

TOWN OF GROTON
SELECT BOARD MEETING
June 7, 2022

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

Audience Members Present

John called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

MINUTE APPROVAL

John motioned to approve the Work Session Meeting minutes of May 17, 2022 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted. John motioned to approve the Non-Public Work Session Meeting minutes of May 17, 2022 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted.

John motioned to approve the Select Board Meeting minutes of May 17, 2022 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted.

OLD BUSINESS:

Building Permit- Map 10 Lot 21

Tim Foy had previously submitted a building permit for his property in Old Rumney Road. This was sent to the Planning Board for review due to RSA 674:41 which requires the Selectman to consult with the Planning Board on any building application on a private or class VI road. The Planning Board reviewed it and reached out to their attorney for advice on how to proceed. The information from the Planning Board is below:

The consultation has occurred, and the interpretation of the Groton Zoning Ordinance requires a single-family principle dwelling to be located on a lot before Accessory Structures (detached from and clearly incidental and subordinate to the principal use and dwelling on a lot) can be built. The Planning Board thought that he might fall under the forestry exception but when speaking to their attorney she pointed out that the definition of forestry includes this statement – “which does not involve any existing, proposed, or future land development”.

He intends to build a house so this is what the Planning Board recommends the selectman consider: issue the building application for the sawmill shed subject to the condition that the owner subdivide out from his lot at least 2 acres for his house lot (could be the acres he cut for wood), providing 6 months to do so. The rest of the lot would remain as a sustainable woodlot/tree farm and might even be placed under current use to save property tax dollars. The other alternatives to consider and discuss with the Selectman are as follows:

- Wait till after Mar 2023 when we might consider amending the Zoning Ordinance definition of Forestry
- Build a sawmill shed 100 square feet or less (this doesn't require a building permit)
- Build a cabin (which could be used as an ADU- see zoning definition - after the home is constructed) with independent living facilities for one or more persons, including provisions for sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation at the same time as the owner builds the sawmill shed (this cabin can be a rough build)
- Appeal to the ZBA for a Variance

Deb Johnson had emailed this information to Tim. John asked Tim if he had a moment to review all the information and he had. John mentioned that his best option would probably be to do the forestry option. John mentioned that the only problem with that is that the land that is in forestry is kind of stuck in it as it says does not involve proposed or future land development. John said this is a good option if you are not planning on doing anything else with your land or if you were planning on just putting the rest into current use anyway. Tim asked if there was an option to do a building permit for a cabin and parallel path the shed. Is there an option for an extension on the cabin if it isn't done in two years. He said that part of his motivation is that the sawmill has

been delivered so they are itching to get started on their project. John said we would have to look into that. John said that there are valid reasons that it changed so that you have to have a residence on the property. At one-point, neighboring towns were buying properties and just putting up storage sheds which then doesn't really generate tax money and lowers the value of the Town and the Town wanted to stop that. John confirmed that he wanted to do a building permit for a cabin and then one for the shed. Tim confirmed and said that he could even do a bare minimum and call it a studio apartment/cabin. John said that if he did that with a way to handle wastewater then it would be an option. Sara said that one of the options Deb gave to consider was *"Build a cabin (which could be used as an ADU- see zoning definition - after the home is constructed) with independent living facilities for one or more persons, including provisions for sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation at the same time as the owner builds the sawmill shed (this cabin can be a rough build)"*.

John said that there are places in Town that are more used for storage or toys and in that structure, there is a small section that is cornered out which has kitchen, bathroom, sleeping quarters, etc.

Tony had the idea to put the sawmill under a cover-it so Sara asked if this would be an option. Tim said that he works in structural engineering and something like that would scare him with the weather and snow we get up here. He would want a more durable structure to protect the investment that they made.

Tim said that if this is a reasonable path forward, he can start the process for a small cabin. John said since he has the knowledge, he could probably even build it so that when he builds the house that the cabin can be incorporated into the house. Tim said that wasn't a bad idea.

Tim mentioned there is no electricity out there which John said is not needed. He said right now he is just thinking of a studio apartment style cabin with a place to cook, eat, sleep, etc.

John mentioned that we are meeting next Tuesday in a work session so if he can get something together and bring it in then the Select Board can add it to the agenda and review it then. Tim will work on this and will drop it off to Sara before next Tuesday. **John motioned to table this building permit until next Tuesday, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

NEW BUSINESS:

School Funding information

John stated that Terry and Eric came to provide the Town with some more information regarding the school funding. John mentioned that Alexandria is trying to push \$250,000 of their tax dollars on to ours which Groton has the second lowest poverty level all the towns in the school district, the lowest median income and the lowest number of residents in the Town. This would dramatically increase the taxation.

Terry and Eric provided handouts and Terry explained that Eric is a representative for the Article 5 Committee and Bridgewater's School Board representative Dominic was also in attendance. Terry said they looked at the demographics. The first thing they did was look at the median household income which ranges from \$55,833 to \$69,718 with Groton being the lowest and Alexandria being the highest. Alexandria and Danbury have the lowest poverty level, with Groton being the second highest after Bristol. The impact on the communities is that the ones with the oldest residents and the lower population are affected the most. In his opinion this is not the best way to do this. He said that looking at valuation is not a good way to do this. If we want to fix this, we dissolve the school district and see how many people want to get back on the train. There is a cart for each Town. The end result is that for every kid in the classroom every seat is the same.

The Towns like Bristol and New Hampton have a lot of developable properties so even if it looks like they may save money now, in the long run it may not. He looks at the equalized sales and last year there were 40,000 sales

in New Hampshire. Many of the homes in this area and North people were buying the properties over market value. This will have consequences.

The other thing they discovered is that we don't have a true ADM system. We actually have an ADM under the guides of the SWEPT (state wide education property tax). The school district doesn't like to talk about it but the reality is that they tell you that you are going to raise so much money to be added to the local tax on the ADM. The Swept tax is 100% equalized value so we really have a hybrid system. Next year, given the changes in the equalized values it will be hard to figure out your budgets.

Eric went over the local assessment and referred to a handout which was about how SWEPT is an equalized value, state mandated, funding of SAU4. This handout showed that Groton's local assessment is \$684,495 and with SWEPT we are raising \$901,683 for 47 kids. This is \$19,051 per kid so we are one of the highest per kid and Alexandria and Danbury are the lowest. This is before the changes to the funding. Looking at this and the demographics, there are only two towns that would benefit and get a permanent subsidy which are Alexandria and Danbury. They can easily afford to pay their own so they shouldn't be cost shifting to us. It was always based on ADM. If it changes to a 75/25, Groton, Hebron and Bridgewater would be increasing to about \$25,000 per kid. The average in NH is about \$17,000 per kid. We would better off breaking away from the school system and forming our own district. We already have an equitable system and with this some of us are already paying more per head with Groton, Bridgewater and Hebron all paying around \$19,000 per student now and the next closest town is pay around \$16,500. We already pay more per student and will pay even more if this change goes through. This is the message we want to get out to the voters across the board and get information out to other towns like Bristol and New Hampton that they are riding a train that may self-destruct.

Terry mentioned that all of this that is being discussed does not improve education it just shifts costs. There is a clause in the lease for the Bridgewater Hebron School that if there is a change in the formula then the contract will cease. They don't think this is a wise thing to do. It does lead to the argument that they could close and then have it be a separate stand-alone district for Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton. When you contact the Department of Education that you want to leave a school district, they ask what will you do with the kids. They had a constituent that wanted to leave the school district years ago because the middle school is lacking for scores, condition, etc. but they decided not to because it didn't make sense to do so. They are still a minority in the school. Bridgewater and Hebron build the school but they do not add up to 50% of the school. It is one of the few places that you build the school, give them a lease of \$1 per year and then they turn around and do this. Right now, it works well and doesn't cost that much to run.

Terry pointed out that all of the numbers they provided today were provided from the school district.

Eric said that it is becoming easier to develop a charter school and are successful. Parents are leaving public school systems and going to charter schools because they are more effective at educating the kids and the kids get a better education and better test scores. This would be another option since we have a facility. We should take this as an opportunity to shut Alexandria down but also to question and look at the quality of the education for the kids we sent to SAU4.

Terry said they don't want to upset SAU4 but what happens if they try to politicize this more than they already have. Concord now has American Education Fund where parents can go and get funding. There are a lot of people are dissatisfied with SAUs and cooperative school districts so there will be more changes in the future. The data is information for the Select Board to review. He said that none of this will work out well. It could start at 75/25 but will go to something else in a few years.

John said the tax payers need to realize is that by remaining silent now that next year if this goes through it will greatly affect them especially the way the country is going with inflation. Now is the time to be vocal, not once it goes through because once it goes through where will it stop.

Terry said that it will require a 60% vote. We need to relay this information to the tax payers and make sure they attend the deliberative session because people need to be heard. If you ask people what are the richest towns around here, they will say Bridgewater and Hebron but the reality is that Bristol is about 130 million more than Bridgewater in terms of their tax base and they are growing. There is more money coming into the area and there are more businesses that will show up which will help lower your taxes. There is not much potential for commercial property in Bridgewater, Hebron or Groton but Bristol and New Hampton do have the potential. If the formula changes and they grow it will bring up their valuation which will bring up their school funding and it will be harder to change it back later on. This formula for them would only be a short-term savings. It is not a towns responsibility to help another town.

Tony said a lot of Alexandria kids go to Hebron Bridgewater. Terry said that is correct, they have about 33 and last year was 45. There are 150 kids in the school, at one point there was 175. They own the building, furniture, and everything in the building except paperwork and some other stuff they have added over the years. The idea is that they built it for every body and they have always been the minority and expect it will stay that way for some time. There was the idea that building it would attract a lot of families with young children but that never really happened. There were some but not as much as they thought. The idea was to share it with everybody and that makes it a little annoying. They have put about \$8 million dollars into the building over a 20-year period and most of that was in the first five years because they paid the \$4-\$5 million dollars in the first five years to get it off of the books as quick as they could. TTCC uses the building and the fields. It is shared with everyone. Groton doesn't have to worry about being thrown out of there, not on Terry's time. It can be expanded and they have offered to add more classrooms on. They don't control where the kids come from, that is part of the contract, the only thing in the contract says that the first seats are reserved for Hebron and Bridgewater kids, they should not have to go to Bristol, and then the rest is from other towns. The only caveat is that all schools should have around the same number of kids per classroom. They don't get involved in school policies. It works well and they are proud of it.

John said it is very easy to get rid of your freedom but very difficult to get it back. Terry agreed and said if this passes it would be this way for 5 years. In that time, they would rally the troops and take a hike. If you think about the distance the kids have to take now to go here would be even worse. He talked to the guy that built the school and this building that cost 4-5 million back then would now cost 20 million. No one from Danbury will want to truck their kids all the way into town. Some kids from New Hampton are on the bus for over an hour to get to school when they are only about 15-20 minutes from Interlakes. Sara mentioned that we have some kids in Groton that are on the bus for over an hour. Tony said River Road students definitely are. Terry said that the school was originally a K-4. He tried to change it to a K-6 but it was agreed that it would be a K-5.

Eric stated that no matter what the Towns say at the meetings, Alexandria will put this forward no matter what so their goal is to educate everyone on how this will affect the tax payers in our towns. We will end up voting on this in one way or another.

Terry agreed that we need to look at all of these things. He reminded everyone that there is another meeting on this tomorrow, June 8, 2022 at Newfound Middle School. There are continuing to work on the bigger Towns.

Tony said that they don't have to convince Groton, we know our residents do not want our taxes to go up. It is the other Towns we need to convince.

Terry said there are other ones that lower the taxes for everyone. Eric mentioned state adequacy goes into a bucket and reduces the total school budget. The reason we get the adequacy is for students that have additional

needs and need more education. They cost about 25% more. It is close to being an offset. They don't qualify for adequacy. It ends up being a wash in all. We want to be prepared to argue that but it is really the SWEPT tax that people weren't even aware that we are paying that we need to look at.

Terry said they will be prepared in the spring but they are meeting with all Select Boards to make sure they have all of the same information. They are here to show the numbers which again is the information from the school district. We need to get this information out to the voters. Terry stated they are here to show the numbers; this is information from the school district. We need to get this information out.

The Select Board thanked Terry, Eric and Dominic for coming and sharing the information.

Intent to Cut Map 1 Lots 16 & 21

The owner submitted an intent for Map 1 Lots 16 and 21 for properties located on Bailey Hill Road. This is about a 35- acre cut. No bond is needed. **John motioned to sign intent to cut for Map 1 Lots 16 & 21, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Intent to Cut Map 9 Lot 2

The owner submitted an intent for Map 9 Lot 2 for property located on Groton Hollow Road. This is about a 15- acre cut. No bond is needed. **John motioned to sign intent to cut for Map 9 Lot 2, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

KV Partners agreement

Mike Vignale submitted an agreement to provide engineering services for the grant we are applying for regarding the culvert on North Groton Road. We had put him on retainer with an agreement back in 2020 for him to provide these services to the Town. The agreement states that the fee should not exceed \$3,400.00. We go have this budgeted under the grant line. **John motioned to sign the KV Partners agreement, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Deed info from Tax Collector

Ruth submitted a letter with a list of pending deeds. She asked that the Select Board review them to see if there are any properties that would cause a liability to the Town. There are 7 properties on the list from 2019. The Select Board does not see any properties that would cause a liability to the Town so Ruth can move forward. She will be sending them all letters as well.

SELECT BOARD ITEMS:

School funding meetings

John said that he goes to the school funding meetings and all he can say is that when the Towns taxes go up because of this they cannot look at the Select Board to blame because no one goes to those meetings, no one gets involved. He knows Terry said wait until the end but he thinks that the more people that get involved and go to the meetings and show they are upset with what they are trying to do may persuade them. That is why we are in the situation we are in now in the country because too many people stay silent. Alexandria doesn't care about Groton and how this will affect us, they only care about Alexandria and how it will affect them. If you are willing to hand over \$250,000.00 to them that is your choice but it is not something that he is willing to do.

Ann asked how much that \$250,000.00 will affect the tax rate. John said to compare, we could have built the town garage in four years at the \$250,000.00 a year but we didn't. In the past we have always been told to plan on the taxes increasing about \$1.00 for every \$100,000.00 that we increase the budget so this \$250,000 would make tax rate increase by about \$2.50 more per thousand.

Tony said the sad part is that it only took signatures to get that on the warrant. He knows Terry is trying to talk to other towns and he can talk to the Select Boards all he wants but when a voter sees a sign that says vote yes

and the taxes will go down, that voter will obviously vote yes not knowing the big picture. John said that is how they are selling it which will hurt them in the long run. They are only looking at today and not the future. If it goes through, who knows where it will stop. It is next to impossible to get out of the school district. Even if you try and fight it the other towns vote if you can get out or not. There are seven towns so if one leaves the other towns have to split what that town was paying so why would they want you to leave. Now is the time to pay attention to this.

DEPARTMENT ITEMS:

Highway Department

Bubba went over the following:

- People need to pay attention to cleaning out their driveway culverts. This is their responsibility. If you don't clean it out and it washes out a town road the resident could be responsible for that. The town has over 300 culverts they take care of that they are responsible for; the property owners need to take care of theirs.
- The barrel at Town pond bridge keeps getting moved so people can drive out there. The reason we put the barrel there is so people do not drive out there to save the life of the bridge. The Select Board agreed to put a jersey barrier there so that it is for foot traffic only and to put the barrel in front of it so people know it is there. Tony doesn't see an reason there would be an emergency that they couldn't respond to on foot.

Police Department

Chief said that it has been pretty calm but the traffic has been picking up with the warmer weather. There was also a tree that he had to have the DOT take care of.

Tony asked Chief if there has been a lot of people speeding on River Road since it was paved. Chief said that he has been down there a lot because there have been complaints and there has been an increase in speeding. Chief also put one of the radar signs there.

COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Fishing Derby

Slim said the Fishing Derby went well. No one caught the tagged fish but everyone had a good time. Slim was disappointed that they didn't catch the big ones that he saw being dumped but was glad to see the kids there. The Conservation Commission stayed after and talked about why there weren't that many people there and what they can do to increase the attendance. Sara mentioned the posters help and they didn't do them this year. They said they will go back to that next year and maybe more signs.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

There were no questions or comments from the audience.

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to adjourn at 8:03pm, Ron 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant