

Groton Select Board Meeting, Minutes, Jan. 6, 2022 (draft)

Select Board: Wade Johnson, Sr, Aaron Smith and Zachary Conaway

Treasurer: Lisa Hart, Town Clerk: Carrie Peters, Secretary: Debra Johnson, Road Commissioner: Harold Hatch, Asst. Assessor: Dorothy Knott, 1st Constable: Jim Downing, Zoning Administrator: Dan Webster

Visitors: Anthony Valenti, Lise Shallberg, Mark Shallberg, Blenda Lakin, Robin Irwin, Roland Irwin, Phillip Palmer, Michael Jolley, Irma Streeter, James Streeter, Alex Nut-de-Biasi, Zach Emerson, Jodi A. Fleurie-Wohlleb, Dave Sanville, Sabrina Sanville, Martin Klein, Signa Braman, Fred Braman, Peter Lyon, Dave Spencer, Gary Lamberton, Steve Hart, Ellyn Hart, Maddie Fredella, Livvy Fredella, Emma Partin, Trevor Hall, Tiffany Hall, and Mary Grant

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM.

Aaron made a motion to accept the minutes of Dec. 16, 2021 with corrections, Zach seconded, motion passed.

Adjustments to Agenda

None

Review 2022 Budget and Amendment

Wade first went over the rules for this portion of the meeting.

Aaron made a motion to open up the discussion to the public on the 2022 Budget, Zach seconded, motion passed.

First the SB is going to give their view of the 2022 Budget.

Zach said that we are here to get the public views of the budget, Aaron said he felt the same way.

Wade said due to the wage increase of 5.9% increase across the board which actually it isn't due to what the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer are getting paid in 2022. Wade does not agree that the Town Clerk, Town Treasurer and the Road Commissioner get paid the same due to the Equality Act of 2010 which states that you need to be doing the same job as a man or woman to get the same pay. In this situation it is not. These are the reasons that Wade voted NO on the budget of 2022.

Now it is open to the public for their questions. These questions need to be to the SB.

Lise Shallberg - she is a taxpayer, concerned resident about the proposed budget for this year. The town of Groton has 3 elected positions that are Town Clerk, Town Treasurer, Road Commissioner and Equipment Operator that are paid an hourly wage. Lise went over some of the past 10 yr salaries for some of these positions. But this year they are asking for a 5.9% raise across the board and the Town Clerk are asking for an additional hourly wages to meet that of the Road Commissioner. Lisa checked other towns and this has not been heard of. Lisa does not believe they should get the same pay and the Road Commissioner. Lisa also mentioned that the people in town who get stipends only have got one raise in the last 10 years. She said they need to be given a raise.

Mark Kline – He agreed with the 5.9% pay increase, stipends are not relevant and the \$27 an hour isn't unreasonable to him.

Wade Johnson – Wade said the Town Treasurer and Town Clerk are receiving \$21.82 an hour and going

to \$27.01. That's a huge raise to get in one year.

Dan Webster – He said a 5.9% increase and paying a lot for their health insurance is a huge benefit. People on Medicare do not get this huge raise when they take it back to pay for their health insurance.

Fred Braman – He said all these figures should be on a 40 hour week. Harold and Phillip get overtime.

Jim Downing – He said he gets \$21.84 an hour for the Constable and going around with a gun and has a gun pulled out at him. He asked why he isn't getting his pay equal to theirs (Town Treasurer, Town Clerk, and Road Commissioner).

Wade Johnson- He said a good question.

Robin Irwin – She said we are paying a higher Health Insurance this year.

Zach Conaway – He responded by saying that the Health Insurance went down this year. The health insurance for one person is \$30,644. There are 4 full time employees that can use this benefit.

The overall benefit package went down, there are 4 full time employees that can use this benefit, last year there were 3, this year there are 4 people which makes the insurance go up.

Robin – She said people can't afford this.

Blenda Lakin – an average family in this town makes only as much as one person in this town. The State only got 2.25% pay increase and pay 25% of their health insurance. Blenda checked around with other local towns and we, the town of Groton, are way above of other towns. Blenda said our pockets are only so deep.

Jodi Fleurie-Wohlleb – She asked, Why do the wages all need to be the same? What is the reason behind this?

Wade Johnson – He answered and said he was told that is do to equal pay.

Jodi Fleurie-Wohlleb – It is not equal jobs.

Wade Johnson – He said NO.

Jodi Fleurie-Wohlleb – You can't compare a Walmart worker and a CEO are not equal pay.

Zachary Conaway – He said you can't compare apples to apples. He said a Walmart worker and a CEO worker are not equal jobs. They are part of the same business. Zach said we are looking at the 3 positions. They have equal level of responsibility in different directions in the town. He said they all have parts to do that are their responsibility. He said they aren't the same job so we need to stop talking about that, they are elected positions. Zach believes they should get the same pay due to being elected positions, we need to set the example that we are paying someone an affordable wage in VT.

Mary Grant – She said that all elected officials should get the same rate pay. . There should be only one level of pay. She said the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer had done a lot of training. If you don't like this show it in your vote at Town Meeting. Mary said that taxpayers should go to the Budget Meeting that is open to the public.

Wade Johnson – He said that Jim is an elected position and he doesn't get those wages.

Mary – She said I know.

Jim Streeter – He pays taxes so he thinks he has a right to say something. He pays 10% more than an average person. I don't live here full time and don't get all the benefits. He is former Mayor of Groton, Connecticut and a part-time resident. There are 40,000 residence there. He has never, never heard of a pay raise going over 3%. He said the huge raise they are asking for is unreasonable. I can afford it but other people may not be able to afford it. Hze asked if the Grand List had gone up. Dorothy said it had

gone up less than one percent.

Steve Hart – A few years ago the Road Commissioner got a huge raise. There was no outrage over that. If the person that shovels the walk and takes care of the walk way gets \$25 an hour then why can't you pay the office help what they want.

Tiffany Hall – She said that the large pay raise is a crazy amount of money. Her mom is a RN and doesn't make that much. They have 2 kids and struggle to pay their taxes.

Lise Shallberg – Mary referred to coming to the SB Budget meeting which is open to public. Lisa was not aware that meeting was open to the public.

Wade Johnson – He said the meetings are posted in three places and on the town website.

Lise Shallberg – Lisa was aware that you sat their for 7 hours and the SB signed the wages at the end of the meeting. Then the SB was handed out the wages that the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer typed up. Even though the paper was signed it does not mean the wages were passed.

Aaron Smith – He said the Taxpayers approve the budget

Wade Johnson– He said when you compare the paper with the wages and the minutes of the Budget Meeting, there is nothing on the minutes that says the wages were passed. Wade did check with a lawyer with that. The lawyer said that you as a SB member need to make the decision of the wages not the workers of the town. The lawyer stressed this.

Lise Shallberg– She says the stipends need to be brought up to date. Another thing Lise brought up is that she had posted posters in the Post Office and other places in town and she been told that someone from the office had been taking them down. Lise said that is very unprofessional.

Wade Johnson – He said if that is the case, what they are doing is constitutional violation. He said the person is breaking the law.

Lise Shallberg – the insurance we are paying is \$30,644 per person. This is a lot of money in a years time.

Zach Conaway – He said no place where he has worked for has used the health insurance cost as part of his wages. It has a benefit that the town has given their employees for years. The town is committed to pay for the health insurance.

Lise Shallberg – She said she is part of old school and my health insurance has always been part of my wages.

Fred Braman – He said the insurance has gone up tremendously.

Aaron Smith – He said in 2021 we paid for 3 people and in 2022 the town is paying for 4 people's health insurance.

Fred Braman – On the front of page 1, Fred went over the wages of some of the town employees for the years 2021 and 2022. He thinks the employees should get only 3% increase not 5.9%.

Blenda Lakin – Blenda suggested raising the employees share of the Health Insurance from 10% to 20%.

Wade Johnson – He said this was not discussed to do this.

Aaron Smith – He said the insurance was discussed with all employees.

Gary Lamberton – The Health Insurance should be fair to everyone.

Wade Johnson – The issue due to the change in Health Insurance years ago, the people wanted to be grandfathered cloused in to keep their same benefits.

Steve Hart – He said that Lisa, his wife, didn't take the Health Insurance for 7 years so that saved the

town approximately \$30,000 each year.

Aaron Smith – He said insurance is a no win situation. Everybody has the issue with health insurance. He said the employees should have a good insurance and want them to do a good job for the citizens by doing the appropriate work.

Mark Shallberg – He is hearing a lot about Health Insurance but the reason we are here is the large raise along with a 5.9% increase. Are they going to start working 40 hrs a week, going to be on call, or let Harold and Phillip only work 30 hours a week and if the roads need work done then the SB will take care of the roads. That's the way he felt about this situation. The town can't keep paying high wages, and we are beginning to look like the Federal Government. He said these huge wage increases need to be reviewed.

Jim Downing – In the past we have had the State Police to do the control work. They didn't want to work for us. Jim said it is going to cost a lot more money to have a sheriff do the patrolling in the town.

Zachary Conaway – The Caledonia County Sheriff sent us a letter on how much it would cost for the town to do the patrolling. It will cost the same as having Jim Downing doing the work.

Jim Downing – He said if the town doesn't want him anymore he needs to know so he won't do any more training so he can look for something else.

Point of Order by Wade Johnson.

Mary Grant – Mary worked on the equal pay in 2017, 2018 and 2019. She went over what the town office ladies do and what the Town Highway Crew do. She said the ladies do the grant paper work.

Wade – He said Harold does a lot of the grant paper work for the Highway grants for the town.

Mary Grant – He does the road work grants. The girls do the figures.

Wade Johnson – He should get double pay because he is a Road Commissioner and a Road Foreman.

Zachary Conaway – Point of Order, He said if we are talking about the performance of the officials then we need to have an executive session.

Wade Johnson – I didn't realize it. I was just trying to make a clarification on something that was said.

Michael Jolley – He asked if Jim Downing is going to get the large raise also? He also asked and heard about the posters being taken down. He asked if the SB is going to look into this situation.

Wade Johnson – Could be a possibility. If it is a town official doing this, then the SB needs to look into the issue.

Dan Webster – We were discussing the budget. Who and what is this based on?

Zachary Conaway - Everybody who is getting an hourly wage is getting the increase of 5.9%.

Gary Lamberton – He asked what the total percentage of increase in the budget from last year to this year. The increase in the budget this year is about a 6% increase. This is very close to the 5.9% cost of living

Wade Johnson – He said it usually has been 3%.

Fred Braman – He said that the SB should think of lowering the salary from 5.9% to 4%. They have to have their insurance.

Wade Johnson – He said we don't know from year to year what the raise is going to be.

Jim Streeter – Did the Grand List for the town go up? You need to consider the tax payers when considering the wages.

Dorothy Knott – She said it has gone up less than 1% in the last couple of years and increasing the budget by 6%.

Jim Streeter – He said it went up less than 1% and the budget is being raised by 6%.

Zachary Conaway – He said half of that is the benefit increase.

Jim Streeter – He said you can re-vote using the Robert's Rules of Order.

Wade Johnson- He said that we are amending the budget now.

Jim Streeter – The SB does have the right to make an amendment using Roberts Rules of Order.

Debra Johnson – She said she has a question for the SB. At the Budget meeting and at the end you (SB) were given a sheet by the Town Clerk. My husband, Wade, talked to a VLTC lawyer and he said that the SB needs to set the wages, so no one should have helped in that. What would you SB have voted for the budget if that paper had not been given you?

Wade Johnson – He said he would have voted the usual 3% increase in wages.

Zachary Conaway and Aaron Smith – No answer.

Aaron made a motion to amend the 2022 budget from 5.9% increase to a 3% increase across the board after listening to the taxpayers in Groton and to include Jim Downing, the Town Constable, Wade seconded,

Wade asked the SB to cut the big raise in half to be a compromise to be favorable for the taxpayer.

Zach – He said it needs to be done, and later in the meeting we will be voting on how much money to use from the fund balance to reduce taxes. It's important to set an example for wages, his opinion, as a private citizen and SB member.

Wade – He said the Constable should get the same amount because he is an elected official.

Zachary – He agreed that the Constable should get the raise also.

Aaron – He said there isn't time to discuss the stipends.

There was an addition made to the motion to add Jim Downing, the Constable to get the same raise since he is elected that Aaron was willing to add.

Motion passed. This raise is \$25.50 plus the 3% increase.

Zach made a motion to accept the 2022 budget with the amendment, Aaron seconded, motion passed.

Community Club

Zach met with Peter Lyon on the concerns with the Community Club bills and requested somebody to be at tonight's meeting. There are some concerns that need to be brought up at the next meeting.

Infrastructure: Drainage and Parking

Zach said the next steps is to get the right of way on Mill Street. Have not heard on the Leahy Grant. This project will done in 2 phases and will be done in a couple of years.

Highway

They have received the Leaf Blower.

Treasurer

The TAN Note for \$500,000 at 1.15% from Union Bank needs to be renewed. The SB signed the note.

Zach made a motion to renew the TAN Note from Union Bank for \$500,000 at 1.15% for the year 2022, Wade seconded, motion passed.

Lisa said there PO's to sign.

Lisa and Carrie had the conference with NEMRC to change from Modified Accrual Accounting to Cash Basis Accounting.

Lisa had the Cemetery Contract done and need the person to sign.

Aaron will be signing in to the ARPA Portal.

The Fund Balance was tabled until after Carrie speaks.

Town Clerk

Carrie mentioned of having the Rabies Clinic in March done at the Community Building this year. This will be done outside in the people's cars.

Town Meeting – SB needs to vote on how they want to do it this year since Covid is spiking. The State is recommending having Australian Ballot.

Aaron made a motion to have the Groton Annual Town Meeting to be Australian Ballot on March 1 and have an informational meeting on Thursday, Feb. 24 at 6:30 PM on ZOOM, Wade seconded, motion passed.

The articles were discussed.

Wade made a motion to use \$100,000 from the Fund Balance to lower the tax rate, Zach seconded, motion passed.

Since we are voting this year by Australian Ballot, anybody running for a position at Town Meeting needs to fill out a consent form and a petition with (1%) 8 signatures by Jan. 24th even if you are an incumbent. .

The Highway Mileage Sheet needs to be signed by all 3 SB members.

Asst. Assessor

The 2021 Equalization Study was received on Dec. 23, 2021 with all the rules are included.

Gary has the new printer set up and is working great.

Fire/FAST

Zach read the letter from the Secretary of the Groton Fire Dept saying that the Fire Dept. is the new Fire Chief for the year 2022.

Zach made a motion to accept Wade Johnson, SR as the GVFD Chief for the year 2022, Aaron seconded, motion passed.

Wade is hoping to do more training this year with the Fire Dept.

1st Constable

Jim is having the cruiser fixing the barren and having the body work done. There will be an article of consideration of having the Constable or having the Caledonian Sheriff do the patrolling.

The contract for the Woodsville Ambulance came and is \$29,427.20 which is higher than what was budgeted.

Wade will contact Derek and tell him that the town needs the yearly budget earlier so it can be put into the budget.

Phillip thanked the SB for looking out for him and supporting him. I'm just an employee. He hopes the next employee that takes his place that the town has more consideration in the job.

Zoning Administrator

He will be doing some training on the zoning laws. There is a planning Commission meeting on Jan. 18. They are working on a permit for subdivision.

Health Officer

The goat lady now has 9 goats or more. Dan took a bale of hay to them. She didn't answer the door. Dan will be going to visit again. A wellness check will need to be done if Dan can't get a hold of her. They are going across the road to get water. The State will not help with goats.

Maintenance

Robert had changed the water flow which caused ice on the sidewalks, so the Highway Dept fixed this issue last week.

IT

Dorothy hasn't been able to send emails on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Gary worked on this and there was one setting that was wrong.

Set Agenda for next SB meeting on January 20, 2022

- Meeting called to order
- Review/Approve Minutes of Jan. 6, 2022
- Adjustments to Agenda
- Community Club – two overdue bills
- Infrastructure: Drainage & Parking
- Highway
- Treasurer
- Town Clerk
- Asst Assessor
- Fire/FAST
- 1st Constable
- Library
- Zoning Administrator
- Health Officer
- Maintenance
- IT
- Planning Commissioner NEK (CUD)
- Set Agenda for next SB meeting on Feb. 3, 2022
- Sign Orders
- Adjourn
- To Do List: Junk/Trash Ordinance

The orders were signed by the SB.

*To see all that was said at this meeting, please go to Kingdom Access Television/Groton Select Board 1/6 Regular Meeting - YouTube

Aaron made a motion at 8:49 PM to adjourn, Zach seconded, motion passed.
Respectfully submitted,
Debra Johnson
SB Secretary

Wade Johnson, SR, Chair

Zachary Conaway

Aaron Smith