plan, it is easier to track the expenditures and the progress.

The Board had some questions as to the specific internet upgrade project. Mr. Knight elaborated further and explained that there is a five year life span and support for the project. Ms. Muir inquired as to if this is factored into the budget. Mr. Knight responded that it would be if the Capital Plan is extended further, and he has projections for further out. Mr. Nelson had some questions as to the price tag. Mr. Knight explained how the number was determined and the process behind it. This includes "hard costs" based on recent upgrades to the High School and projections about what the costs would be to upgrade all the other school facilities in the district. Mr. Nelson followed up by asking what has prompted this need for an upgrade. Mr. Knight explained that the current speeds and connections to the network are not sufficiently working. Ms. Gilbert followed by explaining the technology needs of the district and noted that the full technology plan may be found on the school districts website. Ms. Manugian reminded those present that she only recently left the School Committee for the Groton Board of Selectmen. When she was on the committee she was part of the work on

Approved and adopted on 7/26/17

these plans. She elaborated on the time and work put into the plans and how the school came to its conclusions regarding its needs.

The Board noted the costs and the fact that the technology appears to be in need of upgrade every 5 years. Mr. Knight responded in the affirmative and elaborated why the process is based on 5 year periods. The Board responded that part of what needs to be explained to citizens is what the problem is and how the problem can be solved. Rather than just having a sole emphasis on the cost itself. Ms. Muir agreed that there needs to be a narrative that goes along with the numbers so that the public understands the requests. Ms. Muir had a few follow up questions about the plans and how they define some possible debt exclusion questions. Mr. Knight elaborated that he was trying to avoid an artificial inflation in the numbers and explained the terms he used in the plans. If the title should be changed to remove the terms debt exclusion he was open to that. Ms. Muir elaborated a bit further on her thoughts and concerns. Ms. Leonard inquired as to the methodology used for the cost of the oil tank being removed. Mr. Knight explained how the cost was determined. There is a split based on the student population makeup from each town based on a 5 year rolling average. Some of the cost will be paid for by Groton since Groton does have some students in Swallow Union. Mr. Tometich had some questions regarding multiple appearances of the cost of removal of the oil tanks. Mr. Knight explained that there are two boilers that have to be replaced. One of which is extremely old. This accounts for multiple references. Both boilers have reached their life expectancy.

Mr. Nelson noted the numbers are significant and wondered how these expenditures would be addressed. Whether they would be in the assessment or identified separately. Ms. Muir responded that in FY18 budget talks it was determined that it might help to have the ability to identify these kinds of costs separately so that they can address item by item with debt exclusions. The problem is that some people may view this way of addressing the expenditures would be too menu oriented and voters might treat it à la carte and not fund all of them, picking and choosing instead. So there are concerns on both sides of whether to roll it into the assessment or not. Having it in the assessment could require an override, having them as items would better allow for debt exclusions. Ms. Gilbert noted that the School Committee will be finalizing a lot of the budget goals and guidance to the Superintendent over the remainder of this summer. She noted some problems with possibly proceeding with separately identified individual warrant articles. Ms. Muir noted that Dunstable does appear headed toward a fall Special Town Meeting. Ms. Hutton cautioned about possibly putting these on a fall Special Town Meeting. Ms. Gilbert stressed for the record that the School Committee is not requesting the town hold a town meeting or place these on the agenda of one at this time. She then elaborated further on her concerns and how the committee is attempting to tackle the issue.

There was then some discussion regarding Free Cash. Mr. Nelson had some questions about how the process would work vis-à-vis the town meetings and if Groton passes it in their fall one and Dunstable later in its spring Annual Town Meeting. Ms. Muir elaborated on how it would work and what the impact would be. Ms. Gilbert then turned discussion back to what the resources are for the district on a one time basis and what steps might be possible to take to fund some of this. She stressed that there are issues with not adopting these plans. Not doing so means kicking the can down the road further and the costs will only increase. Ms. Muir inquired as to who would be accountable for implementation. Ms. Gilbert elaborated on the checks and balances the School Committee intends to implement and have consulted with counsel about how to make them meaningful. Overall, the School Committee will make sure that the task is complete, but the administration through the Superintendent's office will be responsible for implementing. Mr. Meehan inquired as to whether there is a way to scale out the project in order to push the project out a bit and relieve the tax payers. Dr. Chesson responded that these cans have been kicked down the road too far at this point. Pushing out now will mean throwing good money after bad. At this point, there are things failing and band aids are costing more than actual fixes. Mr. Knight noted that some of the projects which could get reimbursement can also change the further down the road you wait; so some of the funding could be lost.

Ms. Manugian agreed and elaborated a bit further as to why this needs to be implemented sooner rather than later. Mr. Nelson had some questions regarding tech related expenditures and how the district deals with tech needs in general. Mr. Knight responded by explaining the devices the district has, the access points, and how the district responds to any failure in hardware. There was a question as to exactly how any reimbursements would work and whether this would be a yes or no binary choice or if the reimbursement would be for more or less than 50 percent. Mr. Knight explained the process further, noting that it is a binary choice of yes or no and

Approved and adopted on 7/26/17

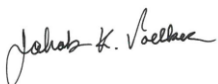
the reimbursement would be for 50 percent in the cases where a reimbursement from the Commonwealth would be available. There was then some discussion of the school having a Chief Purchasing Officer. Mr. Knight stated that he is the Chief Purchasing Officer for the school and elaborated on what those duties entail, including the bidding process and how that works. The Board noted that the maintenance department at the district has been understaffed in recent years, and this does cause some concern about implementation of some of the proposed capital projects.

Mr. McLane noted that some of these will always have impediments and be expensive, but solutions have to be pursued. This led to some follow up discussion on various ways to tackle implementation. Subsequent discussion focused on the role of a capital planning committee or subcommittee. Ms. Gilbert agreed that there are deficits, but the district is functioning. What this is about is accomplishing what we can, rather than just what we want to. Discussion shifted to the problems caused by deferred maintenance. The School Committee then elaborated on some work being done to assess the district's needs. This will help provide further answers to some of the questions being asked. Any findings, whether preliminary or final, will be released in an open meeting. The School Committee agreed to keep the towns updated as more information comes out. There was then light discussion about the start of the budget process for FY19 and upcoming meetings on various fronts. Mr. Nelson then inquired as to where Groton stands on these plans. Ms. Gilbert responded by identifying where Groton currently stands and has stood for the last two years. Funding through alternative sources is one of the big emphasizes. Discussion turned to GDRSD fields. Mr. Petropoulos elaborated on what is being done currently. One of the fields is being turned into an artificial turf, which will lower maintenance costs for the district and alleviate other fields. Ms. Gilbert stated that use of the artificial turf field will save costs, but most of those savings will likely be reinvested into the other fields where possible. Additionally, with the artificial turf field, it may be possible for the district to pursue possible commercial support or sponsorship of the field.

Meaning possible ad opportunities around the field; Ms. Muir then reminded those present about some history around the issue of ads. Mr. Petropoulos brought discussion back to the costs of the turf field and what revenue it might be able to generate. No figures are directly known, but it is possible that some revenue might be generated to support the field and other fields in part. Ms. Gilbert brought discussion back to the Capital and Technology needs of the district. She acknowledged that the towns have other needs such as fire and police, which is why it is the desire of the School Committee to talk about these needs openly and early with the towns rather than just handing them the bill. Mr. McLane stated that what the School Committee is aiming for is to consider the needs of the district while being mindful of the needs of the towns. Discussion briefly returned to the assessment versus debt exclusion question. Ms. Muir noted that this is something that has to be discussed further and the preference determined. The conclusion should be one that is reached jointly with the school and keeping Groton in mind as they may have other options available to them. More of this will be explored in meetings scheduled for September. Mr. Petropoulos noted that Groton has not had any discussions about how they would fund these plans at this time. He stated that whatever is done needs to be flexible and modular allowing each town the ability to respond as it likes while working together. By this he meant that the towns would still have to both agree to fund something, but how they do it could be different, one from free cash another from a debt exclusion. Discussion ended there.

The joint meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted by



Jakob K. Voelker
Admin. Assistant to the Selectboard & Town Administrator

Approved and adopted on 7/26/17