

## Gorham Fiscal Stability Committee

# Highlight Notes

Monday, April 22, 2024

Conference Room A, Gorham Municipal Center

## About the Meeting

### Objectives

- A. Understand and agree to our Purpose, Deliverables, and Operating Guidelines.
- B. Establish our Meeting Schedule for the next 12 months.
- C. Identify and prioritize our needs for information.
- D. Get to know each other and look forward to our work together.

### Attendance

- Committee Members
  - Lou Simms
  - Phil Gagnon
  - Ephrem Paraschak
  - Heather Perry
  - Quinton Donahue
  - Norm Justice
  - Thomas Poirier
  - Susan Coyne
  - Chris Kelley
  - Christy Damon
  - Sarah Perry
  - George Fox
  - Sarah Perkins
  - William Benson
- Facilitators
  - Craig Freshley
  - Megan Smith
- Observers
  - 2 members of the public

### Agenda

- 5:40 **Arrive early for a light dinner, to be provided**
- 6:00 **Opening**

Superintendent of Schools Heather Perry and Town Manager Ephrem Paraschak will welcome the Committee and introduce Facilitator Craig Freshley who will explain the nature of our work together, the meeting Agenda, and ask everyone to introduce themselves.
- 6:15 **Our Purpose, Deliverables, and Guidelines**

Craig will explain our proposed Purpose, Deliverables, and Operating Guidelines. We will make sure we understand these things, discuss them, and revise them as we see fit. We expect to agree on our purpose, deliverables, and guidelines.

- 6:45      **Meeting Schedule**  
As a group we will discuss and confirm how often we want to meet, how long our meetings should be, and our actual schedule of meetings for the next 12 months. Committee Members: bring your calendars!
- 7:10      **Information Needs**  
As a Committee, what do we need to understand in order to do our work? We will begin with brainstorming and put all our ideas up on the wall. We will organize, discuss, and prioritize our ideas. We will come to conclusions about what information should be provided to the Committee, and how.
- 7:50      **Closing Comments**  
Each member of the Committee will be encouraged to make a brief last comment such as a reflection on our first facilitated meeting and/or a hope for the future.
- 8:00      **Adjourn**

## *Meeting Guidelines*

Craig explained the following:

- A. Neutral facilitation**  
The facilitator will run the meetings including calling on people and calling for consensus and for votes.
- B. Room for all views**  
The facilitator will deliberately seek comments from ALL Committee members.
- C. Written themes and conclusions as we go**  
The facilitator will make notes on the screen for reactions and approval.
- D. Respect for all, always**  
Personal attacks and criticism are not tolerated. We might comment on positions, but not the performance of people in positions.
- E. Model behavior**  
Let's model how to do this. People are watching how we honor and blend our different views.

## Introductory Remarks

- Heather Perry
  - Looking forward to being part of this working group, acknowledging challenging fiscal cycles and rising costs as the needs of the school increase.
  - Identifying the school is a large part of the funding equation but does not exert large decision making influence outside of the education environment.
  - The school is committed to minimizing tax increases.
  - Excited to work together to produce great ideas so that Gorham can move forward.
  - Looking forward to developing the Committee's recommendations.
- Ephrem Paraschak
  - Hopeful that the Committee's charge includes a holistic look at school, town, admin and growth as a whole.
  - Wants to create a shared understanding of we get from Point A to Point B.
  - Framed the question, "As a community how do we allocate resources in a way that is sustainable?"
- Craig Freshley
  - SGR – Strategic Government Resources
    - Nation-wide Consulting Company since 1999
      - Craig is a Senior Vice President
    - Services to municipalities
      - Training and Facilitation
      - Executive Search
      - Interim Government
  - Good Group Decisions
    - Maine-based consulting company since 2003
    - Craig is the Owner
    - Services
      - Facilitation for governments and nonprofits
      - Talks and Training
      - Many free resources at [GoodGroupDecision.com](http://GoodGroupDecision.com)

## What We're Looking Forward To

All Committee members introduced themselves with their name, affiliation, and completing the sentence: *One reason I'm looking forward to this work is that* \_\_\_\_\_. Craig organized all responses into four themes, as follows:

- **Let's solve problems!**
  - Want to try to help with challenges
  - It's an important problem for us to solve - I like complex problems
  - Want to help the town
  - Passionate about the community

- **Plan the future**
  - Want to see how the future of Gorham gets shaped
  - Want to see how this contributes to sustainability
  - Looking for answers for sustainable growth for the town
- **Improve the process**
  - Will bring order to a much-needed process
  - Will move us in a positive direction
- **Learning**
  - Shared understanding of the challenges we face
  - Get a better sense of challenges faced by the school department and the town
  - Looking forward to learning a lot
  - I look forward to learning a lot
  - Let's see the whole picture
  - Desire for clarity

## Operating Guidelines

Craig explained the proposed Operating Guidelines and there was general shared understanding and agreement.

It was clarified that no numerical targets have been established related to the purpose, that the Committee could add to the deliverables if desired, and that the Committee is charged with making recommendations only, and not making any decisions on behalf for the Town or School Department.

See the Appendix for the Operating Guidelines.

## Meeting Schedule

The following dates were adopted by members present with the expectation that all will be in attendance. All meetings will be from 6:00pm to 7:30pm in-person at Town Hall. Members are welcome to bring dinner to the meetings

<b>May 20, 2024</b>	<b>October 28, 2024</b>	<b>February 10, 2025</b>
<b>June 10, 2024</b>	<b>November 21, 2024</b>	<b>March 10, 2025</b>
<b>August 26, 2024</b>	<b>December 12, 2024</b>	
<b>September 23, 2024</b>	<b>January 16, 2025</b>	

# Information Needs

## All Ideas for Information Needs



Each member of the committee wrote ideas for information needs and they were then organized by Craig on the wall as follows:

- **Taxes**
  - Map of property tax reviews
    - Per parcel
    - Per acre
  - Heat map of property tax \$\$\$
  - Business type
    - Listing
    - Taxes
  - Percentage of taxes - Commercial and residential
  - Municipal valuation
- **Capital Trends**
  - School capital
    - Budget
    - Forecast
  - Town spending needs - capital spending required
  - Large project capital planning

- School facility needs - capital spending required
- Long range capital plans (town and school)
- Town capital budget and forecast
- **Revenue and Cost Trends**
  - High level overview of town and school expenses; history and projections
  - Percentage including Dec YOY? School budget historical last 3 years by category
  - High level overview of Town and school revenues; history and projections
  - School operating budget with fixed costs
  - Historical revenue trends for Gorham, surrounding towns, and Maine
  - Historical cost trends for Gorham, surrounding towns and Maine
    - \$ not EPS
    - Current revenue streams
  - Current financial landscape
  - TIFS
  - TIFS
  - Identify all revenue streams (potential)
  - Impact fees
    - Current
    - Possible
  - Charts that identify
    - Biggest costs
    - Most flexible costs
- **Debt**
  - Town debt service schedule
  - Bond policy impact on CIPs
- **Demographic Trends**
  - School population history and forecast
  - A better understanding of residential and business growth
  - School growth forecast
  - School student count trends
- **Current and Planned Policies and Steps**
  - Current Town Council and School Committee steps being taken to reduce cost
- **Contracts**
  - Staff contract overview / negotiation process
  - Labor contracts
- **Best Practices**
  - Revenue streams available to both school/town to reduce taxpayer expenses
  - Example recommendations from municipalities and schools that have combined services to reduce cost

- Best practices
- **Staffing Trends**
  - Staff headcount and cost trends for schools and town
  - Staff recruitment and retention needs
- **Growth Trends**
  - Community “growth strategy”
    - what kind of growth do we WANT?
  - Overview of pending residential development requests, timelines, etc.
  - Understanding of how residential and commercial development affects town costs, infrastructure, revenue
  - Overview of pending commercial development requests, timelines, etc.
  - Zoning restrictions: where can we grow?
  - Growth management impact
- **Constraints**
  - What are the greatest barriers to cost reduction? SC / TC
  - State mandates
  - Special Education, 504s, ML, RIT, CDS
  - State EPS formula for dummies
  - EPS funding and revenue streams for school
- **Current Communications**
  - Current communication strategies to and across various stakeholder groups
- **How Decisions are Made**
  - Government structures: how are decisions made?

## *Schedule for Information Presentations*

### Meeting Two – May 20, 2024

#### **Overview of the current state and trends**

- Growth Strategies
  - Comprehensive Plan
  - Economic development plans
    - Turnpike spur
  - School enrollment plan
- Demographic Trends
  - Overall town population
  - Businesses
  - School populations
    - by age

- by type of student
    - The role of USM
- Current strategies and tactics
  - Potential pending developments

### Meeting Three – June 10, 2024

#### **Overview of how things work**

- How decisions are made
- How communications happen
- Contract Constraints
- State law and policy constraints
- EPS

### Meeting Four – August 26, 2024

#### **Revenues**

- Existing
- Property taxes
- Potential
- Growth Trends

#### **Expenses**

- Existing
- Projected

### Meeting Five – September 23, 2024

#### **Problem definition**

### Meeting Six – October 28, 2024

#### **Best Practices**

- Potential for revenue increases
- Potential for expense reduction
- Need to make sure they are relevant

### Meeting Seven – November 21, 2024

#### **Begin to discuss principles**

Revenues  
Expenses  
Communications/Process



## *Format for Getting Information to Committee Members*

The following guidelines were generally agreed to.

- Any member of the Committee can share information with the Committee at any time.
- Questions will be submitted by Committee Members ahead of each presentation to help presenters develop the presentation. To be organized by staff in a shared space. To be submitted 2 weeks in advance.
- Agendas will be posted on Thursday the week before any scheduled meeting and document links will be posted on the Town website that support each presentation.
- When it comes to numerical data, more emphasis on advance absorption and preparedness to tackle topics of discussion at meetings.
- In-meeting presentations will be managed by Heather and Ephrem.
- Committee members are encouraged to ask questions in writing in the week following each presentation.

## *Closing Comments*

- Excited
- Already starting to make improvements right now by getting people together
- Other towns are finding strategies that are working
- We are already seeing the different perspectives and how sharing serves us all
- Excited at the opportunity and looking forward to improve and develop the town in a meaningful way
- Good start optimistic that we're going to make progress
- I'm hopeful
- Very productive first meeting
- Looking forward to working with the group and learning new things
- Looking forward to providing info and training
- Lots of good work going on
- Like the ideas and energy
- Hopeful and optimistic
- This is a good example of what we can do together
- This has been very collaborative
- Excited that people want to learn about municipal government
- Reminds me of the strength of the community
- Optimistic and more than hopeful

## Appendix

### Gorham Fiscal Stability Committee

# Operating Guidelines

*April 22, 2024*

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## Purpose

To understand the existing financial landscape for the Town of Gorham and the Gorham School Department. To evaluate the future financial landscape, and to use this knowledge to make recommendations for how to maintain sustainable taxes while continuing to manage the present and future growth of our community over the next 5-10 years.

## Deliverables

- Development of a series of recommendations to the Town Council and School Committee for how to reduce costs (or mitigate continued cost increases).
- Development of a series of recommendations to the Town Council and School Committee for how to increase revenues that will offset direct taxpayer expenses at both the municipal and school levels.
- Development of a series of recommendations to the Town Council and School Committee for how to improve communications between various stakeholder groups within the community of Gorham to aid in understanding current and future financial limitations moving forward.

## Nature of Our Work

Unlike more traditional processes where parties tend to come to the table aiming to get their way and decisions are made by counting votes, we have in mind a more collaborative process where all parties try hard to understand each other's perspectives and try to find solutions that work for all concerned. This approach is supported by high quality neutral facilitation where all perspectives are shared and considered but where no one dominates. It's also supported by honesty and open-mindedness among participants and a willingness to compromise.

## Member Expectations

- Attend every meeting
- Research and reading between meetings
- Honor the purpose, process, and the guidelines

## Timeline

- We expect 1.5-hour meetings every month or two beginning in April, 2024 for about 1 year.

## Guidelines

### **1. Focused on our purpose**

All our work will support achieving our stated purpose

### **2. Meetings led by neutral Facilitator**

The facilitator serves the group as a whole and treats all members as equals

### **3. Decisions by consensus with votes when needed**

This means:

- A. We work hard to understand the situation and each other
- B. We try to understand all perspectives and accommodate concerns
- C. We look for agreement and try to be flexible
- D. Calls for consensus have three options
  - Support
  - Stand aside to allow to proceed
  - Block for the good of the group
- E. If the facilitator determines that consensus cannot be reached within a reasonable time, a vote will be called and the majority of those present will decide.
- F. All decisions of the group will be recorded on the spot in writing

### **4. Agendas decided by the Facilitator with input**

Committee members encouraged to email comments to the Facilitator after each meeting about the next meeting agenda and future agendas

### **5. Meetings in person**

To foster unity and shared understanding, all meetings will be in person. No proxies are allowed.

## **6. Meetings open to the public**

Members of the public are welcome to attend but discussion will be limited to members of the committee. On special occasions the Committee may invite comments from experts and/or the public.

## **7. Public comment via email**

- A. Anyone may email to [FiscalSustainabilityCommittee@gorham.me.us](mailto:FiscalSustainabilityCommittee@gorham.me.us) at anytime. All such comments shall be distributed to all members of the Committee and the Facilitator.
- B. All comments will be acknowledged but questions will not be answered.
- C. Comments should be respectful and helpful.

## **8. Notes provided by the Facilitator**

Highlight notes of each meeting with basic information, themes, and conclusions will be prepared and provided by the Facilitator.

## **9. All documents publicly available**

Via the Town's website, all agendas, notes, and other meeting materials will be available to the public. Agendas will be posted on Thursday the week before any scheduled meeting.

## **10. Meeting Guidelines**

- A. Neutral facilitation  
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