

TOWN OF GROTON
SELECT BOARD MEETING
January 15, 2019

In Attendance: John Rescigno, Kyle Andrews, Ron Madan and Sara Smith (Administrative Assistant)

Audience Members Present

John called the meeting to order at 7:01pm.

MINUTE APPROVAL

John motioned to approve the Work Session Meeting minutes of January 8, 2019 as written, Ron 2nd, so voted. Kyle abstained.

John motioned to approve the Select Board Meeting minutes of January 8, 2019 as written, Ron 2nd, so voted. Kyle abstained.

NEW BUSINESS:

Future of the Police Department Discussion

The Selectmen wanted to discuss ideas for the future of the Groton Police Department. EJ retired in July and we have been using the Sheriff's Department for coverage which costs us \$75.00 an hour. This meeting is to get feedback from the Town as to what they would like to see happen with the Police Department. The Police budget for 2019 is around \$107,000.00 which could cover around 27 hours a week for Sheriff's Department or State Police to cover. Some options that have been discussed are:

- Maintaining the Police Department and staffing it: This has been proven to be hard. We have been unable to fill the part time positions.
- Abolishing the Police Department and only have State Police respond to emergencies
- Contract with State Police for coverage
- Contract with Sheriff's Department for coverage

Sherry asked if there have been incidents while the sheriff wasn't covering. John explained that there has not been anything major but it is a roll of the dice. Even when EJ was here, he was working 40 hours so he couldn't be here for everything. State Police has always responded to these calls and will continue to do so.

Slim had a few questions and comments.

- He said his report was showing over \$190,000 for the Police last year. It was explained that he was looking at the entire Public Safety, which includes Fire and Emergency services.
- Slim said he feels we should abolish the Police Department and that is money that needs to go to the new town shed.
- Slim also pointed out that there was an accident with an elderly lady at the Town Hall and the Sheriff Department responded almost immediately. John explained that day they were on duty for the town so we were lucky and again it is the roll of the dice.
- Slim asked if the Sheriff Department would continue coverage past March. It was explained that the old Sheriff said yes but there is a new boss so we would have to talk to them about it but we believe they would be.

Pam had a few questions and concerns she wanted to address.

- The first one is would the 27 hours of coverage include weekends or are we at the mercy of what they would do. John explained that we are using them currently and they are working weekends only for us so we believe this would continue.
- The second question is if could we have more coverage in the summer and less in winter since Sculptured Rocks brings more visitors and traffic. John said we would have to run this by them but he wouldn't see why not if the availability is there.
- Pam mentioned that we offer employees medical, NHRS, etc., would we have to pay this. John and Sara explained that this is factored in to the \$75 an hour that we pay since they have their own coverage. Pam said we have separate lines in the budget, not in the Police budget, that covers medical and NHRS. Does this mean these would go down as well? Yes, It would.
- What about belonging to the SOU, would we still belong to them? John said we would not.
- Pam asked about dispatch and if this would continue. We do use Plymouth dispatch right now but we would have to look into that. Bubba said that dispatch calls him right now so this is something we would want to think about. Kyle mentioned that we used to use the Sheriff's Department for dispatch before we went to Plymouth so we would have to look into how that would work.
- What about prosecutions if there is a crime committed? Would we pay for this or would it be Sheriff? This is a great question. We would need to look into this.
- Pam asked if the \$107,000.00 is just salaries and it was explained that it is not, it is the entire budget including salaries, supplies, vehicle maintenance, prosecution, etc. Sara said once we get some of these questions answered we will need to break down what we would still need and what we wouldn't need in the budget so it may not be the entire \$107,000.00 that we could eliminate. This could make it less than 27 hours of coverage.
- Pam's concern is not having any coverage as she doesn't want the Town to be a target. She said there was a time there was theft and we have domestic violence issues so she doesn't want us to not have any coverage.
- Pam also asked if we need a Police Department in order to have mutual aid such as Hebron covering for us for calls, etc. We would have to look into this.

Kyle mentioned that we keep talking about the Sheriff's Department but State Police would also be an option and they are a little cheaper. Sara explained we looked into this and are having some contract issues that we are trying to iron out. Pam asked if it would be similar to the Sheriff's Department and it was explained that it would.

Jim Joyce said that Pam covered his concern if we can dictate the coverage. In his opinion the four-hour blocks are a waste of time. He doesn't want to be a community without law enforcement as criminals would want to set up shop here if they know there are no cops in Groton. He would like to see if we could get the 24-27 hours of coverage from the Sheriff's Department or State Police.

Tony asked why there was a failure of recruitment for the Police Department in the past. John mentioned that at first, we thought it was an hourly rate so we increased it but that didn't make a difference. Hebron said they would put the word out and no one came forward. We are unsure of the exact reason but think it is because we are a small community that is remote and not that exciting to work for. Tony said his concern is the delay, even with the Sheriff's Department covering if they are not familiar with the Town it can take longer to respond. It is nice to have an officer here that is familiar with the Town and the Town is familiar with. He has had an incident at his house where he had to call the police and local officer wasn't available. The State Police called three hours later which is unacceptable and the current Police Chief agreed this was handled poorly. He had an armed person at his house who was very angry and this was a frightening situation for him and his family. He feels that we need local law enforcement that is familiar with the town. Also, with our elderly population it would be better to have emergency responders be more local. He realizes it is a big problem so

he would like to see something done with someone who is familiar with the area. He would be in favor of maintaining a department but he knows the recruitment is difficult because people send in resumes looking for a vacation spot or want more money than Groton can afford. He said it is scary because what could happen with no police is that everyone will be walking around with a gun in their hands.

Joe stated that when EJ was here we were paying him about \$55,000 a year. He said we can use this money to use a few of Travis' officers to do part time and then we wouldn't have to pay health insurance, NHRS, etc. John said we looked into it and there is a lot involved. We thought we could just use their officers and pay their salary but there is more to it in regards with liability, insurances, both towns having to vote to make sure they are okay with it, etc.

Bubba mentioned that he would like to see the Police Department stay. He knows it has been tough to fill the positions but he would like to continue another year with Sheriff's Department or State Police until we can fill that position. It takes a lot to establish a department and once it is gone it will be hard to re-establish. It could cost a lot of money to do so.

John asked for a raise of hands to see who want to have their own Police Department here and who is in favor or subbing it out through Sheriff's Department or State Police.

Pam said she would like to sub it out to the Sheriff's Department or State Police only because she has been involved with the Town closely for 11 years and it has always been hard to find help for the Police Department. We used to think it was just the salary but it is a lot more than that. It is the environment up here. It has been a revolving door and has cost the town a lot of money to outfit this department, to advertise, etc. it would be great to find someone but she doesn't know if we can. Bubba agrees and that's why he thinks we should keep it in our budget and sub contract it out but not get rid of it entirely.

Peter Smith asked if it would it be possible to target certain types of offices such as ones that want to retire. He said we are not going to get young kids that will want to come work here. John mentioned that would be ideal but it's not that simple, its like finding a needle in a hay stack. We have advertised in all aspects, such as the academies, other departments, etc. Sara mentioned EJ tired this for part time help before he left and he wasn't able to find anyone. A lot of the people who retire want days and even though crime happens all of the time, it is the busiest on nights and weekends when most people are not working.

A resident said retirement is ideal but if we find them then they are ideal for Plymouth, Concord or other towns and they will scoop him up and offer more money. They will go to other Towns over Groton because of pay and because they will be too bored because there is not much going on here. He said as far as the incident at the resident's house where the trooper called three hours later, if we only have state police on call in Groton that is what could happen because it will be a trooper that could be working on another call in another Town and it could take awhile for them to respond. He could be the only one covering. We will always have someone respond but it may not be as quick and will depend on the severity. If it is something serious going down, law enforcement will come from everywhere but if it is a theft it will take a while and may just be a call. He wants people to know that even though we don't have a Police Department and even with the Sheriff patrolling the State Police are on call all the time. Dorchester only has State Police on call as they do not have a department or any contracted coverage. Having a department or police presence such as the Sheriff is like the beware of the dog sign; they might not have a dog but the sign keeps people away which is why it is nice to have a Police Department. He said we get what we pay for on Groton's budget, and the guy we all want is being scooped up before he gets to Groton, it is one in a million.

Tony asked if something happened at the end of the Sheriff's shift that keeps them here longer who pays? We have not come across this but we would pay if this came up. If it was after the shift and State Police covers than we wouldn't pay.

Joe asked how Bridgewater does it with only one officer, are they doing something different than what we are doing? John mentioned we don't know what is going in Bridgewater so we cannot speak to what they are doing. Pam mentioned we live here because we love it here, it's quiet and there is not a lot going on. For law enforcement officers, especially the younger ones, they don't want to come here because it would be boring. The person would have to be willing to work in a slower environment or wants to retire to a remote area. John mentioned we are remote and Bridgewater is busier as it has restaurants, stores, school, and things that Groton doesn't have.

Doug shared an idea that if the Town has a situation where they need to take a property for tax deed, could they use this house for an officer to stay at so they don't have to travel. He thinks a home being provided might make it easier to fill a position. The Select Board mentioned that there would be legal issues and liability issues with that and there is a time period you have to wait after a deed.

Slim said that Miles mentioned at the town meeting that there isn't as much going on here and the number of hours waiting for phone to ring isn't cost effective and doesn't seem beneficial to the Town. Dorchester doesn't have a Police Department and the residents he talks to seem to like the savings. Lempster also doesn't have one. Slim thinks we should do away with it and everyone should put a beware of the dog sign out and it will keep people away. Slim said that everyone thinks everyone in Groton is armed and can take care of themselves.

A resident said that it isn't the guy stealing a chainsaw that we have to worry about anymore it is the heroin addicts and they are everywhere. He would like a Police Department but we have to think of the people that have come here. Most of them have not only gotten out of law enforcement because of retirement but have been terminated. The quality of people that come here is concerning and we are letting them work for us because we don't have anyone else but is that really worth it just to fill a position. He is not saying the State Police or the Sheriff's Department is the end all but if there is a meth house, a heroin house or a theft ring, it will be looked into even if there isn't a directed patrol. Even if we don't contract with anyone, we will still always have coverage for emergency calls.

John wanted to make a point that there will be always be someone covering the town it will just be a matter of how fast it will take for them to get to your house. If we have a Police Department and someone is working at the time you need them, they may be there in ten minutes. If we have coverage at that time from the Sheriff's Department, they may be there in ten minutes. If we don't have that coverage and a State Police is driving by exit 26, they will be here in fifteen minutes or so. If they are in another Town it could be longer. If it is something minor it may be a phone call or someone there the next day. If it is something major then there will be many different police departments covering. Sometimes having a Police Department can be a false sense of security but he isn't saying it is bad to have. A resident said that is a message that we have police presence. Even with having one police officer that is one set of eyes but as a community we have a lot of eyes to watch. Bubba said that as long as there is staggered coverage it is a good thing to have to rotate hours so people see the police presence but they don't know when they are here. Bubba also said that the highway is out a lot and sees things and watches out for the Town.

Tony asked how it works for a vacant house check. This has come up and the Sheriff's Department has checked them while they are on patrol.

A resident asked the Select Board what their personal thought were. John thinks the Police Department costs the Town a lot of money and it could be spent better elsewhere. Ron thinks we should keep some coverage with an outside agency. Kyle would like to give it one more year to try to staff the Police Department and use Sheriff or State Police in the meantime and see if we are in the same situation next year. Frank said do opposite since we haven't had anyone since July keep going for a year. He thinks we shouldn't do any contracts, save all the money and only rely on state police for on call.

Doug asked if we choose to not have a police presence can we do classes for community watch or protect yourself. A resident said that he doesn't think the State Police or Sheriff's Department would offer this but he isn't sure. It could be too much liability as far as he wouldn't think they would do gun training but he doesn't know about neighborhood watch. John said we could look into this.

John said if we continued to work with the Sheriff's Department at four-hour blocks, what do people think would be better. The majority feel that we should do one four-hour block in the winter and two in the summer. We would have to look at police log to see when the most police activity is. We could do four hours in the winter and 16 to 24 in the summer. Pam said that 24 hours a week at \$75/hr. would be \$93,600.00.

It appeared that the majority of the residents at this meeting would be for not having our own Police Department but contracting services with the Sheriff's Department or Police Department so we have more type of coverage.

Cardboard at the Transfer Station- Effective 1/23/19

Effective January 23, 2019 all cardboard that is brought to the Transfer Station will need to be broken down/collapsed. This will save room in the containers. Please let Richard or Norm know if you have any questions.

Junkyard Concern

Last week at the Select Board meeting the Select Board discussed #24 on our junkyard list which is on North Groton Road. Our attorney had sent a letter giving the owner 30 days to clean up the property or to contact the Town and neither has happened. On December 12, 2018 Ken Knowlton went out to the property and reported no changes since he last went out. He said that the snow made it difficult to be sure of exact changes but it still no doubt that they are in violation. The Select Board asked Sara to reach out to the attorney to explain that since we do not need the administrative warrant, we would like to know how we would proceed.

The attorney responded to Sara and explained that we would bring a complaint against him, alleging a junkyard violation, and seeking an injunction ordering him to clean up, as well as our attorneys fees and civil penalties for the violation. It would be a similar process, though longer, unless he simply acknowledged wrongdoing and went ahead and cleaned it up. The Select Board agreed to move forward with this process.

Mailings for Data Verification

Avitar sent a letter to the Select Board regarding the mailings for data verification. Our current assessing agreement has us performing a data verification process on a part of the properties in Town annually. Over the past couple of years, they have been noticing a trend with taxpayers and their ambivalence toward allowing Avitar on their property. The biggest reason appears to be the fact that they did not receive prior notification of the visit. Due to some issues with visits in 2018, Avitar has made a company-wide decision to no longer visit properties for data verification without a written prior notice to the tax payers. The letter will clearly indicate that if the town does not hear from them, it will be perceived as consent to continue on with the process. This will be an additional cost and pursuant to the contract will be the responsibility of the Town. Avitar will be mailing out the inspection letters for 2019 over the next few weeks.

Sheriff Coverage

The Sheriff's Department was patrolling and providing coverage for the Town of Groton since October through the end of 2018. They now have a new boss so they were not sure if he would be okay with the process, costs, etc. They have met with him and he is okay with it going the same way it has been. The Selectmen need to decide if they want them to continue doing the coverage as they have been until the vote at Town Meeting or how they want to proceed. It was agreed from the feedback at this meeting that we will keep the coverage as is until the town meeting in March.

Resignation

Kyle Andrews submitted his resignation and will be resigning as Selectman as of January 31, 2019. Sara will look into if his position can be on the ballot. The Town thanked Kyle for his service to the Town and he will be missed.

SELECT BOARD ITEMS:

Veterans Credit Application

The Town received an application for the All Veterans Tax Credit for the owner of Map 5 Lot 114. There were no questions. **John motioned to approve the All Veterans Tax Credit for Map 5 Lot 114, Kyle 2nd, so voted.**

Run for office

The filing deadline to run for Town Offices is January 23, 2019 through February 1, 2019. Ruth will be creating a posting of what is available.

Registering to vote

Pam Hamel who is a supervisor of the checklist explained that if you are not registered to vote the Supervisors of the Checklist will be in session on Tuesday, January 22 to make additions and corrections to the checklist. The session will be held from 6:30-7:30 pm at the Groton Town House, 754 North Groton Road, Groton.

DEPARTMENT ITEMS:

Highway Department

Bubba went over the following items regarding the Highway Department:

- International is down but should be back up tomorrow.
- Furnace wasn't working correctly but seems to be now.

COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Building Committee

The Building Committee will be meeting Thursday January 17, 2019 at 6:00pm.

Road Committee

The Road Committee will be meeting February 12, 2019 at 7:00pm.

Zoning Board

The Zoning Board met and all members have been appointed. The Zoning Board consists of Peter Smith, Ann Joyce, Gary Easson, Glen Hansen, and Robert Ellis. Glen is the only returning member so he was appointed the chair for now. At this meeting they adopted the appeal form. Sara will let Casey Kuplin know this has been adopted so he can fill it out and turn it back in to the Zoning Board for review. The next Zoning Board meeting will be Monday, February 4, 2019 at 3:00pm.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

Groton Historical Society

Slim mentioned that the Groton Historical Society will be dropping of quotes for the signs at the Town Pound. Sara mentioned that Pam Hamel already sent those over. Slim said the amount may change due to donations and he will keep us informed.

Having no other business to conduct, Kyle motioned to adjourn at 8:11pm, Ron 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully Submitted,
Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant