

TOWN OF GROTON
SELECT BOARD MEETING
March 7, 2023

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

Audience Members Present

John called the meeting to order at 7:11pm, after the Public Hearing on the building was complete.

MINUTE APPROVAL

John motioned to approve the Work Session Meeting minutes of February 21, 2023 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted.

John motioned to approve the Non-Public Work Session Meeting minutes of February 21, 2023 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted.

John motioned to approve the Select Board Meeting minutes of February 21, 2023 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted.

NEW BUSINESS:

Candidate Night Information

John asked if there were any candidates that would like to speak.

Tony Albert introduced himself and stated that he is running for Selectmen. He has done it for 4 years now. He took a one year term when Kyle resigned and then he ran for a three year term after that. He is running again for another three-year term. He has been a resident his entire life, all 60 years. He decided to step up after he retired from his 33 years of working for the DOT. He is willing to help the Town where he can. He thinks we have gotten a lot accomplished in Town. Sherry said that he is the first she knows of that was a native son and she thinks that is great. Tony said he would appreciate everyone's vote on Tuesday.

Deb Johnson introduced herself and stated that she is running for the Planning Board again. She was in the process of training Kristina to take her position but she had lovely child and is busy raising her child so Deb is running again so she would appreciate everyone's vote. She said the Planning Board is always looking for alternates so if you are interested, please let us know. It would be appreciated. You can email the Planning Board email if you are interested.

Pam Hamel introduced herself and stated that she is running as a write for Treasurer because she forgot to sign up so please write her in. She is currently the treasurer and has been for about 4 years now and would like to continue to be. She has been doing things on behalf of the Town since 2005. She started off as a Supervisor of the Checklist and she is still doing that. She worked for the Select Board and was actually treasurer before that. She asked everyone to write her in.

Ann Joyce interested herself and said that she is running for town auditor again. She said to vote for her if you would like to. It is a yearly report that she has to fill out. Pam said as the Treasurer she appreciates her doing this job. Sara said she also appreciates her doing this job.

Slim said that he is going to speak for Richard Ross since he couldn't make it. He wants to be a write in for a Cemetery Trustee position. It was mentioned that there is also someone else running for it and they are looking for two positions. Sara said it is Jonathan Beliveau. A resident asked who that was so Sara explained it is Amy Hardy's significant other. Tony said that would be great to have the Cemetery Trustees full.

John thanked everyone that is running. He said it is greatly appreciated.

Casella Meeting

Mike Casella and Amber Vecchiarelli from Casella had requested to meet with the Town. Mike said they wanted come in and talk to the Town. They know they sent a letter about the cost increases so they wanted to talk in person regarding these. The costs had to increase for the hauling for the trash because as everyone knows the costs of fuel and everything is increasing. There are driver and labor shortages. Also, unfortunately with all the landfills and what is going on in the news regarding this, it may get worse before it gets better. We may have to haul farther away depending on how much time they have left with North Country. The plan is 2027 for when that will close but they are looking at permitting other facilities such as Dalton but it will depend if that get that permit or not. It goes wherever they will permit a landfill nowadays which is part of the problem. Massachusetts doesn't really have any landfills and landfills are closing all over. They are hoping that the government will get involved with more grants and hopefully come up with a solution to the problem. He just wanted to come in to see if there were any questions or concerns from the Town.

Amber introduced herself. She said she is the one that sent the wrong letter and then sent the right letter. She is here to apologize for that. She said that if anyone has any questions, they are more than welcome to contact her. If she doesn't have the answer, she will find someone who does have the answer.

Norm Willey introduced himself. He said we are used to price increases this day and age and fuel surcharges and somehow, we are dealing with it. He said the letter we received shows a 62% price increase and asked for that to be explained. Norm said it is ridiculous. Mike said that they looked at all the pricing and it had to increase to cover the fuel costs and they are hauling it far. Norm said we understand that and 25% increase would be acceptable but 62% is not. Mike said he understands but they were not even close to covering their costs so they had to increase it. They have been working with these towns for a long time and want to continue to do so but the increases had to be done. They actually made sure to get the letter out so that towns could budget accordingly and so that the Town could work with Casella to see if there were areas that they could make changes to reduce some of that costs. The Town of Thornton is a perfect example. If we have to haul it further, they will want to put more material into the container so we are cutting the costs down.

Norm said he understands what they are saying and to their credit, we have dealt with other companies in the past and it was a horror show. He said Casella has been the best out of anyone else we have dealt with. It has been the best customer service. If there is an issue or problem Casella resolves it quickly. Our Transfer Station is on a posted road so there are about 4-6 weeks out of the year that we have to jump through hoops with DOT to get stuff hauled out of there and Casella always makes themselves available even with short notice. Norm said they are the best but this increase was outrageous.

Mike said that is why they came out here to discuss this and to see how they can work with the Town. They can provide the calculations on the fuel and the miles that they are driving. It is 130 miles round trip. They used to have a fuel surcharge and then they got rid of it but then the fuel costs were so high that they had to adjust. They always want to be fair to the Towns so they are willing to work with the Select Board to come up with ideas to save costs.

Sherry asked if we have enough money in the budget to cover these increases. Sara explained that she reached out to Amber and worked with her to use our number of hauls from last year at the higher rate so that we could budget accordingly. This is why the transportation cost line increased to \$66,000. Norm said hopefully that will cover it. Mike said they believe it will. Norm said that we hope it will. Every year we seem to gain more people and our visits per day increases every year, especially during COVID. Mike said they saw the same things on their end.

Norm asked what is going on with Dalton site. Mike said they are pushing for it but there are politics involved. Norm said that if that site were approved that would at least keep the costs from increasing. Mike agreed and said that would give them security for the future. A resident stated that this would be too bad for Dalton. Mike mentioned that the trash has to go somewhere. Norm mentioned that if you went to the Bethlehem facility you would be surprised at how little effect that site has on the surrounding area.

Mike said they do an open house every year and he can make sure that Amber gets us the information on this. They do cookouts and rides to the top of landfill to show what is going on and all of the engineering. It shows the controls they have in place for leaching management. These controls are required. They put a green house in using some of the heat. The information they provide is very impressive and it is a good time and very family oriented.

Amber said that the other thing she wanted to mention is that the numbers on the letter looks like huge increases but that is because the numbers that she pulled were from before the August increase, which are already in your budget. She also told Norm that they should definitely meet to go over any concerns at the Transfer Station, if anything can be done different and whatever else he would like to discuss. Norm said that he was worried when he saw the letter but the numbers that Sara worked with Amber on are acceptable. Mike said we didn't want to do this but had to get the letter out to get the conversations started, good bad or indifferent. That way they can budget for it and we can work through the other things instead of waiting until the last minute.

Slim asked if he heard it right that they are doing some recycling with heat with the greenhouse. Mike explained that they are taking landfill gas, which when you take it when it starts to break down it produces methane. They pipe that methane into generators to produce heat. He said that project just started. Slim asked where they are selling it to. Mike said he believes that Arra is the company that the partnered with, it is a small public utilities company. Slim said he is glad to hear this. Mike said again he will make sure the Town receives the information on the open house because it is a pretty incredible experience.

Miles said based on his comments it sounds like there are things they can do to reduce the costs even more. He asked for examples of what that would be. Mike said the big thing for them would be redesigning the way things are set up. It would be more like a 20 year plan but the Town could put a tractor trailer in and not use the roll off containers, buy a bigger piece of equipment to pack the waste in it. It would be a bigger up front cost but you should be able to pay that back over 10 years and then overtime it could bring costs down. This would add more weights to the trucks so that would also depend on where it is being hauled to and fuel costs. You would also have to look at the legal weight limit on the road to make sure it stays under. You could be going from 14 tons with the roll off container to 30 tons so you doubled your capacity and now you have 30 tons on your road which hauling that much weight can cause issues with the road that could cost more in the long run so it is weighing all of these options. Miles asked if the Select Board would be willing to have these conversations. The Select Board said of course they are.

Norm said we did look into covering the containers to keep water out but the costs were extravagant. Sherry said since we don't have the covers doesn't this cause water and melting snow to go into the containers so

we are paying for that extra weight. Norm said that is correct. Sherry asked why would we want that extra weight. Norm said the only solution is to put a cover over the entire area but the quotes we received were for \$160,000-\$180,000 for a steel structure. This is because of the height it had to be built for to allow them to be able to get in there and pack the waste with the backhoe. Wood structures were cheaper but were not recommended due to the weather. Mike said they just took one out at another Transfer Station. Norm explained that he sat down and looked at what we pay for tonnage and if you look at what we pay for the tonnage and the usage is much lower in the winter so the tonnage we pay is less so the cost for the covers is not justified. Norm said we could look at recycling cardboard but we would need to have the machine that compacts it and packages it and we do not have the area there for this. He looked them up and they are huge. Then you would also have to have a place to store the cardboard once it is put in the bale and equipment to move it around. John said we would also need the electricity set up for it which right now we do not have. Tony said right now we only have single phase there and he doesn't know how long we can keep that single phase compacter. As it is right now the lights go out in the building when we turn it on. Norm said most have three phase which we don't have here. Tony said we looked into and got an estimate from NHEC and it would cost about \$186,000. We have three phase about a mile down the road so that cost is to only run it another mile. Bill asked even though the poles are already there it will still cost that much. Tony said that is what they gave us the quote for.

There were no further questions or concerns for Casella. The Select Board thanked Casella for coming out to meet with the Town and stated that they are willing to work with them. Sara congratulated Mike on his new baby!

Eric Law- USDA

John mentioned that Eric Law from USDA arrived after the public hearing had already been closed but he wanted to come back to him and give him the chance to present his information to the Town. John introduced Eric and explained that he is the one that the Town has been working with for the USDA grant for the building.

Eric introduced himself. He explained they provided the Town with a \$250,000 grant due to the current building being in a flood zone. This grant can be used toward the building, salt and sand sheds. He said the grant was issued in late 2020 to early 2021 and we are not in the situation where the Town needs to use it or lose it. The federal government reaches out to them and asks what Groton is doing with that money. He knows that the Town has attempted to put the building through a few times which he knows the last time the bond vote failed. Since then COVID hit and there has been unprecedented amounts of funding available such as ARPA and other things. He believes the intent to is to use the ARPA funds towards some of these costs along with the grant and a now lower cost building to help get this passed.

Eric explained he doesn't come to a lot of Town Meetings but he is here today to stress that Groton will lose this grant if we do not use it. That is up to the Townspeople. You have to ask is the project necessary and inevitable that it will have to be done. He said this is your choice. If the Town doesn't want the money, we can return it to the feds but he wants everyone to ask if this is necessary and inevitable. If the answer is yes, that you are going to need it at some point, then the time to do this is now. If you wait you will not have the grant to offset the costs. Also, he follows construction costs all of the time and it is only going to get more expensive in a few years and you will not have the grant to help. Eric explained that you also you do not return federal funds because this will not be looked at positively in the future. They do look at the next applications and Groton's history and this wouldn't look good for future grants. This is a serious decision that the town has to make and they need to keep all of these things in mind. This is a pep talk but is also reality and common sense.

Sherry asked if Sara recorded this so we can play it at Town Meeting. Sara explained it is recorded and Ruth said she is getting it too.

Eric stated that if anyone has any questions that Sara and the Select Board know how to get ahold of him. Jeremy asked Eric if he would be attending Town Meeting on March 18th. He said he could see if he could attend if the Town wants him to attend. He said you have to look at the costs that you are spending on the building for repairs. They call these lifecycle costs. What does it cost to fix it out of your budget. What is the benefit cost analysis to have a new building out of the flood zone. He knows the Town did this but if you are going to say no to this project then do the benefit cost analysis and run the numbers on the cost. You have to compare numbers to numbers.

Tony told Eric that he feels the Town has this best chance this year. They got the numbers down so that the Town will only have to raise \$169,000 from taxation. Eric said that is what Sara explained to him. Tony said he has a good feeling and the townspeople have provided really good feedback. Eric said this is good to hear. He said that shows that the Select Board listen to the people, they heard the concerns and got the price down. Also, you have sources to pay such as this grant and ARPA funds that you wouldn't have had otherwise so instead of asking the Town to raise \$500,000 it is \$169,000.

There were no other questions or comments for Eric. The Select Board thanked Eric for coming out. Sara will send him an email with the date and time of the Town meeting to see if he will be able to attend.

Building Permit Map 10 Lot 4 (feedback from Planning Board)

The Town received a building permit for Map 10 Lot 4 37 Stage Coach Road. This is located on a private road so it had to be reviewed by the Planning Board. The Planning Board provided feedback. **John motioned to sign the building permit for Map 10 Lot 4, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

PA-29 Tax Credit for Service-Connected Total Disability

The Town received an application for the Tax Credit for Service-Connected Total Disability. The Town received the letter which states that the records of the Department of Veterans Affairs verifies that the resident was rated permanent and totally disabled. There were no questions. **John motioned to approve the Tax Credit for Service-Connected Total Disability, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Bill Oakley and Sara worked together for the changes and updates to the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Bill filled out what projects were completed and signed off on it. The Select Board Chair also has to sign off on it. **John motioned for him to sign the Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Local Septic Approval & Owners Certification- Map 5 Lot 29-3

The septic designer emailed a local septic approval for Map 5 Lot 29-3, for property on Sculptured Rocks Road. This is the site that Tony was working on the septic concerns as a Health Officer. All information is correct. **John motioned to sign the local septic approval for Map 5 Lot 29-3, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Local Septic Approval & Owners Certification- Map 1 Lot 3

The septic designer dropped of a local septic approval for Map 1 Lot 3, for property located on Route 118. All information is correct. **John motioned to sign the local septic approval for Map 1 Lot 3, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

SELECT BOARD ITEMS:

Election Day

John reminded everyone that Election Day is Tuesday March 14, 2023 from 11:00am-7:00pm. He hopes everyone will show up and vote.

Town Meeting

John reminded everyone that Town Meeting is Saturday, March 18, 2023 at 9:00am. If anyone would like to bring food this would be greatly appreciated it. He also hopes everyone will attend this meeting.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

House Bill 349

Jeremy Elder asked how the hearing in Concord on the house bill for the school went. John said it went well. He explained that tomorrow the education committee will be getting together to make a decision whether they support it or not and it will go to the House floor after that. We do not have a date for that yet.

John mentioned that there were a lot of people that showed up in Concord and a lot of people that gave testimonies for it. Out of all the people that spoke at the hearing, there were only two people who spoke in Concord against it. That was the Superintendent Pierre and a lady from the Teachers Union. He said it was kind of interesting. Pierre spoke and then left when he was done. She spoke and then left when she was done. She made it sound like if it passed, the day after the new SAU would be in place and kids would be kicked out of the school. That is not how it will work. If this passes there is four years for the towns to figure out the entire plan. Once the plan is developed it will be shared with the Town and the Townspeople will have the chance to vote if we leave the school district or not. He does feel it went very well.

Sherry confirmed that Hebron and Bridgewater are with Groton as far as the opinions that were shared. John said that is correct.

John explained that many people went online as well to show their support for the bill. There were over 200 that voted online and he believes there were only about 4 that were against it.

Tony shared that a committee member approached himself, Sara and the Lloyds after the hearing. She went out of her way to congratulate everyone on their testimonies. She thought everyone gave great statements. It was very positive feedback. Tony added that it is 10 republicans and 10 democrats on the committee so we will see how it works out. This is just to move it to see if it will pass but it is moving forward.

Sherry asked if the Superintendent was against it because they would get less money since they would be losing three towns. John said he thinks he is probably against their plan is to build another school right now and losing three towns would have a financial impact. John said that the Superintendent was asked if this was to pass would Newfound be open to the new school district paying tuition for grades 9-12, instead of saying it would be up to the school board to approve that or that he would support it, he said the opposite and implied that he would not be open to it, in a sense. John said it is not up to him it would be up to the budget committee and school board to decide that. Then he left right after that. Sara said the way he responded showed it wasn't about the kids.

John said it still hasn't been decided about where the kids would go. They could possible tuition to Newfound, to Plymouth or whatever the dollar amount is, they could possibly even use the amount to go to a private school and the parents would pick up the difference. Again, none of that has been decided and will not be

until this is passed and the meetings start. Chief Bagan asked if parents can decide where their kids can go. John said they very well could but that hasn't been decided yet. Tony said this is at the beginning stages of the process and gives four years to work that out. John said if this passes, they will then look at that. John said there are a lot of benefits and it has been proven that when kids are in a K-8 model that they are much more successful so it will benefit the students. Sherry said also shorter bus rides. John said that is true. Tony said his father always said you couldn't have built that high school any farther away from Groton. He said there will be some students that could be in 11th grade when it is decided and it could make things difficult for them but for the majority it will be a win.

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to adjourn at 7:58pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant