

TOWN OF GROTON
SELECT BOARD MEETING
November 7, 2023

In Attendance: John Rescigno, Tony Albert, Ron Madan and Sara Smith (Administrative Assistant)

Audience Members Present

John called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

MINUTE APPROVAL

John motioned to approve the Work Session Meeting minutes of October 17, 2023 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted.

John motioned to approve the Select Board Meeting minutes of October 17, 2023 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted.

NEW BUSINESS:

Letter from DOT

The NH DOT sent a letter to the Town's Select Board, Planning Board, Police Department, Road Agent and Conservation Commission. This letter stated that they are planning a culvert replacement of twin elliptical pipes which carry North Groton Road over an un-named tributary to the Cockermonth River. They included a Map. The tentative construction for this project is 2024. They sent a list of questions to the Town of Groton and asked that they respond. Bubba reviewed the letter and said that the only thing he could see is that we should push that there needs to be a temporary bridge there so that there is always a way though at all times since this cuts the town in half.

The Select Board reviewed the questions and Sara will send the responses:

1. Does the Town have a list of priority mitigation efforts? We do not have a list at this time.
2. Existing or proposed plans that may have a bearing on this project? No
3. Any natural resources of significance in the vicinity of the project? Not that we are aware of
4. Any cultural resources of significance in the vicinity of the project? Not that we are aware of
5. Any public parks, recreation areas, conservation lands, or wildlife refuges in the vicinity of the project? No
6. Any locally or regionally significant water sources or related protection in the project vicinity? No
7. Any water quality concerns? No
8. Any potential hazardous material or contaminants in the vicinity of the project? No
9. Any environmental concerns not previously noted? Not that we are aware of
10. Will the proposed project have a significant effect upon the surrounding area? The main concern we have is that we will need a temporary bridge, we cannot close the road.
11. Any existing roadside populations of non-native invasive plant species? Not that we are aware of

MS-60W

This is a waiver request for the locally elected audit that allows towns, under population of 700, to request permission to complete sections 1 and 2 only for the audit. **John motioned to sign the MS-60W, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Watershed Workshop

Rebecca from NLRA emailed that this year's watershed workshop will be Monday, November 13 at 6pm at the Alexandria Old Town Hall (47 Washburn Road). They would love reps from Groton there. Pizza and cookies will be served. Sara sent the email to the Planning Board, Zoning Board and Conservation Commission and stated that it would be nice if at least one person from each board could attend. Sara asked if anyone from the Select Board would be able to attend. Bubba will try to go.

Report of Cut/Yield Certificate- Map 7 Lots 3, 12-18 & 22

The Town received a report of cut for Map 7 Lots 3 & 22 on Halls Brook Road for a cut of about 5.5 acres. The amount of the tax is \$219.74. **John motioned to sign the yield certificate for Map 7 Lots 3 & 22, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

GRDC- meeting or proxy

Grafton Regional Development Corporation (GRDC) sent an invite to attend the Annual Meeting on Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 9:00am via Zoom. If we are unable to attend, we can send in the proxy statement that is included. The Select Board agreed that they are not able to attend. **John motioned to sign the proxy form, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Tax Rate Setting Update

Sara explained that she reached out to Michelle Clark at the DRA last week to see why we haven't had the meeting to start the tax rate setting process. She explained that they are waiting on Newfound Area School District to send their information to them that they need to set it so all towns that use the Newfound Area School District have not set their tax rate yet. Sara explained that she is off the rest of the week and we do not meet again until November 21st but we probably do not want to wait until then to set the taxes. Sara recommended having a quick meeting the week of November 13th-17th if the DRA gives us the information by then. **John motioned to come in and have a meeting to discuss the tax rate setting once we get the go ahead from the DRA, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

SELECT BOARD ITEMS:

Update on Steering Committee Meetings

John gave an update on the school committee meetings. They will be meeting every other week instead of every week. SAU4 made it pretty clear that they do not want to negotiate with them. They made the statement they want to do what's in the best interest of the children but made it very clear they do not want to negotiate with the committee. The committee will put all of the focus towards Plymouth. Plymouth is interested in working with the committee. The one thing that SAU4 does not realize is that by not working with the committee, they will not be receiving money as they tuition the children and if they take away the administrative services, they will not be getting money from that. This means the taxes from the remaining four towns will go up but not due to Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton but because their school board did not work with the committee on this. From what John heard, one of the Selectmen actually told a school board member not to work with the committee. The School Board members are supposed to be supporting the Town and the children in it but apparently, they are not focusing on that. Sara said that if they worked with the committee, they would have more say on what happens for the children.

Ann asked that since they are not working with the committee, does this effect the kids that wanted to go to Newfound. John said these kids will be covered by the tailing out agreement. John said this hasn't been signed but they are working on it. Tony said they cannot kick the kids out. Ann also asked if they do not work with the committee, will they still take the kids from those Towns into the new SAU. John said that if kids from other towns still want to go to BHVS that they will be able to. They are going to stand behind that they are doing what is best for the kids and they will allow them to tuition in.

John said they are making some progress. They have been talking to the bus company and they are also willing to work with the committee and will come look at the route. There have been conversations with teachers as well and they are trying to make them a little more comfortable that they are not going to be losing their jobs and the world will not be turned upside down on them.

Bridgewater and Hebron already take care of that school so other than contracts and food services, there is not going to be much that changes. They feel they are in a good place but it is all about the vote in March. One of the people who attended the meeting were not quite sure what they meant when they said this is your last chance. The petitioned warrant article, article 5, that was going to change the formula was put forward before and will be put through again if this vote in March doesn't pass. That can very easily be brought back as a warrant article. From what they believe right now, since the last time it was submitted and didn't actually go through, they can actually do it again now. All it takes is one of those people from one of those towns, like someone from Alexandria again, to submit this. We already know it will reduce their school tax rate by 49% by changing that formula. All they have to do is write that up again or they could even photocopy the other one, change the date and get 20 people to sign it and it is in there. Ann said if this happens, we need to make sure that someone from one of our three towns is ready to put in a warrant article as well because they will pull the same stunt as last time. Hilary asked what the stunt was. John explained that you have up until 3:00pm on the last day to submit and they submitted the petitioned warrant article on the last day it could be submitted in the last minutes not allowing any other town to do a rebuttal. They claim they were not doing it in a sneaky way but he believes that Alexandria videos their meetings and that video disappeared so it seemed shady. By putting it in at the last minute, they knew what they were doing and they knew they were screwing other towns over and they didn't care. If this doesn't pass for the three towns, then there is a good chance this petition warrant article will happen again.

The interesting thing is a couple years ago we were looking to put up a Town Garage that was over a million dollars and the town voted it down as they should have. The payments on that bond would have been about \$100,000-\$200,000 a year until it was paid off and the Townspeople thought this was absurd but they would have had a building to look at. Now, if this doesn't pass in March and a petition warrant article goes through, our school taxes will go up about \$200,000 and there will be nothing to look at. John said that the Town was right to vote the building down at that time, that is not his point. His point is that it is the same payment but we have nothing with value to look at. Tony said if they vote to do that elementary school the taxes will go up even more.

Hilary wondered how many people in Groton are feeling okay about this vote or if they feel like they do not have enough information. She asked why anyone wouldn't vote for this. Ann said that they do not go to the meetings to know what this is all about so they do not understand what they are voting for. John said there are a couple reasons they may not vote for this. One, like Ann said people do not come to fully educate themselves on both sides like they should so they do not have an educated vote when voting. They might be unfortunately only hearing one side of the story coming from the school board. The old superintendent did put some negative stuff out there. Also, some people just do not come out to vote. Hilary said she has had people from other towns that she knows coming to her to tell her terrible things

about this idea and she knows not to believe it all because they do not live in Groton, Hebron or Bridgewater. Chief Bagan said they will say things because they do not want to lose their tax subsidy.

Sara said that she strongly feels they will put a warrant article through again if this doesn't pass. They have already tried and now they have a personal vendetta against our towns for trying to leave and will say well now you are stuck here and try it again. Also, Sara explained if the petitioned warrant article gets submitted for voting, our three towns are outnumbered and will be outvoted so she feels it will go through. John said he has been trying to get this through from the beginning. He said we need to have information for our towns that shows what it will be like so people can vote with knowledge. If we don't, we failed our people because we don't have anything to provide them to know how to vote.

Sara said it is not just that they do not want to work with them, they are also the reason we are doing everything in crunch time. When the bill was brought forward it was asking for 4 years to do all of this and the superintendent at that time submitted and amended article because he knew it was going to pass and it cut the time in half. Everyone is asking why there is such a rush and this is why, it is not the committee's fault. John said that they did this hoping that it would not allow the committee to give the towns the information they need in order to have an educated vote.

Hilary thought that SAU4 was required to work with the committee. Tony said they are not required to work with us but they cannot turn our kids away. If the vacancies are not full, they have to accept them at the rate that is set by the state. John said if there is an empty seat, they have to take the kid. Hilary said she has a kid in the middle school that would want to stay in Newfound. If SAU4 doesn't cooperate with us and do not have tuition agreements with us, does this mean the parents would have to pay out of pocket for the costs. John said they are hoping to have a set amount that would be paid for each kid. For example, let's say it is \$25,000 for each kid to go to Plymouth if that is who we are going to tuition into. If you do not want your kids to go to Plymouth then they are hoping to have it that the \$25,000 can be used towards a different school and the parents will just have to pay the difference if it is more.

Tony said if we do not do this we are screwed. John said that all of the schools are pre-standing. They have the BHVS, the middle school and high school that are already there. If everything goes as planned and smoothly, the kids would still be going to BHVS, the middle school and the high school. SAU4 would still be getting tuition money. The only thing that would change would be there would be a new little district that will be K-8 instead of K-6 and the kids would be able to stay in the school they are in. Sara said another change would be voting which is good because we would have more say. John said that is correct, we would vote on our school and wouldn't have say for the other schools. Bubba said that if they put in the new schools that would decimate us as far as taxes go. Hilary said not just taxes but for the kids because they are talking about splitting up the kids in all different grades. John said that a new school is being talked about for New Hampton. Tony said that would be a very long bus ride for the younger kids.

John said that hopefully they will be moving forward faster now that they will be having discussion with Plymouth. They are hoping to have more details for the Towns.

DEPARTMENT ITEMS:

Police Department

Chief Bagan said that there was nothing new to report.

Highway Department

Bubba went over the following Highway Department items:

- They are ready for snow when we get some.
- They got the truck back today and everything looks good.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

There were no questions or comments from the audience.

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to adjourn at 7:25pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant