

Groveland Board of Selectmen
Special Meeting Minutes
March 2, 2016

Present: Chair William Dunn, Selectman Daniel MacDonald, Selectman Joe D'Amore,
Selectman Ed Watson

Absent: Selectman Michael Wood

Others Present: Denise Demboski (Finance Director)

Recorder: Melanie Rich

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE VOTE:

2015 Massachusetts School Report Card Overview for Bagnall Elementary School and the Pentucket Regional School District Discussion – Present were Dr. Mulqueen, Lisa O'Conner, Jack Willett and Doug Gelinis. Dr. Mulqueen explained the information given to the members and gave an overview of where they are and what they hope to accomplish. He has been trying to minimize the impact the district has had on the community, but not the development in the district. There are five unions he works with; Groveland's district has a cap of 2.5% per year; salaries are a portion of his budget but are predictable. They have a 2.49% increase in their budget and built into that is a 2.5% raise for the staff members; 2.49% is his total budget increase this year. He tries to keep his budget at or under the 2.5%; but there are some costs that can't be controlled such as electric and special education. Special education increased \$818K in one year due to a few who have severe needs who may never come to a public school, not because of the number of students. Chair Dunn said he was criticized after the last meeting and wanted it known that he is not singling out special education students, but with the way the system is set up; we need to find another mechanism. Selectman MacDonald said it is a serious funding issue that he was not aware of and doesn't think a doctor bill should come with the education budget. Dr. Mulqueen said everybody wants the appropriate service for every student but when you have a small population paying for that huge expense, people have a hard time paying for it, whereas if all of the more serious cases were taken by the state, it would be less variables, we would not have a high impact, and we would have a higher level of service for everybody. They increased the level of stabilization for the district and are increasing sustainability. The organization limits he has are challenged by out of district placement (\$818K since last year; electric bill increased 37% and state aid decreased approximately \$65K); those costs have been absorbed in the 4.9% increase. Selectman Watson asked if they have given any thought to negotiating a 1%-2% raise rather than 2.5%; Dr. Mulqueen is not sure he could get them to agree to that. Mr. Labrecque said the special education transportation has increased; tuition for MA public schools has decreased, showing the programmatic improvements being made by the Director of Special Education; private schools tend to be residential; some are over \$300K/year for one child. Selectman MacDonald asked if there was any way to have MA health or any state agency defray the \$300K cost. Mr. Labrecque said some cases are split with the mental health agency. Selectman Watson asked for clarification on how many students were aged out at 22 and how many are brought back into the district to further their education. Dr. Mulqueen said the placements have gone from about 35 to 30 over the past few years. Michael Jarvis, Director of Special Education is looking to bring back students and develop our programming to take care of their needs in district because it is less expensive for everybody. Chair Dunn thanked them for coming in with a \$93,500 decrease from their initial budget.

Selectman MacDonald met with Dr. Mulqueen who clarified some numbers regarding the report card. Bagnall School numbers were at 40% proficiency in math; Page at 61%; and Donaghue at 44%; statewide we are at 51%. Dr. Mulqueen said the disparity is the percentage of high needs (special education, free and reduced lunch, second language, etc.) for each school. If you factor out those numbers, they are all in the mid-60s. Selectman Watson asked for an explanation of the science number decline after 2013. Dr. Mulqueen said this was due to staff turnovers; they don't have the consistency in teaching teams. Selectman D'Amore asked for more explanation on innovative schools. Dr. Mulqueen said innovative schools are not just for talented and gifted students, but for everybody. There are some accelerated programs they want to put in the elementary school. He said the programming is starting to evolve in a way that will help accelerate

student performance. The salary line items for the school principal secretary, special education secretary and high school music teacher were satisfactorily explained for Selectman Watson.

FY17 Budget Discussion – Ms. Dembkoski explained the changes not included on the revised spreadsheets. Pentucket came in at \$93,200 less than the original assessment; Whittier is up approximately \$10K (they are voting on their budget this week); the Merrimack Valley Planning assessment went up \$56; and the library's budget was slightly different than was presented. With those changes we are currently at a \$135,345 deficit; this does not include capital items. The fire department radios that were at \$100K were negotiated to \$82K.

Ms. Dembkoski discussed a potential cost savings of \$16,829. Emily Boutin (who works in her office) is moving out of state within the next month. Her position is 28 hours/week at \$29,000/yr. Ms. Murphy has expressed interest because it is more hours and benefit eligible. One option would be to combine the positions of the administrative assistant and collections/treasury clerk; the benefit being additional coverage. The members supported the idea saying that Ms. Murphy is well-liked, polite and helpful. The board is in consensus to support Ms. Dembkoski's recommendation to explore the option of Ms. Murphy taking the position. Chair Dunn would like a 6 month probation period. Selectman MacDonald thought Ms. Murphy would be taking the minutes rather than outsourcing them. Ms. Dembkoski said that was never going to be part of her job description; it would consume 8 hours every other week of her 18 hours. The minutes were outsourced long before Ms. Murphy was hired. An email was posted; 15 candidates applied and she selected someone who had articulate and well written minutes. She watches the YouTube video, types them at home; clearly does a great job on the minutes, and sends them in promptly; it has worked out quite well. Selectman D'Amore commended Nancy Lewandowski's quality of the minutes and feels that Melanie's minutes are phenomenal as well. Selectman Watson also agreed and likes the fact that they are presented to the members before their next meeting.

Municipal Buildings – Increasing the janitor position to full time. Ms. Dembkoski said she and Bob Arakelian discussed it and he recommended making Tokala full time. He currently works 18.5 hours/week; maintains five buildings and does more than cleaning; he has done projects that have been lacking. Mr. Arakelian said he would be a great fit to maintain the complex in its entirety; he's very meticulous. The increase would be \$18K which includes the 2% increase; \$9K was cut from the Highway budget; part-time wages were cut since they will not be needed. Tokala would be eligible for health insurance, vacation, sick/personal time and retirement, but compared to a \$46K union highway employee, we felt this was a much better and more efficient option to increase services around town hall. Chair Dunn is waiting for Tokala to provide an outline of what he has done since he has been here and where he wants to go in order to justify the work. Selectman Watson is not sure we can afford another full time employee, but we could afford another part-time employee. Selectman MacDonald agreed; he would not support an expansion in the payroll.

Police Chief Budget – In 2016, \$5K was proposed for training; \$12K is proposed for 2017. Ms. Dembkoski said that is for increased training which is needed. Because the fuel costs were down, the Chief was able to shift fuel costs to cover some of those increases. The overall budget is 2%.

Fire Department Budget – The fire chief is looking to increase his hours to 30/week (a \$22K pay increase) making him benefit eligible. Selectman Watson is not sure we can afford that. Selectman MacDonald questioned the fire equipment increase from \$12K to \$29K, why? Selectman D'Amore would like to see the details for that. Ms. Dembkoski said they are scheduled to come before the board on Monday.

Health Department Budget – Ms. Dembkoski said last year the budget was decreased to \$3K. They are still under budget and would feel comfortable keeping it at \$3K rather than increasing it to \$5K.

Chair Dunn asked if the trash recycle contract was put out to bid. Ms. Dembkoski said it is under a five year contract with two years remaining. She is working with Merrimack Valley Planning to try and get a regional trash agreement.

Cemetery Budget – Selectman D’Amore questioned the groundskeeper line item request to \$8,500 (a 42% increase). Ms. Dembkoski said because they had to change the way they operated the account, they had to request a full budget this year. Last year they requested \$8,500; but given it was the first year of their budget they were given \$6K (which they have overspent). They had to terminate the part-time staff earlier than they expected because they were working more hours each week and they spent money faster. This year again they are asking for the \$8,500 for two or three laborers.

Capital Improvements – If we approve the \$227K, we are going to be over and may need an override; with the deficit of \$135K we would add approximately \$200K; we can pay cash for them upfront or borrow it. All the items are considered departmental equipment under the Department of Revenue guidelines so we would only be borrowing for five years; \$45K/year would be needed for the next five years; free cash could be applied to some of the items. The budget needs to be voted and in the warrant on April 11th. Before then, the BOS and Finance Committee need to have a balanced budget. Ms. Dembkoski said if we sell the land this fiscal year we could have the ability to apply those funds to the FY18 budget. State aid is increasing \$42K.

Selectman MacDonald questioned the Planning Board revenues and thought the department would be paid with user fees. Regards the Planner, Ms. Dembkoski said they would work with various departments, not specifically for the Planning Board. Selectman Watson asked about sharing a part-time planner with another city or town. He said sharing a Building Inspector with Newbury is working out. She does not know of another town around that has a combined person. Chairman Dunn asked if we can have the Chairman of the Planning Board and Conservation Commission in to hear their pitch; she will contact them.

Selectman D’Amore asked about the Northeast Vocational \$200K number. Ms. Dembkoski said last year was \$120K; she is requesting \$200K. She contacted Essex Tech; one of the issues with them is they are different from Whittier and Pentucket; we pay what they send us in September after their enrollment; we don’t know how many students they will have. There are currently no seniors at Essex Tech; we will be adding new students. There was an additional assessment because of three extra students. We are not a voting member with Essex Tech; we are there by default. We are a voting community with Whittier, but out of 14 we are in the minority. Doug Gelinis (Pentucket School Committee) is the representative on the Whittier School Committee. Selectman MacDonald suggested getting their meetings on cable; the people of Groveland should know what is going on since it is 63% of the budget.

Chair Dunn reminded residents that there are open seats for election. Ms. Dembkoski said the last day to take papers out is Thursday, March 10th; the last day to return the papers is Monday, March 14th. All vacancies are listed on the website.

The next regular meeting will be held Monday, March 7, 2016 at 6:30 p.m.

Selectman Watson made a motion to adjourn; Chair Dunn seconded; voted 4-0-0. The meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

*** Approved on April 4, 2016 by a vote of 4-0-1 with Selectman Wood abstaining ***