

Town of Groton
Select Board Work Session Minutes
January 21, 2025

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

John called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

Warrant Articles

Sara updated the warrant articles based on what the Select Board agreed upon at the last meeting. She provided an updated list for the Select Board to review which are as follows:

- Article 1 is the normal first warrant article to choose all necessary Town Officers for the year ensuing.
- Article 2 is for the operating budget. This may have to be adjusted to reflect any changes that the Select Board may make to the budget.
- Article 3 is for the Hazard Mitigation Grant for the Culvert on North Groton Road. The total project amount is \$500,000 but Sara applied for and we have been awarded a grant that is for 90/10 so the grant will pay 90% of the project, which is \$450,000 so the Town only has to come up with 10% which is \$50,000.
- Article 4 is the money to go to the Capital Reserve Funds. The Select Board agreed on the following:
 - Public Works CRF: \$50,000.
 - Disaster Relief CRF: \$30,000.00
 - Truck/Sander CRF: \$20,000.00
 - Town House CRF: \$10,000.00
 - Police Cruiser CRF: \$10,000.00
 - Heavy Equipment CRF: \$10,000.00
 - Assessing Reval CRF: \$7,500.00
- Article 5 is to raise \$139,000 for chip sealing.
- Article 6 is to raise \$50,000 to contribute to the costs of the Pasquaney School District/SAU #108.
- Article 7 is for the 3% of the Timber Tax for the Conservation Commission from the unassigned fund balance.
- Article 8 is the normal last warrant article to allow the Selectmen to transact any other business that may legally come before the Town.

Budget Items

Since the last meeting the following budget items have come up:

- The public hearing on our budget is scheduled for our next meeting night which is Tuesday, February 4, 2025 at 6:00pm.
- Sara created a draft budget and put in final YTD totals. She went over the items that are highlighted or that we need to discuss.
- Sara highlighted different wage lines to discuss. These are all at about 3% so if they give a higher increase then we should either increase it more or we may go over. The Select Board went over the lines to make sure we had enough in there. Sara will correct the ones that need to be corrected.
- Sara lowered the minute taker line since we pay \$100 a month but we do not have a minute taker at this time and probably will not for a while. She put in \$800 in case we get someone to start in April.
- Sara checked the deputy line now that we know the Select Board will be giving her an increase. The amount that Ruth put in there does cover it based on the number of hours a week that she works so it doesn't need to be changed.

- Ruth sent an email about the cost for One4All Programming being \$600 so Sara increased the election supplies line by this amount.
- Sara lowered the life and disability line since this rate went down.
- Sara highlighted the Town House heat and electricity to see if we want to lower this at all based on what was spent in 2024. The Select Board agreed to lower each line by \$750.
- Sara highlighted the Forestry line to see if we want to lower this based on what was spent in 2024. The Select Board agreed to lower this by \$100.
- Sara received the actual totals for the dispatch and the prosecutor services. The Select Board agreed to update these lines on the Police Budget to reflect those actual costs.
- Bettina messaged the updated proposal and 2025 did not change so it is still the \$18,965.00. As approved by the Select Board, the Transfer Station Budget and the General Government Building budget lines had money left over for 2024. A lot of this work that is on 2025 started in 2024 so Bettina sent an invoice for the work that was either completed or started in 2024 so we could pay out of the 2024 budget, which is money we already raised. After these items were paid out of 2024, this left \$13,490 for 2025 so Sara put this number in there to give us the accurate information that we will need to pay in 2025.
- Karen from Hebron emailed that the Hebron Fire Budget agreement will increase to \$125,000/yr. for a three-year contract.
- Sara mentioned that the Fire budget is the majority of the increase for the budget.

.gov migration

The State of New Hampshire is pushing for all municipalities to migrate to a .gov from the .org for their website as part of a Cybersecurity Grant Program. The Grant is handled through the Overwatch Foundation, which a company SNS, that reached out to the Town on it, works with to facilitate this migration. This company currently works with Grafton County as their Managed Service Provider. There is a grant application. Sara reached out to our IT guy to make sure that this was legit and to see what he knows about this. He said that he is aware of it and is currently working with CivicPlus to convert the Town of Sanbornton to .gov. He said it does make things more secure. Sara asked him if he knows if this is a required change for 2025 or just a preferred change and if he knows the costs associated with it. Dave mentioned that he believes it is all covered by the grant so there would not be any charge to the Town. He said he doesn't believe it is required right now but it is highly recommended and could become a requirement. He said he would definitely recommend doing it. The Select Board agree that we move forward with the grant application. Sara will start this process and will look at setting up a meeting with Dave and SNS to see what the first steps should be.

SAU4 Trust Funds Letter

John forwarded over a email from Erick Piper who is on the board for SAU108 regarding the fund balance and trusts with SAU4. Usually, it is a Town issue but he has taken the issue on for SAU108 and wanted the okay from each town to proceed with chasing this for the benefit of SAU 108. Sara drafted the letter which states for him to please accept this letter as the Town of Groton Select Board's okay for him to proceed on Groton's behalf, along with the other Towns, to pursue our share of the fund balance and trusts with SAU4. We understand that SAU4 may fight an actual cash payout so we also agree that he negotiate, if there is no cash payout, in order to have this money provided for in kind tuition or services. The Groton Select Board is providing their written okay for him to proceed chasing this and we understand that if a settlement is reached, we allow the services to benefit SAU108, and understand the tax benefit to each town in the event of a settlement, which would reduce the tax liability by said amount. It also states that we appreciate him taking this issue on for the towns and for the Board at SAU108. **John motioned to sign the trust funds letter, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Planning Board Items

Sara mentioned that Deb Johnson has some items for her that have been approved at the Planning Board meetings such as lot line adjustments, mergers, etc. Sara reached out to see where some of these items were. Deb has been sick so there has been a delay with her bringing them up here. Deb mentioned that we should figure out a better way to get the documents without a delay or them getting lost. She does not feel comfortable putting them through the window. This has always worked and others do it as well since the office is always locked when we are not here. She discussed maybe having a key made for me for the filing cabinet or she can leave the documents in a safe place right after the Planning Board meeting. Sara stated that in the past and to current day, all other departments and committees leave items in the window when we are not here since the office is locked when we are not here and the building is locked when none of us are here. It has always been deemed safe and we have not had issues with missing or lost items. Sara emailed back stating that and said if she is not comfortable for her to come up with other options and stated that she would also ask the Select Board for their thoughts. The Select Board agreed that this has always worked fine and we should continue to do it this way. Sara said Deb emailed back and said she would but doesn't feel comfortable leaving money in the window. The Select Board are okay with money not being left and it was stated that all money should be given to Ruth for deposit anyway. Tony mentioned that not only are the doors locked but the office security alarm is set and so is the building when we are not here.

Updated Vacation Policy

There were some previous discussions about updating the vacation policy because it gave two weeks when you start and then you received another week after 5 years but it stopped there. An employee that works 10 years or more did not receive any more vacation time and it was felt that they should. Sara pulled a bunch of policies from local municipalities that were online. Some of the smaller towns did not have this online. All of the towns had increases every 5 years but the following differed from Town to Town so the Select Board will have to decide what they would like to do for Groton:

- How long they continue to accrue more time; a few went to 25 years. Others stop at 15, 20, 25 or more. Sara wrote the draft for 20 years but asked the Select Board what they would like this to be. The Select Board agreed this should stop at 10 years, giving them the 4th week.
- How much time they accrue. Sara followed our current policy which added 5 days after 5 years. Some towns do more than that, some go by hours and not days, etc. Sara asked the Select Board what they would like this to be. They agreed that they will get another week.
- How much time they can carry over into the next year. We currently did not allow any but all other towns allow carry over. Since we currently do not have any allowed, Sara added this to allow 5 days which is usually one week of vacation time. Sara made a note that if they need to carry more over than 5 days, they need permission from the Select Board. Sara asked the Select Board what they would like this to be. The Select Board agreed that they can carry over 5 days or 40 hours.
- If they lose anything over the allowed carry over time if they do not use it or if they can request payment for it. Some towns state they lose it and some let them request some of it paid out depending on how much time it is. Our current policy had that you forfeited it unless terminated so Sara kept it listed that way. The Select Board agreed to keep it as it has been that anything over 40 hours vacation time that was not approved to carry over will be forfeited.

Sara will make these changes that the Select Board agreed upon and have the updated vacation policy ready to be signed at the next meeting.

Pet Policy

John stated that there were concerns in the past regarding employees bringing pets to work and the potential liabilities this could cause. This led to a pet policy being created and handed out in 2020. As of recent, they have

noticed that dogs are being brought to the Town House. The policy states no pets allowed in the Town House other than service animals. It was agreed that Sara hands out the pet policy as a reminder.

February 18th meeting

Sara asked if we can change the February 18th meeting. She has an event that night that she would like to attend that is important to her. The Select Board agreed to not meet on February 18th and to schedule the next meeting for February 11th so it will be two weeks in a row of meetings which will allow us to discuss anything that may come up at the budget hearing on February 4th.

Map 6 Lot 76 (District A)

The Town received the following email complaint:

Upon issuance of said building permit, the barn and garage have been built, unfortunately there has been a construction laborer living on this property in a camper since July 2024. Groton zoning law prohibit this under "recreational vehicles". There are camper and mobile home restrictions on the deed covenant for this development and does not mention building type or style. I have been in contact with the land and building owner and he was going to move the camper and occupant in November but has yet to do so. Any cooperation on this matter from the town would be greatly appreciated"

On pages 11-12 of our Zoning Ordinance, it states "Recreational Vehicle Storage (Districts A and B Only) a. One (1) Recreational Vehicle may be stored on each buildable lot on which there is a pre-existing principal dwelling. b. The Recreational Vehicle shall not be occupied in any capacity while stored on the property, including use as a seasonal or year-round dwelling, rental, Home Occupation, or Home Business. However, it may be occupied rent-free as a guest house by family members and guests for visits not to exceed 180 total days per calendar year.

Sara talked to the owner. The person started staying there in the beginning of September while waiting to find some affordable housing. They do not pay rent and will be moving when they can find affordable housing or in the Spring when he can move the camper.

Sara told the neighbor that she would discuss this with the Select Board tonight at the meeting and will email them back regarding their response. She also let them know ahead of time that anything regarding deed covenants and restrictions would be a civil issue since it is a private covenant on the deed that has nothing to do with the municipality's enforcement authority. The Select Board agreed that they are okay to stay there until Spring when it is safe to move the camper and wanted Sara to reiterate that the covenants are private and are a civil issue that the Select Board have not enforcement authority over. Sara will let the neighbor know.

Reviews & Reviews received back

The Department Heads had turned in some more reviews that they signed and the employee signed. The Select Board needs to sign these. **John motioned to sign the reviews, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

The Select Board had a few reviews to do that were not completed at the last meeting.

John motioned to go into non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3 II (a) and (b) at 6:30pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.

John motioned to return to public session at 6:55pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.

John motioned to seal the non-public minutes, Tony 2nd, so voted.

Meet with Bubba

Bubba met with the Select Board to go over the following:

- Building Site Inspection Update: Sara explained that they had a site inspection at the new garage location on Wednesday January 15, 2025. In attendance were Casey, Jon from Studio Nexus, Tony and Sara. Sara took pictures of the progress so far. The following items were discussed:
 - Casey showed where the pipe, the water line and the sewer line all were. Once the building is up, he will start working on the inside.
 - The roof should be on by the end of the week.
 - Next week they will work on the walls and then all the exterior after that.
 - They will finish the floors and other interior items once that is complete. They cannot do the office until the floor is complete.
 - He may start working on the well soon.
 - He always does the septic last so there is no chance of anyone driving over it and crushing it.
 - He already met with NHEC regarding the electrical and they agreed on where this will come in. Sara stated that she talked to NHEC and gave them the deed, the property card and septic design. They sent her the easement. The Select Board will sign this at the meeting on Tuesday January 21, 2025 and then Sara will send this over with the check after.
 - They will decide when the next meeting will be but for now Jon said that Casey can just send pictures of the progress as they go.
- NBRC Grant: Sara looked into the NBRC grant for the salt and sand shed and if that did not qualify asked about the chip sealing. We may also be able to combine them and apply for both. The Select Board agreed to apply for both. Sara will submit the initial interest and go from there.
- Bubba's review: The Select Board went over the review with Bubba.

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to adjourn at 6:59pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Smith
Town Administrator