



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., John F. Scott, Paulann H. Sheets, James L. Streeter, and Elissa T. Wright.

Tuesday, December 5, 2006

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson convened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

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

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent, Representative Edward Moukawsher, and Senator-Elect Andrew Maynard (6:28 p.m.).

3. NEW BUSINESS

2006-0007

Legislative Policy (2006 Standing Referral)

Discussed

Mayor Watson asked Mr. Vincent to lead the discussion according to the agenda.

Mr. Vincent gave brief highlights of the CCM legislative program overview and asked legislators to give attention and respect to the CCM program. He will let them know if Groton's position on any matter is different from CCM's.

The legislators were asked to be ready for an opportunity to strengthen the lien provisions relating to relief for elderly taxpayers. Councilor Bond said that the many people she talked to door-to-door are confused between tax abatement and tax deferral, the existing choices. She said it would be good to classify lobstermen's homes and trap storage yards as farms. They are now paying taxes on their home and yard on the basis of "best use," which is surely a higher value than lobstering.

Councilor Wright mentioned some independent support for working fishermen in Maine. Mr. Vincent said he knew about the "Working Waterfront" and "The Island Foundation" and would get the web links for her.

Mr. Vincent called attention to a CCM summary on the new DEP Solid Waste Plan. He said that DEP seriously missed their duty in failing to provide in the new multi-year plan for any new places to put waste, e.g. new landfills. Councilor Wright asked if we could quantify the current cost of not having landfills. She was told that we could come up with some costs of the hauling, but would not know the offsetting costs of running a new in-town disposal site.

The augmented conveyance tax was discussed at length. Mr. Maynard said he thought that a majority in the next Assembly are in favor of keeping the added tax. Mr. Vincent said that promises made to the realtors need not be honored, because a greater number of promises to the towns had been abrogated by the legislature and because the arguments presented by the realtors are bogus. Mr. Vincent said that it is impossible that the realtors have any real evidence of sales being damaged by the augmented amount of conveyance tax. Mr. Maynard said, however, that he had to honor his campaign promise to the realtors, though he said that he regretted that promise and admitted that their evidence is weak or lacking. Several councilors urged him to renege on

any promise to the realtors industry.

During discussion on state mandated property revaluation, some councilors said they favored allowing towns to use other methods and intervals for revaluation. Councilor Sheets said that we have already had property tax reform in an ironic way, because by having more frequent revaluations than we had when the interval was ten years, the shift from commercial to residential property -- in their relative weight in the grand list -- has been seen by everyone to have a very large influence on taxes.

The possibility of a local option for extra hotel tax was discussed, and the legislators were urged to consider finding an opportunity to enable such a local tax option. It was suggested that the state could collect it and then disburse the revenue to the towns that chose to use it.

Town Manager Mark Oefinger added some points from his own list.

- 1) There was discussion of the coming loss of reimbursements on MM&E taxes. Within five years, he said, the Town's income from that source would end. The legislators were urged to make sure that the towns will receive full reimbursement in the future for the taxes they will lose.*
- 2) Mr. Oefinger mentioned that the Governor's diversification report would be out by summer, and legislators should look for chances to help implement the best proposals in it,*
- 3) Mr. Oefinger said that, given what New London has received from the state in recent years, Groton should get \$6,000,000-\$8,000,000 annually as the host to the submarine base. No other town has such a large echelon of workers and employers that do not contribute the normal amount to local tax revenue. He cited particularly the money given to New London to keep the Coast Guard Academy museum in New London. It was suggested by Mr. Moukawsher that the grant that Mark mentioned was mainly a premise for a bailout that they wanted to give to New London's budget anyway.*
- 4) The legislators were briefed that we still hope and expect to receive an earmark from state bonding to give us a needed \$100,000 for the Tercentennial Legacy Playground project.*

It was agreed to have another legislative policy Committee of the Whole meeting, tentatively scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 16, 2007, prior to the regular Town Council meeting.

4. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.