



Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., John F. Scott, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter.

Tuesday, January 9, 2007

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Scott and Councilor Streeter

Members Absent: Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond and Councilor Sheets

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. **Calendar and Communications**

Mayor Watson noted that the Planning Commission is conducting a large meeting in Community Room #2 and people are waiting outside the room. If the Committee of the Whole switches rooms with the Planning Commission, the Committee of the Whole meeting can not be televised. The Committee had no objection to moving and not televising tonight's meeting. The Committee recessed at 7:10 p.m. and reconvened at 7:24 p.m.

4. **Approval of Minutes**

None.

5. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None.

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

2006-0295

Overview of Town Departments

Discussed

Alan Benkert, Director of Library Services, introduced Rosemary Palmer from the Library Board. The existing building was built in 1977 with a major expansion in 1996. The facility is in good shape for at least the next 10 years. The Library is one of the busiest Town buildings, averaging more than 1000 visitors a day. Staff peaked at 24 FTE and is now at 20 FTE. There is a substantial group of part-time employees. The Library runs a two shift operation. Staff is changing and the Library is hiring new categories of employees including computer technicians and audio/video technicians. The emphasis is less literary and more technician and computer oriented.

The trend in services has been provision of services to people outside of the building with many on-line functions. Many people are not using the resources in the building, but using it to connect to resources outside of the building (e.g. internet, satellite television, GMTV, etc.) Web based services are very popular. The Groton history on line has been a very popular service, as well as the icon databases funded by the State of Connecticut providing a range of information resources such as magazines, newspapers, images, etc. The Library is also doing a lot of downloadable books and videos. Many services provided are paid for by the Library or the state, such as access

to *The Day* archives and a new 24 hour on-line reference service.

There is a trend toward the use of fiction books; non-fiction books are harder to keep up to date and people tend to use internet resources for non-fiction information.

The Library provides programs for all ages. The video cassette collection is being phased out and replaced with DVDs. The building has been rearranged and one-third of the floor space is now dedicated to computers and computer workstations. There is a computer training lab and the quiet study area is being used by people with laptops. The Library has two wireless networks that are even accessed by people out in the parking lot. The Library has a major commitment to its internet café. There are 94 computers in the Library; 13 staff PCs, the Connecticut library network, the computer training lab network, the integrated library system network, 7 or 8 stand alone computers, computer games for teens and children, one Comcast internet access computer, and backups.

Future trends are more of the same, with a big component being training people to use the Library services. There is a trend toward interconnectivity, e-mail and group communication, and electronic forums raising privacy and censorship issues. In conclusion, Mr. Benkert stated that the Library receives requests for and provides information in every imaginable format.

Councilor Streeter noted the lengthy wait for reviewing microfilm. Mr. Benkert noted that is old technology, and the Library is moving away from that. Most information on microfilm is now available on the internet.

The Library is not buying VHS tapes, although they are donated. Councilor Streeter asked about converting VHS tapes to DVD format. Mr. Benkert stated it is not economically feasible. Acquisition funds are being used for DVDs. The Library does not have unlimited space nor funds, and items used less frequently are discarded.

Local history materials are being converted to a digital format because they are unique.

Councilor O'Beirne asked that the Library not forget those patrons who do not use the internet. Mr. Benkert reassured Councilor O'Beirne that Library staff will still respond to whoever calls or walks in.

2006-0045

2006 Revaluation

Discussed

Sal Pandolfo, Director of Finance, and John Philip, Assessor, reviewed information regarding the revaluation that was distributed to the Committee. Mr. Philip discussed the valuation of industrial/manufacturing properties.

Owners of approximately 900 parcels or 8% met with CLT.

2006-0316

Mystic River Homes Tax Abatement

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted a staff referral memo from Sal Pandolfo. Jack Sebastian and Arlene Stamm noted two facilities for elderly low income people at Mystic River Homes, the cottages and the congregate facility. Many people require rent subsidies. There is electric heat in the cottages, and insurance costs are rising. The cottages were granted an 80% tax abatement when they were constructed. Rising taxes are becoming an issue for the residents and federal subsidies are not increasing. The congregate facility, which is a state subsidized facility, has a 100% tax abatement. Mr. Sebastian requested a full abatement on the cottages' property taxes. Town Manager Oefinger explained this action would require an ordinance. The additional 20% reduction represents approximately \$7,700 in taxes.

Mr. Sebastian noted there are 50 units in the cottages. The rent is \$500 per month not including electricity. Town Manager Oefinger noted these units are comparable to the units operated by the Groton Housing Authority.

2006-0316 Mystic River Homes Tax Abatement

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Scott, to begin the ordinance process on Mystic River Homes Tax Abatement.

The motion carried unanimously

2003-0177 Renovations & Additions to Groton School Facilities - Phase I

Discussed

There will be a pre-dedication ceremony on January 19th at 12:00 noon at the Catherine Kolnaski School site.

2005-0209 Water Pollution Control Facility Expansion

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, and Carl Almquist, Assistant Director of Public Works noted that C.H. Nickerson Company, was determined to be the lowest qualified bidder on the Water Pollution Control Facility Upgrade. Mr. Schneider reviewed the schedule and noted the Town is moving forward as quickly as possible. Discussion followed on the "alternates" and funding implications.

2006-0079 Electronic Voting/Use of Paper Ballots

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger explained that the system proposed for use in the November 2007 election does include a paper ballot that is read electronically and then stored in a lock box, addressing a previous concern raised by the Council.

2006-0079 Electronic Voting/Use of Paper Ballots

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Scott, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0254 Coastal Property Insurance

Discussed

Councilor Scott noted the report from the Insurance Commissioner documents a "wish list" but it is not binding on the insurance companies and it does not appear that anything is being done. He suggested waiting to see if the new Commissioner issues a requirement.

2006-0320 Charles B. Allyn Foundation Grant - Tercentennial Legacy Playground

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Streeter, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0317 Impact of State Campaign Finance Law on Groton

Discussed

Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox noted the limits imposed on contributions by state contractors who can contribute to a slate committee or a candidate committee, but not a town committee.

Councilor Scott disclosed that he is a state contractor with a contract exceeding \$50,000, and noted he is learning about this subject. He distributed information and further explained the law, noting that it is very restrictive. Town Councilors are endorsed by and financed by Town

committees. This law severely restricts who can contribute and fundraising activities. Anyone on the restricted list who makes a contribution after December 31, 2006 is barred from being a state contractor for two years.

Councilor Scott asked for a resolution asking the State to revisit this issue. Councilor Streater suggested that the town committees make the request. Discussion followed and the item was tabled for further discussion.

2006-0314 Charter Revision

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger provided a brief history on recent charter revision efforts. Councilor O'Beirne noted the 1998 version is well-researched and would be a good starting point for a committee. He suggested moving forward, limiting the Committee to a small number of people (7 or 8). A 2/3rds vote of the Town Council to required to establish a Charter Revision Committee. Town Clerk Tarbox reviewed some of the requirements including the requirement that members be appointed within 30 days. Councilor O'Beirne feels it is possible to have this on the November ballot. He suggested announcing a potential commission and soliciting interested.

Councilor Sheets arrived at 9:12 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Scott, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streater
Members Absent: Councilor Bartinik, Jr. and Councilor Bond

2006-0297 Town Clerk Compensation

A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to enter executive session at 9:17 p.m. to discuss 2006-0297 Town Clerk Compensation.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0297 Town Clerk Compensation

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 9:30 p.m.

2006-0297 Town Clerk Compensation

A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

to recommend a resolution rating the Town Clerk's performance as "exceeds expectations" and increasing her salary 3.02% from \$80,566 to \$83,000, effective January 1, 2007

The motion carried unanimously

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

2003-0045 Economic/Strategic Plan Update

Recommended for Deletion

2006-0005 Labor Negotiations (2006 Standing Referral)

Recommended for Deletion

2006-0006 Pending Litigation (2006 Standing Referral)

Recommended for Deletion

2006-0007 Legislative Policy (2006 Standing Referral)

Recommended for Deletion

2006-0008 Town Participation in CCM Lawsuits and Interventions (2006 Standing Referral)

Recommended for Deletion

- 2006-0025 **Joint Meeting with City Council (2006 Standing Referral)**
Recommended for Deletion
- 2006-0055 **Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2006 Standing Referral)**
Recommended for Deletion
- 2006-0166 **Governor's Economic Diversification Commission**
Recommended for Deletion
- 2006-0213 **Lighting on Riverview Avenue, Noank**
Recommended for Deletion
- 2006-0220 **FYE 2008 Budget Discussion with RTM**
Recommended for Deletion

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Councilor Kolnaski asked for a referral on Toll Booths and Mayor Watson made a referral to the Committee of the Whole.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:37 p.m.