



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Rita M. Schmidt, Councilors Genevieve Cerf, Joe delaCruz, Bruce S. Flax, Bob Frink, Rich Moravsik, Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Heather Bond Somers and Harry A. Watson

Saturday, January 11, 2014

9:00 AM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Schmidt called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Cerf, Councilor delaCruz, Councilor Flax, Councilor Frink, Councilor Moravsik, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Somers and Councilor Watson

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

3. NEW BUSINESS

2013-0286

Town Council Goals

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger distributed Councilor Cerf's goals and other information she provided.

Mayor Schmidt asked for the Council's thoughts on the previous Council's goals. Councilor Somers explained how previous Councilors have struggled with bringing goals and objectives from the corporate world into government and debated many goals versus measurable goals. Councilor Watson noted that the Town Manager needs the Town Council to set goals. The Town Manager agreed noting that ideally there should be an interconnection between the Council's goals and the administration. Councilor Watson provided an overview of past goal setting efforts.

Councilor Frink suggested that the Council consider initiatives rather than goals with a focus on areas that need improvement. He supports a limited number of goals. Councilor Cerf noted that metrics for processes make it easier to make decisions.

Councilor Moravsik expressed his hope that the Council will work well together, cooperate, and act as a team.

Councilor Frink reviewed his goals that are based on the "Looking Ahead" section in the budget. He feels that the Council owes the public services, whether they are provided by the Town or not. He defined core skills as 'manageable' and suggested that the Town outsource 'do work.' Councilor Frink explained that his goals assume a fiscally constrained future, and the residents of Groton have shown no interest in investing in the Town's future. Councilor Peruzzotti asked how the Council can change that mindset.

Councilor Frink continued noting his suggestions include sustained quality service; reduction of in-house staffing; private sector involvement in providing Town services; and a staff reward system. This vision will require heavy Human Resources involvement and change management that identifies the step by step process to go from 'as is' to 'to be.'

Discussion followed on core services. Councilor Peruzzotti feels that the Council must identify what services the Town can live without. Councilor Cerf feels it is possible to provide the same services if processes are streamlined. Councilor de la Cruz suggested that Town employees should

be able to live in town and make a living wage. Contracting out services looks good on paper, but the Town will pay one way or another, perhaps through services provided to support lower wage earners.

Councilor Frink explained that he is proposing a three to five year plan.

Councilors discussed their suggested goals and outlined some of the issues they see facing the Town as follows:

- Councilor Somers: Improving the schools is an economic development issue. Fixing the schools will help bring people to town. The Town must be willing to spend money on marketing and reverse the negative mindset. As leaders, Councilors must be more positive. Councilor Somers provided background information on the School Facilities Task Force effort. The group is waiting on the Board of Education to provide a Vision Statement and educational specifications. After the plan is developed and presented to the Council, the Council must review the plan and support it as a united front for the community. Councilor Somers supports a charter revision that would look at Town Council authority, the RTM vs. establishing a Board of Finance, and Councilors' term limits and staggering. She feels that Economic Development should be in Town Manager's Office, not in Planning. All departments should have a Facebook page. With respect to the development process, the Town could establish a "concierge" position to assist developers with complicated developments. The Town Council must also review/renegotiate employee retirement contracts.*
- Councilor Moravsik: He agrees with looking the schools. Also, departments should be consolidated at Fitch Middle School. The Town Council must show a united, positive front and work together in the public eye. He supports charter revision.*
- Councilor Cerf: There have been failures in Planning and Development. Plans must be understandable to the public. She would support a school plan. Projects should be smaller and clearer with better communication of benefits. She feels there is a lack of leadership in economic development and there should be a search committee for an economic development person.*
- Councilor de la Cruz: It is important to communicate a message about Groton's schools rather than comparing to other school systems. He suggested exploring free government design of a middle school and sharing the final design with the public. He noted that the new schools are not being used as community centers as envisioned. Councilor de la Cruz would like to identify all Town-owned property and decide whether to keep or not. He suggested establishing a liaison with downtown Mystic merchants and it was noted that Councilor Somers acts in this capacity now. He also suggested surveying anyone who has pulled a permit from the Town in the last year regarding the service they received and the process.*
- Councilor Watson: The Town must market the schools better with a positive, offensive approach that touts achievements and counteracts negativity. Communication is important. Closed schools must be addressed. The Town Manager clarified that Fitch Middle School has NOT been offered to or turned over to the Town by the Board of Education. (Councilor Watson left the meeting at 10:05 a.m.)*
- Councilor Flax: The Town's Economic Development Specialist should act as the Town's public relations person to enhance communication. For every issue facing the Town, someone has done their due diligence. Everything is funneled through the Town Manager. The RTM presents a hurdle to funding.*
- Councilor Peruzzotti: Past efforts to place marketing money in the budget or hire a person for half a year to research grants saw the funding cut by the RTM. The Town needs to develop a*

more streamlined, user-friendly, consistent, and viable method for the development process.

Councilor Frink provided an overview of the Council's discussion points and the following overall subjects were identified and discussed, and Councilors who will work to 'flesh out' the goal/initiative were designated.

Economic Development (Councilors Somers and de la Cruz)

- Increase Revenue*
- Grant Writer*
- Marketing / PR Person*
- Economic Development Reporting to the Town Manager.*
- More User-Friendly Building Environment*
- Building Department Survey*
- Schools*

Charter Revision (Councilors Frink and Flax)

- Set up Committee*

Improved/Increased Communication of Town Business (Councilors Cerf and Watson)

- Downtown Mystic Liaison (Visibility)*
- Town Manager / RTM*
- Facebook Pages for All Departments*

Co-location of Departments (Councilors Moravsik and Peruzzotti)

Councilor de la Cruz suggested it will be important to communicate the benefits of the Council's initiatives. Councilor Moravsik suggested identifying time lines to provide continuity for future Councils.

Councilors agreed to provide their reports at the January 28th Committee of the Whole meeting.

4. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Moravsik, seconded by Councilor de la Cruz, to adjourn the meeting at 11:30 a.m.

The motion carried unanimously.