



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor James L. Streeter, Councilors Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Paulann H. Sheets, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, January 25, 2011

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Streeter called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Streeter, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Watson

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. Calendar and Communications

Mayor Streeter received two letters from River Road residents requesting that the public hearing on River Road permanent repairs be reopened. He stated that the decision to close the hearing will stand. Councilor Watson noted that he spoke to the Town Clerk who concurred that once the public hearing is closed, it remains closed.

The Town Manager noted that tomorrow's RTM meetings have been moved to Thursday.

4. Approval of Minutes

2011-0030 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meetings of January 4, 2011 and January 11, 2011 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. NEW BUSINESS

2010-0250 FYE 2012 City of Groton Highway Budget

Discussed

Mayor Dennis Popp, and City Councilors Marian Galbraith, David Hale, and Lisa Luck were present. Mayor Popp asked if a City CIP project is subject to RTM review. The Town Manager explained that if a project qualifies as a capital improvement, then it is subject to the existing CIP approval process including review by the RTM. He further noted that CIP funds are available once the project begins.

Councilor Galbraith questioned the Town Manager's request to "level out" large projects over time. She asked how the funds will accumulate over time if they are included in the CIP. The Town Manager noted that CIP projects are not meant to be funded on an incremental basis. If a CIP project is approved, the funding is good for three years. If any money is expended during that time period, the remaining funds are good for another two years.

Councilor Peruzzotti asked if designating a CIP project "highway" would exempt the project from RTM review and the Town Manager stated it would not. He reiterated that he has reviewed this

issue with the Town Attorney, and if a project is included in the CIP, it can be modified by the RTM. The RTM can not modify the highway operating budget for the City.

Mayor Streeter questioned a highway budget line item entitled "Water Division Treatment" and how it relates to highway. Mayor Popp and Michael Hillsberg, the City Finance Director, said they would check and that the item could be mislabeled. Mayor Streeter also questioned the low expenditures for snow and ice control considering the number of snow events. It was explained that the City started out with salt stock and overtime costs for December will be included in January expenditures.

Mr. Hillsberg distributed the FYE 2011 budget for review. Mayor Popp indicated he is fine with the requested budget guidelines if they are consistent with what other departments are doing. Mayor Popp reviewed the City's budget formulation and format.

Councilor Flax requested a summary page for the Highway budget that follows the Town's format.

Discussion followed on reductions in the operating budget versus the CIP budget. The Town Manager encouraged the City to keep its CIP projects separate from the operating budget. Councilor Galbraith asked about reducing operating expenses versus benefits, and the Town Manager explained that benefits are operating expenses, but they are removed from consideration when looking at budget reductions, unless there are associated personnel reductions.

Mayor Popp indicated a willingness to meet again prior to submission of the City's budget on February 28th, if desired.

2011-0026

River Road Permanent Repairs

Recommended for a Resolution

Mayor Streeter noted that a public hearing was held on the permanent repairs to River Road. The Town Manager explained that the only issue to be decided by the Council is installation of the guiderails. The Town Manager noted it is a liability issue for the Town. It is the professional engineer's opinion, as well as the Director of Public Works and Town Attorney, that the guiderails are necessary. However, it is a policy decision to be made by the Town Council.

Councilor O'Beirne understands the desire to limit liability, but there are a number of places on River Road that are more hazardous than this section of the road. He feels the proposed guiderail is an "over-reaction" and he would like to see something less obtrusive. Councilor Monteiro agreed with Councilor O'Beirne and noted the Merritt Parkway guiderails design specifications are excessive. Councilor Sheets agreed and noted that she never received accident information for River Road as she requested.

Councilor Johnson questioned the crash rating for post and rail. Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, stated that the rating is unknown. The proposed guiderail system is designed for 25-30 mph speeds.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Mayor Streeter, to remove the objectionable guiderails from the River Road project.

Councilor Watson asked if the change would require a new public hearing. Councilors Peruzzotti and Flax expressed support for the motion.

A motion was made by Councilor Monteiro, seconded by Councilor Sheets, to amend the motion to remove the objectionable guiderails and replace them with what was there before the March flood damage occurred.

Mayor Streeter noted that there are general guidelines for the barriers, but nothing stating they are mandatory. He expressed concern for the aesthetics of the street. Mr. Schneider indicated that there

have been no accidents in this area of River Road.

The motion to amend carried unanimously.

The motion carried unanimously

2011-0028 Adoption of Thames Street Rehabilitation Program Ordinance

Discussed

The Town Manager distributed responses from the Town Planning Commission and City Planning and Zoning Commission to the CGS 8-24 referrals on the Thames Street ordinance. Both bodies recommended in favor.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2011-0029 Adoption of Phase II School Facilities Program Ordinance

Discussed

The Town Manager distributed responses from the Town Planning Commission and City Planning and Zoning Commission to the CGS 8-24 referrals on the Phase II Schools ordinance.

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

A motion was made by Councilor O'Beirne, seconded by Councilor Sheets, to amend the motion and replace all occurrences (words and numbers) of \$133,481,150 with \$132,478,384, and to delete Section I.(e).

Councilor O'Beirne explained that the amendment would eliminate the all-weather field at Fitch High School that was added to the project by the Superintendent of Schools with little discussion or justification.

Councilor Kolnaski asked about the ability to add wording to the ordinance to address the potential unavailability of state funding. The Town Manager stated no, but if after the referendum is approved by the voters the expected state reimbursement is different, the project is still under the control of the Town Council and it can be stopped. Discussion followed on wording in the ordinance.

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets to amend the motion to modify the final paragraph in Section I. to read "The Town Council ... shall delete elements of the project if funds are insufficient to complete the entire project. There was no second.

Councilor O'Beirne noted the lack of support for the project because of the cost. He would like the Board of Education to develop a program for Pre-K that does not demolish and close existing schools.

Mayor Streeter supports institution of a Pre-K program. However, despite low lending rates and contractor availability, the Town can not afford the project.

Councilor Peruzzotti noted that the Superintendent was hired to move the school system forward. The Phase II project was sent to a committee that made a recommendation. She noted that the only people who vote or attend a public hearing are those with strong feelings and she believes that everyone must have the opportunity to vote on the project.

Councilor Johnson feels that people should have expected that a Phase II would follow a Phase I and the Town should see what happens with a vote. He emphasized that Thames Street and the Phase II Schools are two separate issues, not competing issues.

Councilor Flax believes that the Superintendent is presenting what he believes is the best product. He personally needs more time to think about it and so do the voters.

Councilor Watson feels the project should move forward. He reiterated his disappointment that there is no swimming pool included in the project.

Councilor Sheets expressed support for sending the project to the voters.

Councilor Monteiro has spoken to no one (that is not associated with the project) that favors the project. However, since the majority of the Council accepted the Phase II report, she supports sending the project to the voters.

The amendment to the motion failed by the following vote:

In favor: 3 - Mayor Streeter, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne

Opposed: 6 - Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Sheets, Councilor Watson.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 7 - Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Watson
Opposed: 2 - Mayor Streeter and Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

2011-0027 Parks and Recreation Master Plan Committee Progress Report

Discussed

Director of Parks and Recreation John Silsby, and Lisa Luck and Sue Sutherland from the Committee were present to address the Council. Mr. Silsby distributed a 2010 summary and Ms. Luck reviewed the list of the Committee's accomplishments, activities, and future efforts.

Councilor Flax asked if any consideration has been given to adding a facility fee to raise money for future projects or soliciting sponsorships. Mr. Silsby noted that grants and sponsorships are constantly being sought. Currently, the fee system is set up to generate a profit to cover many indirect costs, but not facility projects.

Mayor Streeter asked how a drastic reduction in the budget would impact the Master Plan. Mr. Silsby noted that major projects will continue to go through the CIP process, but not all of the Committee's proposals cost money.

The referral on credit card usage in Town departments is expected to be on the agenda for the February 8th Committee of the Whole meeting.

2011-0033 Supplemental Appropriation for May Referendum Costs

Discussed

The Town Manager noted that no funds were budgeted for the May referendum. The Registrar of Voters estimates their costs to be approximately \$24,000, less than usual because the referendum coincides with the City elections. Other costs include legal notices (\$4,600) and printing and postage associated with preparing and distributing explanatory text (\$9,500 to \$11,500 each). The Town Manager estimates that a supplemental appropriation from Contingency in the amount of \$51,000 will be required.

A motion was made by Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., seconded by Councilor Monteiro, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2010-0124 Review of Town Council Goals

Not Discussed**2011-0032 Sister Cities Committee - Update****Discussed**

Mayor Streeter provided an update for the Council on possible Committee appointments.

2010-0172 FYE 2012 Budget**Discussed**

The Town Manager noted that the budget process has started and departments have made their initial submissions. Departments are looking at a variety of options to cut costs. Betty Anne Reiter, Director of Library Services, explained her proposal to dramatically change the way service at the Library is provided. During a strategic planning session, Library staff looked at issues such as mixed use of space, refreshing and rejuvenating, eliminating big service desks, providing more self-service, and cross-training. Ms. Reiter is proposing to eliminate the reference desks in the adult and children's areas of the Library, and consolidate them into one service desk. This will provide greater staff flexibility. The Library will also institute self-service checkout. The proposed changes will trim about \$40,000 from the part-time non-union account. Implementation costs are approximately \$15,000, with half coming from the remaining Community Foundation funds.

Councilors expressed their support for the proposal and appreciation for Ms. Reiter's forethought.

On other budget matters, the Town Manager noted that the minutes from the October 16th budget work session were redistributed to the Council. Some of the suggestions have been reviewed with staff. The Outside Agencies Committee has not met yet.

Councilor O'Beirne suggested reducing the balance in the insurance fund and closing out older CIP projects. The Town Manager noted that there is no balance in the health insurance fund or Capital Reserve.

Councilor Flax asked if the Council could give the Town Manager budget guidelines. The Town Manager stated it has been done in the past, but he prefers no guidance since it is difficult to pick a target number without knowing the revenue picture.

Councilor Watson questioned the status of the police study. The Town Manager indicated that the group has not met in awhile. He does not expect that a report will be available for consideration during the FYE 2012 budget process. Outside agencies solicitations will be going out soon with a mid-February submission deadline. Councilor Flax asked for additional information from the two ambulance services and whether or not they contract out billing and at what cost.

Councilor Johnson questioned the status of hiring a consultant for the police study. The Town Manager responded that the committee was in the midst of developing a scope of services.

Councilor Sheets expressed concern that there will be no input from the police assessment for the budget. She asked what pressure needs to be applied to get it done. Mayor Streeter noted that a draft Scope of Services has been developed and was provided to Mayor Popp to provide to the City Police Chief who was going to be attending a conference where he could discuss the scope of services with various consultants. The information was not provided to the City Police Chief.

6. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, to adjourn the meeting at 8:39 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.