

Town of Groton
Select Board Work Session Minutes
November 19, 2024

In attendance: John Rescigno, Tony Albert, Ron Madan and Sara Smith (Town Administrator)

John called the meeting to order at 5:00pm.

Tax Rate

Sara emailed Michelle Clark at DRA on Monday, November 4, 2024. Michelle stated that they are waiting on the school. Newfound Area needs to have financials verified by DOE and then the district needs to be apportioned. Sara emailed again on Monday, November 18, 2024 since it had been two weeks and she still hasn't heard anything and Michelle stated that the MS25/DOE25 has been started with the department of education, however, she had no other information on to the schedule or status of when this may be completed and she suggested reaching out to the school district for more detailed information. Angela Carpenter, the Business Manager, emailed back stating that they are looking to get the report submitted to the DRA and DOE by November 27, 2024. They know it is not ideal and are hopeful this will not occur again once she gets SAU 4 back on track. She also asked if we were able to get a TAN in place and if we think we will need it with this timing. Sara responded that we do not think Groton needs a TAN, that is not the concern at this time. We just know that doing the tax bills later can affect different reporting that we do, such as the MS-61 and other reports. Also, we have a timeline we follow every year so our residents, Select Board, Tax Collector, and everyone are used to these already being done or being close to being done. Therefore, we have a lot of people asking about this and we were looking to be able to provide an estimated time that they could expect to receive them. Sara asked Michelle if there is a certain date that the Town needs to set our tax rate by. There is not an exact date, it is usually just preferred to do it before the end of November so the tax bills are due by the end of the year.

The Town cannot set our preliminary rate until the school is completed. Michelle tried to outline steps that will need to be taken before she can meet with Sara to set the preliminary rate. There are quite a few steps that need to be completed first which are as follows:

- Newfound submits financials (DOE25) to the Department of Education for review
- Department of Education reviews and finalizes (barring any revisions or adjustments that need to be done during their review) and notifies the district that it has been completed.
- Newfound uploads a MS25 (and financial extraction from the much larger Department of Education's financial report) to the DRA web portal.
- Newfound enters within the DRA web portal and then submits the revised estimated revenues for the district (MS24).
- DRA advisor is notified through the uploads and can contact the school district to review the MS25 and MS24 and to set the net assessment for the district.
- The advisor will prepare the apportionment using the net assessment determined and send to the Department of Education for review and apportioning according to the school's agreements with the entities within the district.
- DOE will return the approved apportionment to the DRA for final review and at that time it is available for distribution.
- Once all the above has been done, Michelle will contact the town and set the tax rate if the town is also in a ready status.

Sara figured that we should mention this at the Select Board meeting tonight since we have had quite a few residents asking about it so she added it to the agenda. Also, we will have to schedule a meeting once we are able to set the tax rate so we do not have to wait until the next meeting if it happens sooner than that. Sara will keep them posted. Sara did let Ruth know about all of this in case she is asked as well. The Select Board agreed

to hold off on the spending freeze memo for now since we have funds available but we may need to revisit this at December meeting.

Budget Meetings

Executive

AA Wages

Sara proposed an increase \$1,934.00 making it \$66,414.00 to have room for a 3% merit increase. This is up to the Select Board for what they would like to do.

Selectmen's stipend

Stayed the same

Minute taker

Stayed the same

Moderator/Assistant wages

This was part of the moderator's budget meeting and was \$800.00.

Other Town Meeting expenses

Stayed the same

Contracted services (web hosting)

Stayed the same

Workshops/Seminars

Stayed the same

Telephone/Internet

Stayed the same

Mileage

Stayed the same

Supplies

Stayed the same

Postage

Stayed the same

Furniture/Fixtures

Stayed the same

Office Equipment Maintenance

Stayed the same

Hiring expenses

Stayed the same

Computer/Computer software maintenance

Stayed the same

Other office expenses (CU recordings, etc.)

Stayed the same

The Select Board was okay with the Executive budget as is.

Financial Administration

Financial Reporting (Town Report)

Sara proposed a decrease of \$450 making this \$1,300. The quote that RC Brayshaw provided is \$1,013.00 and then a cost per additional page so Sara rounded up to provide some wiggle room and it is still lower than last year. We could lower it more if the Select Board wanted to.

Auditing

Stayed the same; waiting for costs

Assessing

Stayed the same; waiting for costs

Treasurer

This was gone over at a prior meeting.

The Select Board was okay with the Financial Administration budget as is.

Fire Budget

Sara met with the Select Board to discuss the Fire budget.

Stipend

Stayed the same

Communications/Training

Stayed the same

Equipment

Tony proposed an increase of \$1,300.00 making this \$1,500.00 for the Fire Warden to get equipment needed.

Contracted Services- Hebron

Sara kept this the same but she knows the contract is due to go up in 2025. We have not received the numbers yet. Sara asked Tony if he has any idea what these increases will be yet.

Contracted Services- Rumney

Sara kept this the same but she knows this will change. She did send Joe a request for the 2025-2026 Fire and EMS coverage costs but has not received these yet as they are still working on them. Also, the Select Board have to decide if we want to pay for the fire truck all in one year or over a few years. Our payment options for the fire ending are as follows:

- We pay it in one year it will be a single payment made in 2025 for \$57,733.50.
- We pay it in two payments and they will be made in 2025 and 2026 at 5% with each payment being \$30,310.09 so we would actually be paying \$60,620.18.

- We pay it in three payments and they will be made in 2025, 2026 and 2027 at 5% with each payment being \$20,206.73 so we would actually be paying \$60,620.18.
- We pay it in four payments and they will be made in 2025, 2026, 2027 and 2028 at 5% with each payment being \$15,155.05 so we would actually be paying \$60,620.18.
- We pay it in five payments they will be made in 2025, 2026, 2027, 2028 and 2029 at 5% with each payment being \$12,124.04 so we would actually be paying \$60,620.18.

The Select Board agreed to see how the budget comes together and see what would be better. They are leaning towards a one-time payment.

Lakes Region Mutual Aid

Sara kept this the same but she knows this will change. We have not received the 2025 numbers yet. Sara asked Tony if he has heard anything about this yet. He has not. Sara will email them.

Dues

Stayed the same

Mileage

Stayed the same

General Government Buildings

Town Hall Repairs & Maintenance

Stayed the same

Town Hall Repairs & Maintenance Wages

Stayed the same

Town Garage Repairs & Maintenance

Stayed the same

Transfer Station Repairs & Maintenance

Stayed the same

Cleaning supplies

Stayed the same

General Supplies

Stayed the same

Contracted Services (security, elevator)

Stayed the same

Town House Electric

Stayed the same

Town Heat

Stayed the same

The Select Board was okay with the General Government Buildings budget as is.

General Insurance

Property/Liability

Sara proposed an increase of \$2,032 making it \$17,783 due to the costs we received in the mail from Primex showing the increase.

Workers Compensation

Sara proposed an increase of \$479.00 making it \$4,467.00 due to the costs we received in the mail from Primex showing the increase.

Unemployment Compensation

Stayed the same.

The Select Board was okay with the General Insurance budget as is.

Health

Salary

Stayed the same

Supplies/postage

Stayed the same

Mileage

Stayed the same

Training

Stayed the same

Dues

Stayed the same

Water testing

Stayed the same

Legal

Stayed the same

Transport Central

Stayed the same

CADY

Stayed the same

CASA

Stayed the same

Mid-State Health

Stayed the same

Pemi-Baker

Stayed the same

Voices against Violence

Voices Against Violence requested an increase of \$550.00 making it \$1,100.00. The Select Board are okay with the \$1,100.00.

Genesis/LRMHC

Genesis/LRMHC requested an increase of \$250.00 making it \$1,050.00 for 2025. The Select Board are okay with the \$1050.00.

The Select Board was okay with the Health budget as is.

Parks Recreation

Maintenance of Parks

Stayed the same

Maintenance of Recreational Facilities

Stayed the same

Porta Potty

Sara proposed an increase of \$335.00 making it \$1,600 due to the increase in costs of the porta potty.

Advertising

Stayed the same

Tapply Thompson Center

Tapply Thompson Center requested an increase of \$106.00 making it \$3,640.00, which is a 3% increase from last year.

Old Home Day

Sara said that last year this line was increased to \$4,400.00 so that we can do fireworks. Sara kept this the same but knows the fireworks guy said he could do larger fireworks if we wanted to. The Select Board agreed to keep it this way.

Electricity

Sara proposed an increase of \$60.00 making it \$420.00. It has been about \$35 a month.

The Select Board was okay with the Parks and Recreation budget as is.

Personnel

Benefits not allocated to department (NHRS)

Sara proposed an increase of \$1,950 due to rates increasing and due to Road Agent being back full time this year all year.

Life and Disability

Stayed the same

Medical Insurance

Sara proposed an increase of \$2,732.00 making it \$64,500 due to the increase in cost of health insurance for 2025.

FICA/Medicare

Stayed the same. We may need to revisit this when we get more information on this.

The Select Board was okay with the Personnel budget as is.

Welfare

Dues

Stayed the same

Direct Assistance

Stayed the same

Tri-County Community Action

Stayed the same

Grafton County Senior Citizens

Stayed the same

Other Vendor Payments

Stayed the same

The Select Board was okay with the Welfare budget as is.

Other Budget Items to Discuss

- Updated Transfer Station Landfill Quote: Bettina from Credere did send over an increased estimate for 2025 which is currently at \$8,700. She said that she is still working with DES on some things so this should be finalized within the next few weeks.
- Research on Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk: Sara did some research on the Town Clerk Pay and the Deputy Town Clerk Pay. This was in each of your folders and in the review folder. The Select Board had talked about increasing the pay for both of them so we can use this information to make that decision. The Select Board discussed what they thought would be good for both Ruth and Hilary and will see where this brings the budget.
- Public Works Compensation Report: Groton had participated in a survey on what our Public Works Department employees get paid. Due to taking part in this, they gave us the results which is the compensation report and it has the information for the Road Agent, Highway assistants, and also has Transfer Station Attendants. It is like a wage study without having to pay that amount of money. It shows the bottom range and the top range for the min, max, mean and median for each position. It shows where we stand for each of these and we are very low so we should think about revisiting this as well. The Select Board agreed that this shows we should bring the Transfer Station attendants up and discussed what they thought would be good for this year. They will see where this brings the budget. The others are in the range shown but will see how their reviews go and discuss the increases at that point.

Memo to Transfer Funds to cover over charges for Town house due to extra rot

The Select Board knew from the beginning that the estimate would probably be under because the contractor would not know the extent of the rot until he got in there. Due to the extent of the extra work, the Select

Board need to take an additional \$2,904.00 out of the Town House Capital Reserve Fund. Sara created a memo requesting the Transfer of these Funds. **John motioned to sign the Memo requesting the Transfer of \$2,904.00 from the Town House Capital Reserve to MVSb to cover these charges, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Email from attorney regarding Ethier concerns

Our attorney has been trying to work with the property owner's attorney to set up a site visit for the concerns we have received. However, he changed attorneys and we have not received much of a response. Sara asked what our options are if they continue to not respond. Our attorney gave the Select Board a few options but it will depend on what the Select Board want to do, if the Town has the proper enforcement, if not, how much money they can afford to spend on this, etc. The Select Board reviewed the options that were provided from the attorney and asked Sara to email her back to see what we would do if the Town doesn't have anyone who would we contact. Sara will also reach out to our Engineer to see if he handles these cases or knows anyone that does. We can also check with MRI to see if they have anyone that handles these cases.

Before we do that, though, the attorney recommended that she would write a formal letter to the new lawyers telling them if they don't get back to us by a certain date, that's what we're going to do.

She also offered to meet with the selectboard, either in person or via zoom to discuss this. We can ask her what she would do to assist us when we go out there because none of the Selectmen are experts on this.

Holiday Items

The Holidays are fast approaching so Sara wanted to touch base with the Select Board on a few things.

- Thanksgiving baskets/gift cards: We used to do Thanksgiving Baskets and then changed to gift cards which seem to work better so people can get what they need. Sara received a donation of \$200.00 so she will go this week to get gift cards to Market Basket and then she can have Chief deliver them or the Select Board can or whatever they think is best. Sara created a list based on last year and she will work with Ruth to get a list of names but knows a lot of the families from last year that we helped are no longer in Town. She will either get four \$25 gift cards or five \$20 gift cards depending on how many families we come up with. Sara asked the Select Board if they know of anyone in need.
- This same person said they will most likely donate around Christmas so we can do gift cards then as well. She knows there is usually one other person that likes to donate as well. We can do them to Walmart around Christmas so they can use them for food or gifts or whatever else they need at that time.
- Our Holiday Luncheon is always planned for a Friday and is usually the second Friday. This year that would be Friday, December 13th. We usually do this from 12pm-2pm. Does this date and time work for everyone? Friday December 13th does not work for everyone. It was agreed to do Monday, December 9th from 12pm-2pm. Sara will update the invitation that she created and will email it out and put it in the mailboxes of those what work for the Town.

908 North Groton Road

The Town had previously sent 908 North Groton Road a letter regarding the structure that was being built on the property. It appears to be over 100 square feet but a building permit was never submitted. The structure appears to now be complete and it now has sides on it and we still have not received a building permit so we are sending another letter. **John motioned to sign the letter to 908 North Groton Road, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Meeting with Bubba

The Select Board met with Bubba to discuss the following items:

- Radios: Bubba had received a quote to upgrade the radios in the F350 and in the International. To do both the quote was \$6,298.46. When the Select Board discussed this at the last meeting, Bubba has enough money in his budget but the concern was there if something happened and he needed to use contracted services for plowing, etc. They were leaning towards just ordering one for now. We are

now almost into December and there is still plenty of room in his budget. The Select Board agreed to go ahead and do both now since there is money left in his budget this year, instead of having to raise more money next year to cover it. **John motioned to order both radios, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

- Bubba had both trucks undercoated. He had the guy come to the shop to do it.
- Winter reminders: Every year we put out winter reminders that talks about the amount of sand each resident gets; the parking ordinance and making sure to park the car at least 4 feet off the road side to allow for plowing; if they plow, snow blow or shovel into the road they are required to clean it up or they will be held liable for any injuries or damages caused by these conditions, etc. Sara and Bubba were thinking to make these actual ordinances that the Select Board can sign. Other towns do this. For now, we can put the reminder out while we work on putting this together. The Select Board agreed that we should make the winter items an ordinance. Sara and Bubba will work on this ordinance for the Select Board to sign.
- Engineer for North Groton Road Culvert Project: Back in 2020 the Town signed an agreement with Mike from KV Partners to make him our engineer when the Town needs an engineer for projects. Sara is looking into if this means that we do not need to put the engineering part out to bid for the North Groton Road Culvert Project or if because it is a Federal Grant if we are required to follow our procurement policy still and send it out for bid if it is over \$10,000.00. We know we would need to for the contractor but we didn't know if having this agreement in place would make it so we do not have to for the engineering. We had the pre-construction site-visit for this project on November 18, 2024 and we really cannot do much more until the Town votes on it in March. However, there are a few things that can take a while to do so it would be beneficial if we got started on them now. DES recommended that we do for some of the research items for types of protected species, etc. Since Mike V is our engineer and has helped us with the initial items for this grant, we would like to have him start the process for some of those items if that is okay. That way we are all set to move forward in March with no delays.
- Changing the Procurement Policy: The following change recommendations were made:
 - Currently the Procurement Policy states that any purchase of \$10,000 or more must be on a bid basis. Bubba asked what the Select Board thought about raising this amount. The Select Board agreed that everything is more expensive these days so \$10,000 does not get you very far. The Select Board agreed to raise this to \$25,000.
 - Sara thinks we should also change the amount requirement under the part about needing competitive quotes. It is currently \$500-\$9,999. Sara thinks it would be better if this amount started at \$2,500. The Select Board agreed.
 - Sara recommended that we should add that in the following situations only, the Select Board may be required to make purchases without following the procurement policy and list out situations such as emergencies, disasters, etc. in which the Board will document the reasons for not following it and that they will record those reasons in Select Board Meeting Minutes.
 - Sara wondered if we would even be able to add something in it stating that if we have an agreement/contract in place for a regular on-call basis if we find out that the bids are not required. The Select board agreed.
 - Sara will have these changes ready for the next meeting.
- There has been an on-going parking issue at 1061 North Groton Road. We have received complaints and we have sent them letters in the past. The Select Board agreed that we need to get ahead of this before snow comes and agreed to create a reminder letter regarding not parking in the right of way. They worked together to create a letter. **John motioned to sign the letter to 1061 North Groton Road, Tony 2nd, so voted.**
- There has been a lot of work going on at MIT on the road and there is a bridge there. It does not appear that it is wide enough for an emergency vehicle or that there is an area for them to turn around and this was a requirement. John said he thought that the Planning Board approved MIT to do the work. Sara said that this came up at a previous meeting and she had pulled all of the minutes from the Planning Board meeting where this was discussed. It appears that even though it was Hebron Fire that

was originally involved, they changed over to Rumney Fire. Sara also located the email that she sent the Planning Board from the Select Board on April 5, 2023 which stated: *The Select Board reviewed the MIT plans for the driveway and new parking lot. They have the following recommendations:*

- *The road has to be big enough for emergency vehicles to fit, which it appears the plan is showing 10 feet wide which would be wide enough but we should confirm that width.*
- *There needs to be a turnaround at the end and the road so the emergency vehicles can turn around.*
- *The road will have to be plowed and maintained year-round.*
- *We should also ask what the weight rating is on the bridge and will need an engineer rating for it.*
- *They can put a gate up but the Town/emergency services would need a key.*

It was clearly stated what the Select Board is requiring. Tony said we should ask them to come meet with us at one of the next meetings in December which are on December 3 and December 17. Sara will see if they can attend one of these meetings.

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to adjourn at 7:00pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Smith
Town Administrator