

What's Going on in Dunstable?

THE DUNSTABLE SELECT BOARD'S QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2, 2023

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Town's Financial Crisis threatens Town Services

In August, Town officials started the FY25 budget process – the Town Administrator created a School-Town Budget Working Group, departmental budget worksheets have been distributed, the Town Administrator is participating in the Groton Town Manager's TriComm meetings (similar to the School-Town Budget Working Group in Dunstable), and the Town has drafted a Capital Improvement Plan and a financial forecast for FY25 through FY28.

Over the course of this time, it has become clear that the



Groton Dunstable Regional School District will need a much larger increase than was originally contemplated in the initial forecast for FY25. Rather than a 6% increase, the schools have presented a 14.5% budgetary increase based on a variety of

factors; the major factors are listed below:

- Elimination of the full-day kindergarten fee
- Removal of the use of Excess and Deficiency funds to balance the budget
- Anticipated increases in employee related costs – salary and benefits
- Inflationary increases in utilities costs

On the Town side of the budget, because there are 52.2 payroll weeks in FY25, salary increases have been adjusted accordingly and other modest miscellaneous adjustments have been made.

In sum, the Town's general fund revenues (tax levy, cherry sheet receipts, local receipts, and free cash) are estimated to increase by 2.76%, from \$12,765,559 in FY24 to \$13,117,656 in FY25. Estimated total new revenue for FY25 is \$402,097. However, because the amount of free cash being used to balance the budget has been reduced by \$50,000, the total available new revenue for FY25 amounts to \$352,097.

The Town's operating expenses are estimated to in-

crease by 3.78% from \$4,579,163 in FY24 to \$4,752,049 in FY25. The major factors contributing to this increase include salary increases, benefits/insurance estimated increases, and a new cruiser in the Police Department added back to the budget after being removed from the budget in FY24 due to the availability of ARPA funding. In addition, \$119,344 has been included in the forecast for capital expenditures, which was removed entirely from the FY24 budget, once again, due to the availability of ARPA funds.

Considering these adjustments, the FY25 projected budget deficit has ballooned from \$399,491 to \$1,067,093.

The Select Board, Advisory Board, and Town Administrator continue their work on the FY25 budget and have accelerated the budget process to better align with the Town of Groton and the Groton Dunstable Regional School District's budget calendar. The Town will continue to update the community on the budget process as it moves forward and the Town's financial picture for FY25 becomes clearer.

AARP-funded Walk Dunstable Project

The Town continues its work with Northern Middlesex Council of Governments on the AARP grant-funded project, Walk Dunstable.



The Town is hosting a public meeting to discuss and review our work to date. The public meeting and walk audit are scheduled to take place on Wednesday, October 4 at 5 PM. Thus far, we've hosted a

successful walk audit with town officials and stakeholders, and a productive meeting with seniors where we received helpful feedback.

We hope you'll join us on October 4!

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Resident Survey Available

The Town has started the process of creating a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan thanks to a \$37,000 grant from the



Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

As part of this process, the Town has published an online survey seeking feedback from residents and asking residents to share their experiences with extreme weather events in Town. The survey results will help shape our Municipal Vulnerability Prepared-

ness Plan, help the Town be more resilient to extreme weather events, and improve our planning and response during these events. The survey is planned to close on Friday, October 13.

You can take the online survey by visiting the following link: tinyurl.com/DunstableHMPSurvey.

Stay updated on what's happening in the Town of Dunstable and the work of your local government! There are many ways to stay informed:

- Sign-up to receive email notification on our website, www.dunstable-ma.gov/subscribe, provide your email in the appropriate fields, and check off any notices you would like to receive.
- Follow us on Facebook: @dunstablema and Instagram: @townofdunstable
- Subscribe to our Youtube Channel: @townofdunstable3179

Questions? Email selectmen@dunstable-ma.gov

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2023 Special Town Meeting Warrant Open

The Select Board voted on September 20, 2023 to open the Warrant for the 2023 Special Town Meeting to be held on Monday, November 13, 2023, and to close the Warrant on Monday, October 16, 2023 at 4 PM.

The last day to register to vote to participate in the Special Town Meeting on November 13, 2023 is November 3, 2023 at 8 PM.

For information on Town Meeting, you can visit [here](#), where you'll find [information on citi-](#)

[zen petition articles](#) and the [petition residents should use to submit citizen articles](#).

To register to vote, check your voter status, and for other voter information, please visit [here](#).

The warrant won't be finalized until after the deadline for resident articles on October 16, however, it is anticipated that the warrant will include the following:

- A zoning amendment to the Town Center District Zoning Bylaw allowing re-

tail alcohol sales at a maximum of one location within the District

- A Special Act to petition the state legislature to allow the Town to change the name of the Board of Selectmen to the Select Board
- Debt exclusion request to fund the PFAS mitigation project at the Groton Dunstable Regional High School

As more information is available, it will be shared with the community through all communication channels available including Facebook, Instagram, and our website, www.dunstable-ma.gov.

Draft Capital Improvement Plan Completed

Over the course of the last several months, the Town of Dunstable has compiled a comprehensive 5-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for FY24-FY28. The CIP provides a strategic roadmap to improving and maintaining the Town's infrastructure, facilities, recreational and historic assets.

This plan encompasses a wide range of areas, including:

Infrastructure Improvements:

The Town recognizes that our roads, public buildings, and other assets help define our Town and its character. By proactively planning and investing in the maintenance and repair of these assets, we can effectively extend their

lifespan and reduce the need for larger, more costly repairs in the future.

Public Spaces and Facilities:

The Town's conservation and recreational areas, Town Common, and library are the heart of the community. Other Town buildings like the Fire and Police Stations, and Town Hall are critical in delivering high-quality services to the community. Maintaining, upgrading, and expanding these spaces create opportunities for recreation, community events, and other activities.

Transportation Improvements:

Through planning efforts, the Town has identified projects to improve safety and accessibility for all users of our transportation network in-

cluding our streets and trails. Seeing these projects through from design to implementation helps promote the safe use of alternative modes of transportation and further increase access to the Town's many recreational, off-road trails.

Vehicles and Equipment: Routine maintenance and regular replacement of the Town's vehicle fleet is crucial for safety, reliability, and operational effectiveness.

By strategically allocating resources to these key Town areas, we not only address immediate needs but also lay the foundation for the future success of the Town.

To view the complete Capital Improvement Plan, please visit [here](#).



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PFAS Mitigation Project at the High School

The Dunstable Board of Selectmen, Water Commissioners, along with the Towns of Groton and Pepperell continue their discussion and work to solve the PFAS contamination at the high school.

As background, the Groton Dunstable High School is served by an on-site well, a separate public water supply, operated by the Groton Dunstable Regional School District.

On March 2022 testing of this public water supply found PFAS(6) concentrations of 490 nanograms/liter (ng/L) at the High School. Subsequent follow-up testing at downgradient water users found concentrations up to 123 ng/L at 13 private wells in the Town of Dunstable and 3 in the Town of Groton.

The PFAS contamination is attributable to the use of firefighting foam by the Groton Fire Department at the High School during construction of the track on June 17, 2003, to extinguish a fire.

MassDEP requires PFAS levels lower than 20 ng/L in sum of 6 PFAS compounds in any public water supply.

Currently, the EPA has proposed new regulations limiting PFAS levels to 4 ng/L, not yet in effect.

On March 2, 2023, MassDEP issued a Notice of Responsibility to the Groton Dunstable Regional School District including interim deadlines.

On a temporary basis, bottled water is being used at the high school and some of the surrounding properties for cooking and drinking water purposes. At one address, MassDEP installed and is maintaining a point-of-entry treatment (POET) system because PFAS levels tested above 90 ng/L.

The Notice of Responsibility required the installation of POET systems at all residences with PFAS levels at or above 20 ng/L and a plan to maintain those systems and monitor PFAS levels.

The School District must respond with a plan for a permanent solution by January 31, 2024.

Most recently, the Groton Select Board and Dunstable Board of Selectmen held a second joint meeting to discuss the options to solve this problem. Three options were discussed and

both Boards voted to support a regional approach to solve the problem which includes the three Towns of Dunstable, Groton, and Pepperell. At the meeting, the Boards voted to authorize the Town Administrator in Dunstable and Town Manager in Groton to begin negotiations on the cost share of the project. Those negotiations are currently happening, as we also work to seek out funding opportunities at the state and federal levels of government to remove as much of the cost burden as possible from the residents of the three communities.

Only if the Towns are able to come to agreement on the cost share of the regional project will it be able to move forward. To fund the mitigation of PFAS at the high school, which is required by MassDEP, a debt exclusion will be needed.

As a next step, the Groton Select Board and Dunstable Board of Selectmen have another joint meeting tentatively scheduled on Monday, October 16 at 5 PM.

Leading up to this meeting, town officials plan to continue conversations and continue outreach to state and federal leaders.

Town Common Bandstand Renovation Out to Bid

Thanks to \$75,000 from the state, the Town is in planning to renovate the Town Common Bandstand. Improvements to the electrical connection were made several months ago.

An Invitation for Bids has been issued and is posted and, also, has been advertised on COMMBUYS, in the Central Register, and the Groton Her-

ald. Responses to the IFB are due Tuesday, October 10.

The project includes: replacing the cedar shake shingle roof and crown molding; replacing floorboards as-needed, replacing horizontal tread boards of stairs and railings on both sides of stairs; replacing the wood skirting base; and scraping and painting the structure.



Town Partners with Pepperell on shared Treasurer Collector position

The Board of Selectmen has appointed Andrew Wall to the position of Treasurer/Collector. The Town has worked with the Town of Pepperell on a shared services, regional model. Andrew brings a strong background in municipal finance to the position as he currently serves as Assistant Town Accountant in the Town of North Andover. Prior to his role in North Ando-

ver, he served as Assistant Treasurer/Tax Collector/Payroll and Benefits in the Town of Georgetown and Head Clerk in the Treasurer's Office for the City of Methuen. He also brings finance and customer service experience in the private sector. We expect him to start at Town Hall mid-October.

We'd also like to take this opportunity to give our sincere thanks

and appreciation to Bonnie Ricardelli for coming back out of retirement to help the Town get through this transition period. Her professionalism, expertise, and commitment to the Town is truly appreciated. We're grateful for her continued assistance as Andrew transitions into this new role and continuing to benefit from her support moving forward.

Town and National Grid Begin Paving Streets

National Grid has started the process to mill and overlay Hall Street, School Street, and Groton Street. The work is expected to take approximately 2 weeks to complete, weather dependent. The Highway Department also completed paving a portion of Depot Street and Lake Street.

350th Anniversary Hometown Hoedown - October 14

SAVE THE DATE!

The 350th Anniversary Grand Finale is planned to take place on October 14, 2023 from 5 PM to 9:30 PM. They'll be food, games, music, and MORE! Don't miss it!

To stay up-to-date on all 350th Anniversary events, be sure to monitor the Town website, www.dunstable-ma.gov and the Dunstable 350th Anniversary Celebration on Facebook.

Coffee with the Town Administrator

Have a question about Town government? Need help with Town services? Want to learn more about what the team at Town Hall is working on? Join the Dunstable Town Administrator Jason Silva for coffee and conversations at the Farmhouse Cafe, Thursday, October 5 from 10 AM to 11 AM. The coffee is on him!

Volunteer for the Town!

There are openings on Town Boards and Committees - Advisory Board, Capital Planning Committee, Memorials and Monuments Committee, and Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board of Trustees. Visit the Town's website at www.dunstable-ma.gov to check out the vacancies. If interested, please send an email to selectmen@dunstable-ma.gov! We hope you'll apply to serve!

Union Building Restoration and Reuse Process Continues to progress

The Town's Union Building Rehabilitation Committee has selected an architect and the Board of Selectmen has awarded a contract to Spencer Preservation Group to assist the Town in developing an Adaptive Reuse Feasibility Study and Restoration Plan for the Union Building. They are also working with the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments on this project. Just last week a site visit was conducted by the consultant team and later in October we expect there to be the first public meeting to present the Town's work to-date and to seek input from the community on reuse ideas and options.

More detailed information to come on how residents can provide feedback and get involved throughout the process!

FY24 State Budget Earmarks

Thank you to State Senator Edward Kennedy and State Representative Margaret Scarsdale for their work to secure funding for two essential projects that will greatly benefit our town.:

- A \$50,000 earmark was included in the FY24 state budget for the acquisition of a new command vehicle for our Fire Chief. This vehicle will enhance our department's ability to respond effectively to emergencies, ensuring the safety and well-being of our residents.
- A \$250,000 earmark was also secured in the FY24 state budget for the replacement of the Joint Grass Brook culvert. This funding will play a pivotal role in improving our town's infrastructure and safeguarding against potential flooding, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for our citizens.

These investments in our community will have a lasting impact and without this state funding, we would not be able to address these critical needs.

MCO Associates MUD District proposal update

The Board of Selectmen has approved both a Land Development Agreement and a Lease Agreement with MCO Associates for the development of 44 rental housing units in the MUD District, 25% or 11 units will be affordable. MCO has prepared and submitted a Local Initiative Program application to the Board of Selectmen, through the 40B program, for their review and approval. If approved by the Board, the application will then be submitted jointly by the Town and MCO Associates to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities.

Town Administrator creates Town-School Budget Working Group

Because of the significant anticipated budget gap in the FY25 budget, the Town Administrator has created a Town-School Budget Working Group to begin the budget process early with the goals of establishing a regular, open line of communication between the Town and School District, assisting in the coordination of budget preparation, reviewing and building a greater understanding of the overall financial condition of the Town, and seeking to build consensus on budget approach and funding. The makeup of the working group is the Chair of the Board of Selectmen, Chair of the Advisory Board, Dunstable Representatives on the Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee, Superintendent of Schools and the School District's Director of Finance and Operations, and the Town Administrator. The Working Group has held one meeting and another is scheduled for this week.