



## Town of Dunstable Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes

**Tuesday, February 20, 2024**

**In attendance:** Chairman Ron Mikol, Selectman Kieran Meehan, Town Administrator Jason Silva, Chief of Police Erik Hoar, Exec. Assistant Sue Fayne

**Absent:** Vice Chair Leah Basbanes

*The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm by Chairman Mikol.*

### **Public Comment**

No Public Comments

### **Approve Meeting Minutes from 2/6/24\***

After review, there were no changes or updates needed to the minutes.

On a **motion** by Selectman Meehan and **seconded** by Chairman Mikol, it was **VOTED** to **approve** the Meeting Minutes dated February 6, 2024. The vote was unanimous.

### **Request to Present to Board – Erica Flynn**

Ms. Flynn brought a presentation to share her thoughts on the FY2025 Budget. She began by sharing that she conducted research related to revenue and expenses for the Town of Dunstable's FY2025 budget. Based on her research, Downtown Andover alone has over 31 restaurants, bringing in \$694,000 in revenues annually. In looking at retail marijuana, she found that towns can only collect up to 3% for taxes on marijuana sales.

With an assumption of annual sales of \$2.5M (\$1M - \$2.5M average annual revenues per dispensary), revenues for the town would be \$75,000 per year. In her opinion, relying on those revenues would not solve the problem. Instead, she suggested raising the commercial tax rate. Her recommendations for revenue are to stop buying land for conservation, attract/build smaller homes for singles, childless couples, and seniors.

Ms. Flynn then spoke of expenses, specifically of the GDRSD School district. She provided a comparison of test scores to costs per student, and she concluded that every state that has a higher average SAT score than MA has a lower cost per student. She also highlighted that over the last 30 years there have been increases in costs for public education, no decreases, both nationally and for Groton-Dunstable School District. She spoke of average reading scores and math scores that have gone down, with the largest drop in recent years between 2020-2022.

Ms. Flynn spoke of the teacher and Administration salaries as compared to workers in the private sector. She quoted from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, at the lowest skill levels—a GS-6 on the federal scale—teachers earn salaries about 26 percent higher than similar white-collar workers. At GS-11, the highest skill level, teaching pays 17 percent less than other white-collar jobs. She also stated that the current Superintendent is making the 2nd highest in the "Market Basket" towns. She shared her opinion that the district is overspending on Guidance Counselors, claiming that removing 9 guidance counselors will still keep the district below the ASCA recommended average and save \$675,000. Ms. Flynn also claims that the district has excess spending in Health Services and could remove 1 nurse, saving \$65,000, and

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she believes that the Boutwell School is not mandatory pre-k, so that should not be included in the operating budget.

Ms. Flynn recommends that the district implement transportation and increase athletic fees. She ended her presentation by stating that:

- Spending more money is not having a positive effect on testing
- There is plenty that can be done to increase revenues prior to an override
- There are expenses that can be offset by charging fees per child
- Towns need to push back on the school system to cut out of control spending

Selectman Meehan asked if this presentation was shared with the School District. Ms. Flynn said no, she was planning to share it on social media. He recommended that she reach out to present this to the School Committee and also mentioned that in education today, the validity of test scores being used as a metric to measure a student's success is not as much of a factor anymore. There was also a brief discussion about data positioning. Regarding business in town and taxing them differently, we have very few businesses in town, and shifting the burden of the tax to commercial would impact businesses significantly due to the small amount we have in the town. The overall revenue for the town stays the same, shifting the tax rate shifts the burden, it would result in the businesses paying significantly more and residential marginally less.

Chairman Mikol thanked Ms. Flynn for all of the data she presented and the analysis she performed. He said there have been recent discussions about some of the suggestions brought up in the presentation. He suggests that this is sent to the School Committee and the district, digest it, and put it back on the agenda with a reply from the School Committee. He then opened it up for questions:

- A resident inquired why the extra money and support that the district has received hasn't impacted student performance and testing.
- Brian Flynn made the comment that SAT score correlation seems to be based on the people in the town, the parents, the community. He also shared that he's unhappy with the continued increase in taxes.
- Joan Simmons shared her opinion that a commercial tax rate isn't a good idea, as it will push small businesses out of town when we are trying to attract them.
- Alan Chaney inquired if anyone has asked the small businesses in town what they would think of a commercial tax rate. Chairman Mikol stated that no, we haven't because collectively as a town we're concerned about the impacts to our businesses.
- Brian Lacapo had some questions regarding the Boutwell School. Why do we have that building? Move the school to another building. It's an \$875,000 expense.
- Sara Axon shared feedback regarding her experience with the school district, and she has concerns about using ARPA money for permanent positions and presenting it as "level services" in the budget.

#### **FY25 Town Operating Budget\***



On a **motion** by Selectman Meehan and **seconded** by Chairman Mikol, it was **voted to recommend** the Town's FY2025 Operating Budget with total expenditures of \$13,992,812 requiring an additional \$763,266 in property taxes contingent upon passage of an override ballot question and, further recommend a 3-year general override to cover the operating expenses of the Town and Groton Dunstable Regional School District assessment in the amount of \$2,074,351 to be presented to the residents of the Town of Dunstable at the Special Town Meeting on Tuesday, March 26, 2024 and at a Special Town Election on Tuesday, April 2, 2024. **The vote was unanimous.**

#### **Brattle Group LIP Proposal – 41 Lowell Street\***

Without Vice Chair Basbanes in attendance, Chairman Mikol recommended that they defer this topic to the next meeting. TA Silva and Jim Tully will work on an agreement that outlines the conditions and benefits to the Town, before we convene for the next meeting.

#### **Ballot Questions and Warrant for Special Town Election on April 2, 2024\***

On a **motion** by Selectman Meehan and **seconded** by Chairman Mikol, it was voted to approve the following questions for the ballot at the 2024 Special Town Election and to provide written notice of such questions to the Town Clerk in accordance with M.G.L. c. 54, Sec. 42C:

##### **QUESTION 1:**

Shall the town of Dunstable be allowed to assess an additional \$2,074,351 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of funding the operating budget of the town and the assessment of the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**The vote was unanimous.**

#### **Appointment to the Master Plan Implementation Committee – Select Board Representative\***

Chairman Meehan will represent the Board of Selectmen on the Master Plan Implementation Committee.

On a motion by Chairman Mikol and seconded by Selectman Meehan, it was voted to appoint Kieran Meehan to the Master Plan Implementation Committee. The vote was unanimous.

#### **ARPA Reallocation Request – newsletter mailing\***

On a **motion** by Selectman Meehan and **seconded** by Chairman Mikol, it was **voted to approve** the use of remaining ARPA funds, up to \$1,000, for the mailing of the Selectman newsletters to all households, to include printing and postage. **The vote was unanimous.**

#### **Town Administrator's Report**

There wasn't a review of the TA Report since most topics were covered.

#### **Items not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair**

Selectman Meehan suggested that the Historical Commission and Conservation Commission look into the Malancin property on High Street, which is for sale, due to the historical designation.



The Board of Selectmen will be meeting on Tuesday, 2/27 at 6:30pm before the Budget Forums, to approve the STM Warrant and open the Warrant for the Annual Town Meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:25pm

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Sue Fayne  
Executive Assistant to the Town Administrator  
and Board of Selectmen**

Approved 3/12/2024