

TOWN OF GROTON
PUBLIC HEARING – PROPOSED BUDGET
February 1, 2022

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

Audience Members Present

John called the Public Hearing on the Proposed Budget and Warrant Articles to order at 6:00pm.

John wanted to mention to those that may not stay for the Select Board meeting that Alexandria had put in a petitioned warrant article that will change the formula for the school which will greatly increase the amount that the Town of Groton will be paying. There is a meeting tomorrow night at the High School at 6:00pm and then the more important meeting will be Saturday morning at 10:00am at the High School there will be an amendment to that article but it needs people to vote on that article so it is critical that people are there to vote on this.

Miles asked if Saturday is when the article will be voted on or if it is done by ballot. John explained that it will be on the ballot on March 8th but the voting on Saturday will be on the amendment.

Miles said his understanding is that tomorrow night is just an informational session. John said this is correct.

Sara explained there is a letter regarding this on the table that was put together by Derry Riddle which explains the warrant article, what the BHVD could do if this goes through.

Budget

John reported that the Operating Budget of \$798,840 is an increase of \$6,948.00 from last year.

General Government

John mention that the General Government totals \$302,767 which increased by \$11,120 from last year. The increases in this section come from the merit and stipend increases and an increase in the number of elections so this is an increase for Moderator, ballot clerks and supervisors.

Executive

The proposed budget is \$69,408, an increase of \$5,719. John explained that there was a proposed merit increase as part of the evaluation process. This was also due to an increase in the Selectmen Stipend. The Moderator increased as well due to more elections this year.

Miles said that historically, or as long as he has lived in Town, the Stipend has been what it is. Some even wanted to forego the stipend but he wasn't one of them because he knows what is involved in the job it deserves compensation. However, he likes to crunch numbers and wanted to point out that the entire time he was on the Board of Selectmen, from 2008-2014, there was discussion about adjusting this amount but they felt there was never a right time nor did we feel it was the best thing for the Selectmen to recommend it for themselves. As recently as 2017, the Selectmen's stipend was \$9,000 which is \$3,000 each. Since 2017 it went up \$600 to \$9,600. Now the increase would go up 37.5% since last year and 46% since 2017. He had some other concerns that he will address later about the increase for the Forester.

John mentioned there is no junkyard dog anymore so they have taken this on. They spend far more time than the one day that the meeting. There are times they come in during the week to take care of business, they sometimes take care of emails during the week along with other stuff. It is more than just the two hours for the meetings. Miles said that he understands that but it has been that way for everyone else who served. Tony said the cost of everything has gone up for them too. This hasn't been increased in a long time and they feel it should be. Miles said he understands and there are people like himself who feel this. It was the last year or the year before that Governor Sununu sponsored or at least signed a bill to give retirees a wage increase for the first time in 11 years and it was 1.5%. He has not received an increase other than in 11 years. He said that others that live in this town that are on retirement or Social Security are the same way.

Pam asked how they came up with the particular number. John said they came up with an amount they thought was reasonable. Sara explained that they proposed an increase of \$100 per month for each of them. The Chair was making \$300 month so this would bring that to \$400/month which is \$4,800/year and the others are currently making \$250/month so this would bring that to \$350/month which is \$4,200/year each. This totals the \$13,200.

A resident asked how many people we have running for Selectmen. They said just one this time around and it is Ron again. They said that the pay could be why and if we increase it, we may get more interest.

Election, Registration, Vital Statistics

The proposed budget is \$58,193, an increase of \$2,120. There was an increase here were for merit increases as well. The ballot clerks and checklist supervisors increased because there are more elections this year.

John mentioned that the Supervisors of the Checklist and the Ballot Clerks increased due o more elections this year.

Ruth mentioned that the Town Clerk/Tax Collector Deputy wage line will have to go up. When she submitted this, she didn't add on the merit increase and Ruth and the Select Board have since gone over her performance evaluations and agreed to an increase. Ruthe explained that Joanna filled in a lot for her last year due to the fire which is why they went over budget last year but they don't need to increase it that much this year, they just need to reflect the increase. The Select Board agreed to add the increase on there. We didn't have in front of us what each employee makes so we will have to look at that and will increase the line appropriately.

Financial Administration

The proposed budget is \$24,165, an increase of \$5 for Treasurer supplies.

Legal Expenses

The proposed budget is \$13,000, which is an increase of \$2,000. There were a few times that unique situations came up this year that we couldn't have anticipated so we went over budget in this line so it was agreed to increase this to be on the safe side to provide a cushion.

Personnel Administration

The proposed budget is \$76,400, which is an increase of \$700 due to increase in Retirement and in FICA/Medicare. There was a decrease in health insurance. These are things that we don't have control over.

Planning/Zoning

The proposed budget is \$6,816, which is the same as last year.

Pam asked if the Planning Board voted to move forward with the Zoning Ordinance. John mentioned that they are. Pam said that the meetings mentioned some mailings that could cost money so the postage line may need to be increased. The Select Board said that Deb didn't come back to them about the budget after the Zoning Meeting. Sara mentioned that the reason they were over in 2021 was for the mailing they did the end of the year for the Zoning Ordinance so you would think they would need to increase this. The Select Board agreed to increase the postage line to \$500.00. John said that maybe they thought they didn't need to since they are always under on the other lines but we should increase this to be on the safe side.

Pam asked if any of the postage that was spent in 2021 was offset by a resident that may have had to pay for something they brought before the Planning Board. Sara said that if she remembers correctly that the entire postage line was spend on the zoning mailing but she can double check to be sure.

General Government Buildings

The proposed budget is \$22,900, which is the same as last year. John mentioned that two lines went over which were the Town Garage repairs and maintenance and the Transfer Station. The Town Garage was over due to the heater going at the beginning of the year and the mold situation. The Transfer Station was due to an accident that happened there and the site work for the cement work and moving blocks. We didn't increase these lines this year because these were situations that do not normally happen.

It was asked why we didn't move forward with the covers for the Transfer Station since the slabs were supposed to be the first step for that project. John explained that the slabs did two things. The first thing was partially for the covers but they were not just installed for the covers. They also make it easier to move the containers in and out to clean around them. We did ask for quotes for the covers this year but only had one company come back and it was a very high quote of \$168,000. It came in last minute. The Select Board felt this was too high, it wasn't complete and didn't feel comfortable moving forward. Tony said that they will revisit this and continue to look into it but \$168,000 was expensive for just roofs, no building and they didn't provide a complete plan or design for how they were going to build it. We couldn't find anyone to bid on it and then we did get one at the last minute. The resident said there is a theory behind that covers that it will be a payback by saving on trash costs. Tony Tavares asked if there was money approved for the covers last year. The Select Board explained there was not, there was only money raised for the slabs which were completed last year.

Cemeteries

The proposed budget is \$5,152, which is the same as last year.

General Insurance

The proposed budget is \$15,002, which is an increase of \$556 which was an increase in costs for 2022 for Property & Liability Insurance.

Advertising and Regional Associations

The proposed budget is \$4,450, which is the same as last year.

Other General Government

The proposed budget is \$7,281, which is an increase of \$20 due to tax mapping increasing.

Miles said that it is his understanding we have someone acting as a Forester and wanted to know if this is correct and who it is. Sara explained that his name is Jordan King. She was drawing a blank on the company name. She will have that information for the next meeting. Sara explained that we have been using him for many years, since Christina was here so around 2017. It was Christina's recommendation to make it easier on the report of cuts to have someone who is knowledgeable go check the sites to make sure what they are reporting is accurate and the assessment worksheets are filled out correctly since the Select Board wasn't 100% familiar with this. So now anytime we have a report of cut, we send it to him he reviews it and goes out to the area to inspect it. Miles asked if he really does come out and Sara said he does. He said that is another one of his concerns because from reading the minutes from a previous meeting it said that he had initially agreed to do these at a lower rate and this year he thought he was asking for it to be doubled. Sara said that she doesn't have this information with her, she knows it was an increase but didn't think it double. She knew it was an increase to match the average rate and to cover the gas increases and mileage to come to Groton. John said he knows it increased as well but doesn't know the exact amount. John and Sara said we will look this up and will have this information at the next meeting.

Police

The proposed budget is \$77,854, a decrease of \$17,249 which was due to the decrease to reducing the Part Time officer wages to \$1 which is due to the Part Time Police Officer that we are no longer looking to hire.

Miles asked if we aren't going to have a part time officer at all. John explained that Mike has done a lot of work to try to find someone but hasn't had any luck. The Town hasn't had any luck in a very long time so it was agreed it would be best to stop budgeting for this. Tony said Mike reached out to other departments and no one was interested in coming to Groton. Chief Bagan explained that he has put it out there on all avenues and there is no interest. He has called other Departments and they are busy and there is no interest.

Miles asked about the Police Chief wage line and why there was no increase. It looks like maybe it has been over funded since it is the same as it was last year. Miles said that the Chief from what he can see is doing a good job. He asked the Chief if he is getting an increase this year. Chief Bagan answered that he believes he will be, he did get an increase last year. Sara explained that he will be but they haven't met with the Chief yet to go over it. Chief Bagan explained that there was extra in the budget line so even figuring in the 3% increase it didn't need to be increased, there will still be enough. Sara explained that they when he was hired it was agreed he would work between 25-29 hours so it is budgeted for 29 hours but he doesn't always work the 29 hours each week. Chief explained he works around 25-26 hours to leave room in case he gets called in. Miles asked if he is paid hourly or salary. He is paid hourly.

Miles said that based in the information that we are not going to be hiring a part time officer, could we lower the uniforms and training lines. He said when he worked for Derry Police Department, they got \$250 a year. Many people stated that was years ago and the cost of everything including uniforms has gone up since then. The Chief explained that the problem is if you don't have it and need it then it isn't good.

Miles asked if the Chief is anticipating using \$2,500 in training this year. Chief said that he tried to attend all of the free training he can but there will be times when these are not free and there are certain trainings, he has to do that cost money. Miles said Chief has been an officer for many years that he should be up on his training. Chief said that they require him to do certain trainings and he likes to do extra trainings but he doesn't think it would cost \$2,500. Miles said the Chief said he doesn't think he will use it all so he asks the Select Board to consider reducing this. A resident disagrees that we should lower the training. She said we only have one officer, we just lowered the budget over \$18,000 by removing the part

time offer, so we shouldn't further handicap or limit our only officer to the training he can attend. Sara also explained that due to COVID they have been doing a lot of trainings via ZOOM or virtual so it is free or cheaper since they are not travelling but once they can go back to normal it will be more.

Tony Tavares said that the didn't remove the part time officer, it does still have \$1 so we could hire someone if they came along and they would need training. Sara said that Tony is trying to say is that \$1.00 does leave it open so they can expend from that line if needed to so if a part time officer was hired it would be paid out of this. It was also mentioned that something could happen to the current Police Chief and we could need to hire someone else.

Fire and Ambulance

The proposed budget is \$103,104, an increase of \$1,500 which is for the increase in Hebron Contracted Services.

Emergency Management

The proposed budget is \$1,278, which is the same as last year.

Highway Administration

The proposed budget is \$86,396, an increase of \$1,066 which is in the Road Agent Wages due to merit increases and an increase in the telephone. It was explained that the highway assistants did get merit increases but that line could still be lowered based on the number of hours they work.

A resident asked how much the Town receives for the Highway Block Grant. Ruth couldn't remember off the top of her head. Pam thought it was around \$24,000 but Sara thought it was a little higher than that. Sara explained she will look it up and have the information for the next meeting.

Highways and Streets

The proposed budget is \$105,301, which is a decrease of \$1,000 which is due to the gas line decreasing.

Miles wanted to clarify if the culverts did come to the exact amount of \$1,500. He asked this last year as well. He wants to clarify that we spent exactly \$1,500 two years in a row on culverts. Tony and Bubba explained that each year we have spent more than that on culverts all together but some of them were paid out of money for other road projects, like the FEMA projects, River Road project, etc. The overall culverts were more than \$1,500 but they came out of different lines.

Streets and Lighting

The proposed budget is \$1,300, an increase of \$200 due to the cost of electricity going up.

Sanitation – Monitoring

The proposed budget is \$9,450, which is an increase of \$3,450 due to the cost of the full PAF testing for the landfill monitoring. This is why we were over budget last year.

Pam asked what is going on with this. John said it is a complicated story but we just got a letter today which explained that they received the recommendation from Andover Geological to remove the PAF testing requirement and it looks like they will remove it but they have said this before and still required it or still made us do the testing that year. The testing is very inconsistent with which year it happens so we have to plan that it will happen again this year. We are hoping it will stop since Andover Geological recommended this and they haven't found anything in any of the other tests they have done. There is a chance that this won't happen due to this but the Select Board didn't want to remove it from budget until

we are sure and see that it is not getting done. Sara explained that the PAF testing was a new testing and when it started, we were told it wouldn't be every year and it was happening every year so we went back and forth with them and Andover Geological. It probably will not happen anymore due to the letter but it is very hard to plan for this until we see it. Miles asked if the Board of Selectmen is prepared to fight this if they do try to go it again. John said we will and we will use the letter if needed.

Solid Waste Disposal

The proposed budget is \$92,260, an increase of \$7,353 due to wages for merit increases and attributed to the increase in transportation costs.

Health Administration

The proposed budget is \$1,553, which is the same as last year.

Health Agencies and Hospitals

The proposed budget is \$4,940, an increase of \$233 which was mostly because Pemi Baker went up \$183.

Miles asked if have hired a Health Officer because he knew we were looking. Sara explained that Tony Albert is the Health Officer. We had looked and were not able to find anyone. We had a person we thought would be able to do it this year along with the junkyard inspections but he got really sick right when we were going to meet with him and has been struggling with health issues since. We reached out to all local towns to see who they use for the health office and for junkyard inspections but either their person wasn't interested in taking more towns on or the Town was in the same boat we are in and told us to let them know if we find anyone.

Pam asked why the Health Officer Stipend is \$0.08 less than budgeted. It is just the way monthly payment averaged out at the end of the year.

Welfare

The proposed budget is \$4,701, which was an increase of \$25 because Tri-County Community Action went up \$25.

Culture and Recreation

The proposed budget is \$7,936, an increase of \$250.

Parks and Recreation

The proposed budget is \$5,739, which stayed the same as last year.

Library

The proposed budget is \$2, which stayed the same as last year.

Patriotic Purposes

The proposed budget is \$100, which stayed the same as last year.

Conservation

The proposed budget is \$2,095, which is an increase of 250 due to water testing, which is a new line.

Miles asked why the Conservation Commission used the exact amount for every line they budgeted. Sara explained the same question came up last year. She explained that there was a warrant article years ago, before she was here, that states that whatever the Conservation Commission doesn't spend of their

budget, gets cut in a check to them at the end of the year to put into their Conservation Fund account. Miles asked when this was. Sara said she doesn't know the exact year and asked Pam if she remembers. Pam said it was a one-time warrant article and we looked it up again last year to verify this. Pam said they also get a percentage of the LUCT which was also a one-time warrant article. The Timber Tax, which is on the warrant this year, has to be requested every year.

Miles asked if they did use the budget for anything. Sara explained that they did do items such as clean ups, fishing derby, etc. Slim spoke to this as well. He explained they did the fishing derby which uses money to buy the fish, trophies, etc. It is the one thing in Town that we get a very good turnout of people attending and we would like to keep doing this. Slim said that they do a few clean ups every year and the state does provide the bags and loan the vests.

Other budget questions

- Miles stated that we were concerned last year that the unreserved fund balance was really low after putting money towards the taxes. He asked that the amount is this year. Sara explained that since there wasn't much on the budget last year, money wasn't need to take from here to apply to the taxes since they were already very low. The amount is \$332,591. Miles asked what percentage that is. Sara stated 17.37%.
- A resident asked about the funds that were closed which were the Perambulation and Fire. It was explained that these were closed and this money went back into the general fund. He also asked what happened to the money from the property sales. This money also went into the general fund.

Pam wanted to mentioned that the tax rate is really low this year, which is nice but is not the norm. This was low because we closed these accounts, we also got FEMA reimbursements for money that was spent in previous years. She said it would be wise for people to know this is not the norm and this will not be the case next year.

Sara said it can be confusing because we don't set the taxes for the current year until the end of the year. For example, 2021's tax rate was not set until November of 2021. John explained that when this is set at the end of the year it looks at what was voted on at Town meeting that year, what was spent, what we get for revenue and this is all used to set the tax rate. This is set in November and you see this is in your December tax bill. Sara explained that the first bill you pay in July is an estimate and takes ½ the tax rate from the previous year. Then when the tax rate is set in November it looks makes up for the difference depending on the new tax rate. So, if it is a higher tax rate you will pay more on the second tax bill and if it is lower you will pay less than the first tax bill. It is never the same from year to year. This year the first half will be very low because it will be half of the 8.97. Tony also mentioned that this year the school tax went down but they also said not to get used to that because it was mostly due to COVID money, etc. John said that 2021 taxes were artificially low. There were things that were not voted on at the Town meeting due to a mishap which also made it lower. Pam asked

Pam asked if the Select Board has concerns. We will not have as much tax money coming in even when the tax bills go out in July. Pam said it could be a tight fall because of this. The Select Board do share this concern as well.

A resident asked if we have to do the ½ of the tax rate for the July bill or can we do more. This is a good question. We have always done the half so Sara is not sure if there is an RSA that states this or if it can be changed. She asked Pam if she ever had this come up when she was the AA and she hadn't but they did have some pretty mean falls. Sara will look into this.

Warrant Articles

The proposed Warrant Articles were reviewed. Sara explained that the first two articles are ballot articles that will be voted on March 8th. Ruth will have sample ballots to put out before then.

Article 1: The Town Officials

The open positions are as follows:

- Selectman- 3 Year Term
- Moderator- 2 Year Term
- Trustee of the Trust Fund- 3 Year Term
- Planning Board- 2 positions for 3 Year Terms
- Cemetery Trustee- 2 positions one for a 3 Year Term and one for a 2 Year Term
- Supervisor of the Checklist- 6 Year Term
- Zoning Board- 2 positions for 3 Year Terms
- Local Auditor- 1 Year Term

Article 2: Zoning Ordinance

Are you in favor of the adoption of the Town of Groton Zoning Ordinance (" Ordinance") as proposed by the Planning Board?

The effect of a Yes vote is summarized as follows:

1. Replacing the current one-page zoning with the proposed Ordinance, known hereafter, as The Town of Groton Zoning Ordinance will:
 - a) Establish zoning districts: A. Residential and Forestry/Agriculture; B. Rural Residential, Forestry/Agriculture; C. Renewable Energy/Other Businesses, Forestry/Agriculture, Conservation Cluster and Recreation
 - b) Guarantee personal property uses, and distinguish size and priorities within each district
 - c) Integrate the 2007 approved Floodplain Development Regulation as Article 6.
 - d) Integrate the 2015 approved Large Wind Energy Systems Ordinance (LWES) as Article 7

Should the proposed Zoning Ordinance fail to receive an affirmative vote, the 2007 Zoning Ordinance, the LWES and Floodplain Development Regulation will continue in their present forms as Groton's zoning.

Article 3: Operating Budget \$798,840

This was just discussed.

Article 4: \$182,500 for previously established Capital Reserve Funds

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **one hundred eighty-two thousand five hundred dollars (\$182,500)** to be added to the previously established Capital Reserve Funds. The Selectmen recommend this special article. (Majority vote required)

- Public Works CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2021 balance: \$60,064.44): \$100,000
- Disaster Relief CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2021 balance: \$30,186.57): \$50,000
- Police Cruiser CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2021 balance: \$5,735.68): \$10,000
- Truck/Sander CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2021 balance: \$1,020.87): \$10,000
- Assessing Reval CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2021 balance: \$3,002.18): \$7,500
- Electronic Equipment & Software CR Fund (Dec. 31, 2021 balance: \$3,432.38): \$5,000

Total Capital Reserve Funds \$182,500

It was asked if this is doubled because of this not being voted on last year. It was explained that there was no money put into this last year because there was an amendment that was put through but never then we never voted on the new amended article. John said that we did increase the Public Works and Disaster Relief since no money went into them last year but the others are pretty much the same amounts we have done in the past. Tony said the amendment was put thought but we failed to vote on it so we couldn't allocate that money.

The resident wanted to confirm that this will all be reflected in the second tax bill so maybe we don't want to do this all this year.

Another resident asked how much is normally put into the Public Works CRF. It was explained that we have tried for \$100,000 in the past but it was amended to \$25,000. John said if we ever want to put up a new building, we will never get there if we only put \$25,000 in it each year. The resident asked of the building is going in this year. John said no. She said maybe we shouldn't increase it this year and look at increasing it to \$200,000 the next year. John said if we increase it to \$200,000 the next year, we will be in the same boat with the higher tax rate. She said to be prepared to have this amended at town meeting.

Ann said that it is crazy not to put \$100,000 in this year since we don't know that the taxes will be next year, so to put \$200,000 into it the following year doesn't make sense. The resident said that she didn't say \$200,000. She is saying not to put too much in this year and put more in next year.

Pam said that we need to put this money in. The bottom line is we need a garage and we can't keep deferring it. We need to put money into our CRF. Even if our tax bill is higher in December, she doubts it will be as high as last year. We need to plan on \$14-\$15 per thousand every year for a tax rate. We need to fund these reserves.

Miles asked when does the Select Board anticipate to do another proposal, how many years? John mentioned that Tony found another option that we are looking into. Tony said he was going to talk about this with the next warrant article. The next article is for site work. We are going to amend the next article down tonight so it won't be for the \$100,000. We are hoping to do site work this year and do some planning such as septic, etc. Casey Kuplin gave a quote for this and he can do it for \$21,000 so we are going to bring this article down to \$30,000 which will do the site work and some plan design. He would level it all out, rip rap banks, graded and all set to build. We are going to turn the building around. We are looking at other options and won't go with an engineering firm but try to use a local person instead. Casey has offered to be the general contractor for us. He does this for a living, he will give the town a break as much as he can. He is building a garage in Hebron that is a little smaller than what we are looking for and he is paying \$300,000 without septic and has a house out back. It is through an Amish company so we are looking at getting quotes from them. Casey is trying to get this for us and thinks we could possibly do it for \$500,000 with septic and well. Tony said if we start this back up again, we will do a building committee and have other people in community to assist with this so it isn't just the Select Board. As a selectman he won't go through again what he did last year. Tony said we still have the \$250,000 grant. Sara wanted to point out that the grant was based on the plan for the last building so the amount could change if we submit a new plan for less money. The grant could be lowered or not at all depending. Once we have a new plan, we would have to reach out to USDA to see.

Miles has concerns with the amount going into Public Works Capital Reserve Fund and the amount on the article 5 as well. He said that the vote was closer this year than it has been but was still not voted on. He doesn't see the Town changing its position and he is concerned that we may be throwing money away.

Miles said he also wanted to remind the Select Board of something they professed to the Town last year. Miles said that the Select Board said that if that proposal was approved that our taxes were going to go down. The taxes did go down due to the other factors but as proposed right now the budget is going up not down compared to last year and what kind of message does that send. Tony said that we said that taxes this year would be going down which they did and still would have even if we did the building. John said that the taxes would be going down that year because if the building went through as planned, the previous year we raised over \$300,000 due to grants. If approved the highest bond payment would be \$100,000 and work its way down each year. So, when we said it was going down it was because it would have been less than the years before.

John wanted to state that he doesn't agree with Article 5. The way it is written before it is amended looks like we would be raising \$200,000 this year for the building, \$100,000 for the reserve fund and \$100,000 for the site work. He feels if we put the \$100,000 in last year at least we would be seeing the work of a building we can look at not just hopes of a building eventually. He also doesn't agree with this article because he doesn't agree with doing it in pieces. Each year we would have to go to the Town and ask for money he thinks it should be done all at once instead of going back and forth every year asking for more. One year we could do the foundation and then the next year ask for a frame and the Town could say no so the foundation could sit there for years getting weathered. He feels we either commit to it and put the building up instead of going back every year.

Miles said that he was under the assumptions it wouldn't be a onetime reduction in the taxes, it would be going forward because for years now we have been spending money improving the roads and other projects. His understanding was that once we crested this hill it would be lower going forward but as proposed it is more than it was last year.

Tony said that we need a building and need to do something. They could eventually stop the insurance and stop paying for the flood repairs. The last time was 4 feet of water in the building. We have to move forward somehow. Tony said that \$100,000 payment was based on the low bond interest and it would be less every year after that and then it would be done. Instead of every year having to put money towards a building that isn't here.

Miles said that up to this point the townspeople haven't been even close to approving this.

Tony said that people have approached Tony on this. Tony said that we wouldn't just do the foundation without the building. The site work should be done to do something there and put us in the right direction.

Miles said that who knows what could happen in the future. If we put money into the site work this year and another board in the future could decide not to do anything and now, we have spent money on site work for nothing. Tony said the site needs to be clean up anyway and it will stabilize the site. Tony said we can just bring it to the people and see how they vote.

Article 5: Site Work at Potential Site for Highway Garage

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000)** to conduct sitework at the land across from the Transfer Station which is the potential site for the future Highway Garage. (Submitted by the Highway Department)

The Select Board is amending this to \$30,000 since we got a quote for a lot lower. The wording will also say sitework and plan design instead of just sitework. It is a site plan not a building plan.

A resident said she was complaining about the previous article because she thought this was \$100,000 as well and \$200,000 for a building that isn't there yet on is a lot of money. Tony explained we didn't receive this lower estimate until this week which is why we are amending it.

Another resident said we saved the town money last year, by closing those funds and now we want it back. It was explained that those funds were closed and were going to be used for the building but the building wasn't approved so it went to the general fund. This did help lower the tax rate. Pam said there was benefit from this which was a ridiculously low tax rate for the community.

Tony said we are trying to plan for a building that is needed. The resident said we spent the \$100,000 so now we need to come up with more. John explained this wasn't spent, it went to the general fund which helped to reduce the taxes. John said we need a garage and we need to put money away for this or we will never have it.

A resident said that everyone agrees a building is needed but the amounts being presented are too high. If something was presented that was reasonable then it would probably go through but they haven't done that yet. Sara said this is not for lack of effort. The Building Committee, the Select Board, Bubba and herself have work hard on this to try to come up with quotes, we didn't just make the numbers up. We have worked hard on getting grant money. At every meeting someone says this can be done cheaper and we challenge them to find a cheaper price and they never bring anything forward. The ones who say this haven't attended the building committee meetings, or any other meetings on the building. John said that someone did try to come up with a plan but saw where the numbers were going and gave up. Someone was at the meeting last year and speaking loudly against it said to John after that if the Town had \$400,000 put towards it, then it would have gone through. John explained with the grant, the closed reserve funds and the capital reserve fund we did have that amount. Right now, Tony is working on something else that is looking hopeful,

Tony said that the way town meeting went last year was just wrong. They didn't even have a chance to speak about the building and that was wrong. Miles said what was done was legal but it didn't allow the Townspeople to become informed. Tony said agreed that it was an uninformed vote and we needed to inform them somehow. Tony said he is not giving up; we need a building.

A resident said that keeping the \$100,000 to put in the Public Works seems applicable but her concern was to see that amount in the Capital Reserve article and then the next article asking for another \$100,000 which didn't make sense to her. Tony said that is why we amended the other article because we received an estimate.

Another resident suggested that for town meeting the Select Board have more information with the long-term plans, how much money we will need, etc. so that the townspeople are informed. He said we need to show they are not putting money in just because they feel like it and have a reasonable story. John said it isn't just because we feel like it, it is because we need a building. He said that if the building Tony is

looking into comes in at \$500,000.00, that is if we put it up today but that could go up to \$550,000.00 next year. By putting \$100,000 away each year we will be saving towards this goal and then more money we have aside the more we can put down and the less we will have to get a bond for. Tony said that the bond rates were so low last year but they may not be when we go forward with the building again. Tony said if we keep putting small amounts aside like we had been we will never get ahead and will never get this building done.

Miles would like a full accounting of what has been spent so far on the building. Sara explained they have this information and they had it for Town meeting last year but doesn't have it with her. She will bring it to the next meeting.

Article 6: New Backhoe for the Highway Department

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **one hundred sixty-five thousand dollars (\$165,000)** for the purpose of purchasing a new Backhoe/Loader for the highway department with **fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000)** to come from the Heavy Equipment Capital Reserve Fund, **sixty-five thousand dollars (\$65,000)** to come from the unexpended fund balance as of December 31, 2021, and **fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000)** to be raised by taxation. The town has applied for a USDA grant in the amount of **fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000)** to assist with this purchase, and if it is received, the **fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000)** from taxation will not be needed. (Submitted by the Highway Department)

Sara explained that if the grant is received then no money will need to be raised from taxation.

Miles said the present backhoe is 10 years old. He asked if this has been maintained. Bubba explained that the first six years it wasn't maintained as it should have been and he has been doing his best to keep up with the maintenance since he took over. Bubba explained the backhoe is it is very tired due to climbing the mountain to pack the dump once a week, sometimes twice a week. It used to climb the mountain in 3rd gear and now it is struggling to climb it in 2nd gear. It is getting close to 5,000 hours but due to the harshness of climbing the mountain it would probably be closer to the wear and tear of 10,000 hours. Miles doesn't think that it has that many miles on it. Bubba said it does and he can get him the exact mileage but he knows it is over 4,000 miles. Miles said that surprises him. Miles asked Tony if he knows, but he thought that if they are maintained regularly, they typically don't need a rebuild until they are at 2,000 hours. Tony said he is not a mechanic so he is not sure of the exact number. Bubba said he thought it was around 4,000 but he isn't exactly sure either.

A resident asked if this is the one that they call Old Bessie that constantly goes back and forth in front of her house all of the time. It was confirmed this is what they are talking about.

Sara explained the reason they would want to keep the old backhoe is so that it could stay at the Transfer Station and then the new one wouldn't have to go back and forth all of the time and could stay at the Transfer Station for packing the dump and used for other things as well. Bubba explained that we wouldn't get a lot for trade in and it would also be used on projects on that side of Town so that the new backhoe wouldn't be run up the mountain unless it absolutely has to. John and Tony confirmed it would stay at the Transfer Station.

Miles said that he was on the Select Board when that backhoe was purchased. Kyle Andrews had concerns if we needed to purchase a trailer to haul it around. The representative from JCB was here and said that the way they are designed now is that they are fine to go over the road, it doesn't harm them at all, just normal wear and tear. Bubba said it depends on the roads that it is travelling. Bubba said this machine was a demo and didn't have all the features. Miles said it was brand new. Bubba said he knows

it was a demo. Miles said he guesses a demo could be brand new. Miles had the Town Report from when the backhoe was passed.

Miles also said that he noticed there wasn't any language in this warrant article about a trade in like there usually is so he thought that was where the Select Board was headed with this. He said the frames on these backhoes are good and as long as the motor is okay and you maintain it the way you should, you should get way more than 10 years use out of it, especially with the minimal loading that we do. It is like 2.5 miles to the dump, so how many miles are we putting on it. Ron said if you can make it up the mountain. Miles said again he would really like to know how many miles it has, Bubba said he will get that information. Miles said he recently traded in his tractor that he bought in 1985 and over the course of the 31 years, he had to replace the hydraulic lines that blew, dimmer sticks, and when he considered getting a new one was because the clutch had worn out. He bought a new one because he was deciding between putting money into the old one or getting a new one. Miles said to Bubba's point that he doesn't think we will get much for the old one, he thinks we will get a significant amount for it. He paid \$16,500 for his tractor and when he traded it in, he got \$9,000. Bubba said it is a different animal. Miles said his is essentially a backhoe. Bubba said he's not saying it isn't, but it is a different animal. Miles said he asks that Bubba gets quotes on what the trade in would be. Bubba said he will. Bubba said he also feels that if people don't think we should get a new one then they can vote it down. Bubba said it is very tired so we need a new one. Ron said that backhoe was not maintained the way it should have been. He worked for the highway department at the time and he can speak that it wasn't. Nobody ever saw anyone ever working on this.

Tony said that he is the one that put the bug in Bubba's ear to put a new backhoe on the warrant. We were going to do it last year but didn't want to with the building on there. Tony ran the backhoe in 2019 during the July storm damage and he has run a backhoe for 30 years and this one is loose. It doesn't seem to have the power it should have and he was very disappointed in it and the lack of maintenance is probably why. It would be fine for the Transfer Station and what they use it for but not for the road work and the work they were doing in 2019. Tony said it is nice to have two of them so that we have a back up if one breaks down. Right now, when it breaks down in the middle of a storm, we have nothing else and have to borrow or rent tractors. It would be nice to have a dependable machine and what we have is not dependable. Also, if we have one at the Transfer Station, we won't have to beat on the new one by travelling up the mountain to the Transfer Station or for some projects on that side of Town. It is not junk but it is not dependable and it would be beneficial to have two. Tony really feels this would be the year we should do it.

Miles said he cannot support this. We are keeping machines and vehicles because we aren't getting the use out of them. When he was on the board with Kyle, they tried to get rid of the Ford which we were told was a piece of crap and we got the Dodge. The Road Agent at the time at Town Meeting after already getting support for warrant article now wanting to keep it which leads to a surplus of machinery in the event of something happening but the reality is that things are going to happen. With the work that we do, the vast majority of things besides snow removal can be deferred to another day. We have a line for rental equipment if we need it. He thinks keeping machines and vehicles and we are not really getting the value or use out of them. Tony said this is different because the old backhoe will still definitely get used at the Transfer Station. Miles said that we have been fine with one for how many years, 30 or 40. Tony said we are trying to move ahead and save the life on the next one by keeping the old one. It is not good to run it over the road, you will run the wheels off of it. The salesman will tell you anything.

A resident said he would like to see what we could get for a trade in for the backhoe just so the Town could make an informed decision on this especially if we are planning on building a new garage across from the Transfer Station in hopefully 3,4, or 5 years down the road so going up and down the road wouldn't be an issue. He thinks we should have all of the facts before we make a decision. Tony said we will have Bubba get this. He thinks it was around \$20,000 when we last checked and that was a while ago.

Slim asked what year it was that the backhoe burned up. Miles said it was the Ford and it was a lot of years ago.

Article 7: Paving of Town House Parking Lot

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **forty thousand dollars (\$40,000)** to pave the parking lot at the Town House.

Pam said she would hate to spend the money but this parking lot is horrible.

Tony said also a lot of sand come in and ruins carpet.

Miles said he doesn't remember when the Town was founded if it was 1792 or 1793. Pam said it was 1796. Sara said it shows in the Town Report. Miles said for the last 226 years it has been this way and he has a few issues with paving this. It is not historical, paving the driveway. Any pictures we have show that it has always been gravel or grass. The majority of people have to deal with mud season period, not everyone has paved driveways in Town. The biggest concern is that we donate \$1,000 a year to NLRA and one of the primary things they propose that Towns adopt is to minimize impervious services where the ground water can't sink it and by paving that driveway, we are not making that situation better, we are making that worse. We have all had issues with the flooding and this won't help with the flooding, it will only make it worse. So, he doesn't support this.

Tony said we have the Tax Collectors office and the other offices here which leads to a lot of people coming in and out of here and people have asked us this. John said that there is a lot of foot traffic here. Tony said people are parking here and always asking when we are going to pave. The Townspeople wanted this so we got the quote and we will let the Townspeople vote on this.

Sherry asked if anyone has got stuck in the parking lot. Tony said we are not sure but that isn't the issue as much as people getting muddy, tracking it everywhere, etc. Bubba said we lose quite a bit of it. It has been brought up many times.

A resident asked how we came up with the amounts and asked if we got quotes. Sara explained that we reached out for quotes so we know how much to do the warrant article for. These are not bids and the project would have to go out for bid if the warrant article goes through.

Article 8: Paving the intersections in Groton

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **nineteen thousand dollars (\$19,000)** to pave the intersections in Groton.

A resident asked what intersections we are referring to. John said it is for the Town dirt road that goes to a state or town paved road, 50 feet, which will help preserve the roads and help to maintain them better. Bubba said that this is for Old Rumney Road, Edgar Albert Road and Blanchette. Sara pulled the quote and stated that it says North Groton Road intersections at Old Rumney Road, Edgar Albert Road and

Blanchette Lane. Bubba said we cannot do anything on Bailey Hill Road because it actually comes out in Dorchester.

A resident asked if these were private roads. They are not, they are town-maintained roads. John explained that Town does not touch the private roads at all.

Article 9: Recoating and Restriping the basketball court

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **nine thousand five hundred dollars (\$9,500)** to recoat and restripe the basketball court at the Everett Hobart Memorial Park.

A resident asked if this is actually used. Bubba said it is the one thing that people are using. Tony said that cracks are getting bigger and if we don't do something there could be more issues. Sara explained this has come up in the past but the quotes were so high and this is the lowest we have seen; the others were double this amount. Tony confirmed this is the lowest price we have ever got.

Pam said it is always a hard sell in Groton to get anything to make our town nice. This is a good idea but is always a hard sell. We wanted to get flowers and they said no because of maintenance. Another resident said that is a good argument for paving the parking lot and Pam agreed and said it should be done.

Article 10: Conservation Commission 3% Timber Tax

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of **two hundred ninety-one dollars (\$291)** for deposit in the Conservation Fund. Fund to be offset by **two hundred ninety-one dollars (\$291)** from the unassigned fund balance. This sum represents 3% of the Timber Tax revenue for 2021. (Submitted by the Conservation Commission)

Article 11: Transact any other business that may legally come before the Town

Deliberation

The Selectmen deliberated on the following items:

- The Select Board agreed to change the Deputy Town Clerk wages budget line to \$9,500.
- The Select Board agreed to change the Planning Board postage to \$500 due to possible Zoning Ordinance Mailings.
- The Select Board agreed to keep the Police Budget as it is and not change the uniform line or the postage line.

It was agreed that Sara will make the changes to the warrant and let the Select Board know when it is ready to be signed. Also, the MS-636 will need to be signed for the budget. **John motioned to come in and sign the warrant and the MS-636 once it is ready, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to close the public hearing on the Proposed Budget and Warrant Articles at 7:35pm, Ron 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant