

Town of Groton
Select Board Work Session Minutes
April 20, 2021

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

John called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

Meeting on Re-valuation

The Select Board met with Kerry from Avitar, Jason and Phil from DRA about the re-valuation that takes place every five years and is taking place this year.

Kerry from Avitar explained the point of this meeting is for them to give the Town an overview for the revaluation process. RSA 75:8A states that the assessors and/or Selectmen shall reappraise all real estate within the municipality so that the assessments are at full and true value at least as often as every fifth year. What this means is that every 5 years a revaluation is done to bring properties to true market value. Kerry and Evan will be handling it. Kerry explained that real estate is constantly changing and not everything changes at the same rate.

The sales control the ratio and they want to make sure all are at market value. The sales go back two years and if they require to go back further, they will. For 2020, Groton's over all ratio was 94.8%.

Kerry said that tax payers need to keep in mind that if property goes up 20%, that doesn't mean their taxes will go up 20%, will depend on all other variables. Some may go down and some may go up.

The plan is that the preliminary values will be done with a field review of the entire town. Avitar has already visited each property as they do a ¼ of the properties each year for the other four years between the revaluation years. On the fifth year they go to all properties but for these they just drive in and look at properties to be consistent as possible. These are called drive by assessments since they had already met with every property prior to this and tried to go in if owner allowed. The field review will hopefully be done by mid-June and then the notices will go out in August. Once this is all done the town will receive a report which explains the process which should be done by 10/01/21. This means the Town will probably have to file extension for the MS1. Avitar will do all data entry in the software system.

Kerry wanted to let the Town know that Solar will be assessed in 2021 so it will be taxed now and wasn't previously. This is statewide not just in Groton. This increases the value and is assessed all over the state now. They depreciate every five years. There is a solar exemption that the town may want to look into. It would have to go on a warrant as a warrant article so this wouldn't be done until the 2022 Town meeting.

Kerry will send Sara some PR stuff that we can put on our website to let the residents know about the process. He will be in Town a lot to look at properties. Sara has already put this on the website. He said there will not be interior inspections at this time unless the home owner requests it. They have also been allowing them to send pictures and emails due to COVID. Everything will be checked and brought to true market value.

Jason from the Department of Revenue Administration (DRA) said they run their sample against Avitar and send postcards to homeowners which explains they have been selected as a sample and gives a number they can call for the DRA. DRA will request cards thru Avitar. They only need to verify 12 sales but they send out double in case someone opts out or the property isn't accessible.

They use a Monitoring inspection report with a score sheet when they go out and get samples and compare. Then Kerry or Evan has 30 days to respond to that. After 30 days it is sent to the Town.

Jason asked Kerry when the expected sales completion date is. Kerry said within the next couple weeks is the plan. They started in November and did more in January and are working on it now. The sales analysis will be complete in about 3-4 weeks. Jason asked if any work done has been done remotely. Kerry said mostly done at Avitar. The preliminary values notice will be sent out early August. The Hearings are after this as they usually give them a couple weeks. They aren't sure if they are doing it in person or not right now due to COVID. Last year it was done in a few different ways which went smoothly whether it is a call, emails, etc. It worked well.

DRA asked if there are any special use properties in Town like campgrounds? Yes, there is a campground. Kerry said that they are assessing these because they are assessing everything including these, utilities, etc.

Phil from DRA went over the assessment review which DRA is doing. It is not the same as the revaluation but is related to it and is done every five years as well so they are generally done at the same time. They handed out a 2021 Assessment Review Standards chart and went over each section A-F individually.

- Section A is the level and uniformity of assessments which measure statistics. It looks at the median ratio. This should be as close to 100% as possible and last year for Groton it was 94%. The revaluation usually brings this number back up and hopefully this will be close to 100 when Kerry is done with the process. This section also verifies Coefficient of Dispersion of median ratio not greater than 20 and Groton was at 20.
- Section B is the assessing practices which assess items like the cards. They do a sampling of current use files which is about 30 properties. They will give Sara time ahead to get the documents together that they are looking for which is usually the application, stewardship plans, map of the land, etc. They may need an updated CU12. Sara can run a report in Avitar for this. The hard part about this is that we can't require them so sometimes this is hard. They also look at LUCT, contracts, inventories, etc.
- Section C is the exemptions and tax credits. They do a review and look for at least 95% accuracy. This should be updated every 5 years to make sure they still qualify. Sara said she already sent letters out to verify if anything changed. The elderly need to fill out the form again to see if they still qualify based on income and assets. This section also looks at religious, educational and charitables. Sara already sent the charitables to Kerry for review.
- Section D is Data Accuracy. They do another field review and look at % of errors. 90% of the property cards should be free of errors. They usually sample 35 properties so they will be sending post cards for this as well.
- Section E is proportionality which the DRA looks at stats and with 90% confidence level for all three strata within 5% overall median point estimate. These three are improved residential, improved nonresidential, and unimproved property. They verify PRD which is the price related differential. The revaluation usually puts this more in line.

- Section F is the USPAP manual which is the appraisal manual that has all the information that Avitar uses. They have to get that in 30 days after the MS1. Avitar does this and once approved becomes a public document in Town.

Some of field work will start this summer and the rest will be late fall/winter. The revaluation work will be done this year and then the Town will get the report next year. It is not a pass or fail, it just gives a heads up on what the town should work on. It is like an audit to make sure the Town is doing what they are supposed to and that Avitar is as well. They will send the list of files ahead of time so we can get this ready for them.

Junkyard Inspection Concern

Sara had emailed MRI about the junkyard inspections because they originally said they would have someone to take Ken's place. They said that at this time they do not have anyone that is able to provide this service. The Select Board asked Sara to check with other towns to see who they use and then they can go from there.

Mask Mandate

The Governor didn't extend the mask mandate in NH. However, it is up to each Town, school, business etc. what they would like to do moving forward. The schools are still requiring them as are most businesses when you are inside. The Select Board decided to not require it for the Town. Sara will update the signs to say that masks are not required but to be respectful of those wearing masks and to still maintain the 6-foot distance.

Schedule a meeting with Chief Coursey

Tony saw Chief Coursey and Rumney agreed that it would be better to hire him on as a Town employee. The Select Board would like to see if he can meet with them on May 18th at 6pm. Sara asked if a contract is needed so she will look into that.

Town meeting 5/8/21

The Town Meeting is fast approaching. We only have one more meeting after tonight before Town Meeting. The work session on the Tuesday before, May 4th, is the last one. The Select Board agreed this should be at 5pm so we can go over the warrant articles, set up for the meeting and other meeting items.

With the mask mandate lifted, the Select Board agreed to still have the meeting outside at the park due to the amount of people that will be there because of the warrant article on the building. Sara said that at the special town meeting in 2018 for the building there was around 120 people there, when we normally only have 40-50 people at other Town meetings.

Sara looked into tent rentals as requested by the Select Board. She reached out to five different places and three out of the five got back to her with quotes. They all recommended a 30x60 or 40x60 tent. Abbott rental out of Littleton quoted \$1,920.00 for the 40x60 which includes set up and take down. Lakes Region Tent & Event out of Concord quoted \$1,737.00 for the 30x60 which includes delivery and pickup and damage waiver. Decker's Tent Rentals out of Charlestown quoted \$1,520.00 for a 40x60 which includes travel expenses and set up and take down. The larger tents were quoted at \$4,300.00.

Now that the mandate was lifted and it is outside, we will probably have more people coming without masks but we want everyone to feel comfortable there and some people may not come if there are

people without masks. The Select Board agreed to have two tents and one can be for those wearing masks and one for those that are not so everyone has their comfort zone. Sara will call about two tents. The Select Board agreed since Decker's was cheaper to go with them and to ask what they have smaller than the 40x60, but not smaller than a 40x40, and what they have available for two tents for May 8, 2021 and when it would be delivered. The company will set up the tent and take them down. The Town will be using our own chairs and will be setting them up. It was agreed since a lot of couples come to meetings together and move the chairs together that when we set up, we will do the chairs in groups of two we have masks, we can do chairs in sets of two and spread them out.

Sara did reach out to the Fire Marshall and they do not need to come and check out the tent. They said a local fire chief could and they provided a tent checklist for the chief to follow. Tony said he will talk to Chief Coursey.

Sara said the Select Board should think about if we should do food and coffee this year due to COVID. The Select Board agreed to no food or coffee. People can bring their own drinks.

Also, Sara stated that she talked to Bubba and we should set the PA system up ahead of time to test it and make sure everything works since we haven't used it at the park. We can then store it at the Garage until the meeting.

Sara also mentioned that it was suggested that the Select Board call residents ahead of time. Is the Select Board Planning on doing this? Tony and Ron and John have met with people individually. Tony and Ron have met with a lot of people. John said that since he hasn't met with as many people, he will get the phone list from Sara and will make some calls.

John motioned to allow Sara to call Decker's and see if they have two smaller tents and if it isn't a lot more to go ahead and order the tents for Town Meeting, Tony 2nd, so voted.

Meeting with Bubba

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

- Sign Norms Review: Bubba went over the review with Norm so now Bubba and the Select Board need to sign it. **John motioned to sign Bubba's review, Tony 2nd, so voted.**
- NBRC Grant: Sara explained that she put in a letter of interest for both the Potential new garage and River Road. She is doing the application process now which is lengthy, especially for both of them. We will not know if this is decided on August 31, 2021 and will not get the money until the next month or so. If River Road passes at Town meeting we would want to get the road work done before Fall. Also with the building, we won't know at Town meeting when people vote but we will have to vote on the bond and probably start the bond before then. If we have the bond, we won't be able to pay it off early and we can't use the grant money towards bond payments. The Select Board agreed that we shouldn't spend the time on these grants for this year due to the timing. It didn't sound like they would award for this building anyway since we have tried in the past and have not been awarded and due to the requirements, they listed for buildings we probably wouldn't qualify as it usually has to support a larger area. We didn't have these on a warrant article this year to accept the grant if awarded since we found out after so we will have to see what happens at Town meeting and can apply for this grant next year if we have any more projects. The Select Board told Sara not to move forward with these ones now due to all these factors.

- Paving Renewal Contract: Bryant Paving sent a renewal contract for paving based upon last year's pricing. They have built a relationship with the Town and asked that this contract be presented to the Select Board to allow Bryant to proceed with this year's projects. The Select Board agreed that we are not going to sign this as everything goes out to bid.
- The Town received a letter regarding the guardrails that were damaged on Sculptured Rocks Road. The letter wasn't signed and there was no return address on the envelope. They included pictures of the guardrails and wanted to know when these would be fixed and asked a few questions regarding the guardrail installation, referenced notes from when this was discussed in a work session, etc. At first it was thought that the guardrails were not installed properly but they were. Bubba is working on repairing it. Charlie may be able to fix them.
- Bubba talked to Charlie Coursey who had given us the original quote for the bridge at town pond. Due to the increase in pressure treated wood the price would go up \$2,500.00 from the original quote or he could do hemlock at the price in the warrant article. We could stain it and do other things to the bridge down the road to help it last longer. However, even if the article passes at Town meeting it will not get done by the fishing derby. Bubba could make it so people could walk over but not drive.
- Bubba said may need to set up parking area at baseball field for Town Meeting. The Select Board said this was a good idea. We could paint lines.
- There were some wash outs past Rego's on North Groton Road after the winter so they have been working on filling those in.

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to adjourn at 6:55pm, Ron 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant