

**Town of *Dunstable* Selectboard**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**January 18, 2018**  
**Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827**

**Convened:** 1:30 pm

**Present:** Walter F. Alterisio, chair, Leah D. Basbanes, vice chair, Ronald J. Mikol, member; Tracey Hutton, Town Administrator; Karyn Polito, Lt. Governor of the Commonwealth; James Dow, Chief of Police; Brian Rich, Fire Chief; Mary Beth Pallis, Library Director; Bernadette Georges, Admin. Assist. for the Police Dept.

**Roundtable with Lt. Governor**

Lt. Governor Polito started by introducing herself personally to those in attendance. From there she indicated the importance of municipal partnership for the Baker/Polito Administration and highlighted the importance and emphasis the Governor's Office puts on finding ways to encourage talent in public office in Massachusetts. There is deep talent in the private industry, but the Administration sees a need to bring new talent into municipal governments throughout the Commonwealth. With that said, the Lt. Governor asked those present to take a moment to introduce themselves and speak about what it is they do, why they do it, and what inspired them to enter public service. The Board started off with each member introducing themselves and giving some background about the town in recent years. Ms. Hutton then spoke briefly about the efforts of the town and what has been accomplished in the nearly 3 years she's worked for the town. The Lt. Governor noted that the time truly flies; it was just over 3 years ago that she and Governor Baker took office.

Ms. Pallis then introduced herself as the Library Director, noting that she is roughly the 7<sup>th</sup> Director in the history of Dunstable. She has lived in town for many years and cares deeply about the issues the town faces. Ms. Georges introduced herself as the Administrative Assistant to the Police Dept. She noted that she has lived in the area for a number of years and her husband's family is from Dunstable. Chief Dow introduced himself. He explained that he's worked for the department since age 19 and is now on his 30<sup>th</sup> year of service. He spoke about some of the challenges the department faces in regards to the opiate crisis, and attempts being made to help people who run afoul of the law because of addiction or circumstance. This has prompted efforts to establish alternative justice and deferred justice programs which aim to find long term solutions and aid people in changing their lives for the better. He thanked the Lt. Governor and the Governor for all of their support. Chief Rich then introduced himself, noting his background and long history with the Fire Department. Under his tenure the Fire Department has expanded and become increasingly professional. He spoke of some of the needs of the department for new and upgraded equipment and how grant funding has helped. Discussion as a result shifted to all of the ways town officials and departments work collaboratively together to make funds stretch. It has, as Ms. Hutton stated, been a team effort.

Discussion then turned to the issues on the agenda, in particular School Funding in a Prop 2 ½ world, and the burdens of unfunded mandates. The Lt. Governor inquired as to the age and structure of the school district. The Board responded that GDRSD is a regional school district that was created around 1970. Ms. Hutton then elaborated briefly about the district noting that the town only represents about 23 percent of the district with the rest coming from Groton with increasing costs that have been hard on both towns. The Board agreed, noting the ability to pay has been increasingly difficult for small towns like Dunstable. The Lt. Governor praised the education in the community, which she noted, is responsible for producing most of the very people present. The job is to ensure that education continues to uphold high standards. But the needs of seniors must also be considered, and the quality of life in the community is an important piece as well. Those present noted that the community continues to see overturn in residence with young families moving into town. The Lt. Governor turned discussion back to the question of funding asking if operational overrides have been necessary. Ms. Hutton responded that overrides have been necessary. In recent years the towns have attempted to avoid overrides by seeking deeper cooperation with the regional school district and each other to treat the school more as a department of both towns and to work on budgets jointly. Nevertheless, the need to fund the schools has posed a challenge.

*Approved and adopted on 2/6/18*

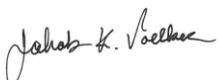
The Lt. Governor responded by talking about the efforts of the Administration to see local aid increased to help municipalities as much as possible. They have also sought additional funds for Chapter 70 aid to schools. The Administration is aware of the challenges faced by local government, and is committed to helping professionalize, innovate, and modernize because when these goals are realized, the entire Commonwealth will be better off. As part of this, the Administration seeks to reduce the level of uncertainty for municipalities and to improve their overall health. She then went over the various programs put forth by the Administration that attempt to reach the Administrations goals. Nothing is one size fits all. The Administration pushed hard for the Municipal Modernization Act of 2016 precisely because of its commitment to helping local governments by cutting red tape and simplifying numerous processes. Discussion then briefly shifted back to the school district with Ms. Pallis noting that there is real concern among municipal departments that increased school needs will mean cuts to other departments that are also essential to the public. This anxiety is hard on overall moral.

Ms. Hutton then outlined some of the challenges the town faces, and how the various components of the law in regards to school funding impact the budget for the district and therefore the town. Even small shifts in population of students going to the school can have thousands of dollars in consequences. The Board agreed, noting that many people move into town for the schools, and that is a doubled edged sword. It means the education is excellent, but it also means people move in and out of town based on their children being in the school which can have downsides. The Lt. Governor asked where the Master Plan process stands and whether there are ways the town can diversify its tax rate. Ms. Hutton responded by outlining where the Master Plan process is and the attempts by the town to encourage development of a diversified tax base. While the town has made progress, the town doesn't face school funding issues alone. There are infrastructure challenges like the aging water system which is over 100 years old, and the need for new public infrastructure such as a safety building. There are also the headwinds of resistance to change. Not everyone in town wants to see the town change. The Lt. Governor made several follow-up inquiries concerning infrastructure, in particular the water system. Ms. Hutton responded by detailing where things stand with DEP. Water quality and quantity are good, the problem is in delivery. The system is antiquated. The Lt. Governor probed the issue further inquiring about how the interactions with DEP have gone and what ways the town can solve the issue. She offered the help of the Governor's Office to help things work, noting that a big part of the Community Compact program the town is a part of is about making the Governor's Office more available to the towns.

The Lt. Governor then spoke of the tools that are available and inquired about what more the Administration can do to increase and improve them. Chief Rich noted one of the biggest problems for little towns is prevailing wage. Nashua, New Hampshire, can build a fire station for \$3.5 million, but that same exact building costs \$7 million in Massachusetts. The Lt. Governor responded by outlining the ways the Municipal Modernization Act changed procurement and related rules to attempt to alleviate some of these costs. Ms. Hutton noted that there are a few small things in prevailing wage that could be changed for the better. Part of the problem is that prevailing wage intimidates many companies from even doing work for the town. The Lt. Governor shifted discussion to the related question of whether the town has achieved green community status, noting that there are grant funds through that program that could help the town. Ms. Hutton outlined what the town has done to achieve that status. The Lt. Governor then inquired about the town's debt. The Board responded most of the town's debt will be paid off by about 2022. The Lt. Governor then finished up by speaking about her background growing up in Shrewsbury and what drove her into local and eventually state politics. She stated that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts faces many challenges, but it also has unparalleled opportunities. The Board concluded the meeting by thanking the Lt. Governor for her time and her visit to Dunstable.

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Basbanes at 2:30 pm. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

Respectfully submitted by



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

*Approved and adopted on 2/6/18*