Town of Dunstable Select Board
Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 29, 2025

In attendance: Chair Leah Basbanes, Vice Chair Kieran Meehan, Select Board Member Ron Mikol, Town Administrator Jason Silva; Executive Assistant Sue Fayne
Absent: Executive Assistant Sue Fayne

The meeting was called to order at 5 PM by Chair Basbanes.

Public Comment

Resident Bob Kennedy addressed the board regarding his concerns about speeding on High Street. He suggested painting the speed limit directly on the road surface to improve visibility and compliance. Mr. Kennedy provided a photo showing the current speed limit sign was difficult to see. He noted that other towns like Stow have implemented road painting of speed limits.
Chair Leah Basbanes said they would take the suggestion under consideration but expressed skepticism about its effectiveness without additional enforcement measures like speed bumps or police presence.
Vice Chair Kieran Meehan acknowledged speeding was an ongoing issue in town. He suggested the speed trailer could be deployed as a short-term solution but was unsure of long-term options for straightaways.
Member Ron Mikol noted that painting lines on roads is not unusual and is done in other towns like Cambridge. He recalled the issue had previously been referred to the road commissioners for review.
TA Jason Silva confirmed he had sent an email about the suggestion to the highway superintendent and believed it was discussed at a road commissioners meeting, though he was not present.
Chair Basbanes said she would follow up with Stow to see if they found painting speed limits on roads to be effective before reconsidering the conversation with Dunstable's road commissioners.
Joan Simmons asked about the legality of a resident painting the speed limit themselves out of frustration. The board did not have a clear answer but suggested it would likely not be allowed.

FY26 Preliminary Budget Presentation and Discussion

TA Silva gave a presentation on the preliminary FY26 budget.
Key points included:

- Estimated 2.5% increase in tax levy plus $110,000 in new growth
- Significant reduction in excluded debt for FY26, mostly on school side
- Estimated 4% increase in state aid
- $50,000 reduction in use of free cash compared to FY25

- Department requests resulted in 5.5% overall increase
- Schools assessment increased 9%, including capital and debt service reductions
- General government increasing significantly based on:
    - Municipal salaries increasing slightly over 4%
    - Insurance and assessments up almost 10%, largely due to 24% increase in pension assessment
    - $22,000 total increase for police/fire communications in preparation for regional dispatch
- Three budget scenarios were presented:
    - Based on new revenue available ($318,000):
        - Town Receives $119,287 – creates deficit of $110,242 based on TA Recommended Budget
        - GDRSD Receives $205,085 – creates a deficit of $546,464 based on level service budget.
        - GLVTS receives $4,464 – creates deficit of $3,013
    - Matching Groton assessment without override – creates a deficit of $261,600
    - Level service budget for schools requiring override – creates a deficit of $659,719

TA Silva noted the town would need a $261,000 override to match Groton's assessment. A level service school budget would create a $659,000 deficit for Dunstable.
The board discussed the challenges of balancing town and school needs within available revenue.
Concerns were raised about infrastructure needs, especially at the library. TA Silva explained they are pursuing grant opportunities and state funding to address some facility issues over time.
The board expressed openness to considering an override question but wanted more analysis of options. TA Silva said he would continue refining budget recommendations and awaiting final numbers from schools and insurance.

Approval of Meeting Minutes from January 29, 2025*

The meeting minutes were accepted as submitted.

On a **motion** by Member Mikol and **seconded** by Vice Chair Meehan, it was **voted to approve** the meeting minutes from January 29, 2025. **The vote was unanimous.**

Appointment: Bonnie Ricardelli as Interim Treasurer/Collector*

Bonnie has graciously agreed to take on the full time Treasurer/Collector role while the town continues it's search for Andrew Wall's replacement.

On a **motion** by Member Mikol and **seconded** by Vice Chair Meehan, it was **voted to appoint** Bonnie Ricardelli as interim Treasurer/Collector. **The vote was unanimous.**

NMCOG Presentation: At Home in Greater Lowell

Representatives from the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) presented on their regional housing strategy "At Home in Greater Lowell."

Key points included:

- The plan aims to address housing affordability and accessibility challenges across the 9 communities in the region
- Data shows population growth is flat, but the number of households is increasing, creating need for different housing types
- Vacancy rates have declined significantly, correlating with increased housing cost burdens
- The plan proposes local and regional actions over a 5–10-year timeframe
- Strategies include zoning changes to allow more diverse housing types and reviewing inclusionary zoning policies
- NMCOG is seeking municipal support for advancing local actions aligned with the regional strategies

Board members raised questions and concerns about:

- Impacts on town infrastructure and services
- Balancing development with open space preservation
- Dunstable's unique position as a small town in the region
- How to incentivize appropriate development
- Aligning housing goals with other town priorities like walkability and conservation

NMCOG representatives emphasized the plan provides a framework for each town to implement in ways that fit local needs. They will incorporate feedback and return with more details on implementation.

Architectural Services Contract: Library and Bandstand Improvements*

TA Silva explained the proposed $9,000 contract with Emerald Design for architectural services related to repairs at the library ($6,300) and bandstand ($2,700). The library portion would address issues with exterior doors, windows and trim using state grant funding.

Member Mikol expressed concerns about prioritizing doors and windows given more critical infrastructure needs at the library like the boiler and HVAC systems. TA Silva noted they are pursuing other grant opportunities to address those larger issues but wanted to utilize the available state funding for immediate needs.

On a **motion** by Member Mikol and **seconded** by Vice Chair Meehan, it was **voted to award** a professional services contract to Emerald Design Build for architectural and design services for repairs to the bandstand and repairs to the library in the total amount of $9,000 - $6,300 for the library and $2,700 for the bandstand - and authorize the Chair to sign the contract on behalf of the Board. **The vote was unanimous.**

Textile Bin Relocation*

The board discussed relocating the textile recycling bins back to the original location, located on Pleasant Street next to the Post Office. This move will be temporary, however MCO Associates did give permission for the Board of Health to relocate them until further notice.

On a **motion** by Member Mikol and **seconded** by Vice Chair Meehan, it was **voted to relocate** the textile recycling bins to the municipal site in the location as discussed, being parallel to the driveway and perpendicular to the road. **The vote was unanimous.**

Building Improvement Contract: Police Station Window and Door Replacement*

On a **motion** by Member Mikol and **seconded** by Vice Chair Meehan, it was **voted to award** a contract to FRG Contractor Corp for the repair and replacement of the windows and doors at the Police Station in the amount of $44,235 and authorize the Chair to sign the contract on behalf of the Board.

> *Ron Mikol moved to award a contract to T&T Contractors for the repair and replacement of the windows and doors at the police station in the amount of $44,235 and authorize the chair of the board to sign the contract on behalf of the board. Kieran Meehan seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

TA Silva noted the $44,235 cost would be fully covered by state grant funding. An additional $20,000 previously allocated for the project from town funds would now be available for other uses.

Member Mikol reminded that the police station is in a historic district, so window replacements may need approval. TA Silva said he would ensure the contractor submits plans to the Historical Commission for review. **The vote was unanimous.**

Annual Report Discussion*

The board briefly discussed potential changes to the format of the annual town report. After reviewing examples from other towns, they decided to maintain the current format for this year given other priorities and budget constraints. They agreed to revisit potential updates for next year's report.

On a **motion** by Member Mikol and **seconded** by Vice Chair Meehan, it was **voted that the Select Board enter into Executive Session** pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 30A, Section 21(a), Purpose 2, to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel, specifically Jason Silva, the Town Administrator, and to conduct contract

negotiations with nonunion personnel, Jason Silva, the Town Administrator. The Board will not reconvene in open session following Executive Session. **The vote was unanimous.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sue Fayne
Executive Assistant