



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Bruce Flax, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Diane Barber, Greg Grim, Rich Moravsik, Karen F. Morton, Bonnie Nault, Deb Peruzzotti, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, January 17, 2017

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING - REVISED

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Flax called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Flax, Councilor Barber, Councilor Grim, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Morton, Councilor Nault, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Watson and Councilor Moravsik

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Administrative Secretary L:isa Hylton.

Board of Education: Kim Watson, Andrea Ackerman, Susan Watson, Mike Graner, Rita Volkman, Rosemary Robertson, Gary Baker

3. NEW BUSINESS

2017-0009 **Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2017 Standing Referral)**

Discussed

- FYE 2018 Budget

Dr. Graner and staff are working on a draft of the budget to present to the Board of Education with a Public Hearing being held at Fitch High School on January 30th. Dr. Graner noted that the Board of Education had to reduce their health insurance reserve plan by \$746,000 to get the budget at zero this year. He is interested in hearing the Town Council's advice for making reductions and what the Board of Education should be thinking about.

The Board of Education needs to make sure that money is going into the right programs that are working for students and taking back the programs that are not working. There needs to be a review of staff, job duties and locations for cost savings. Councilor Peruzzotti mentioned she would like to see the plans in place once they are created. She also stated there is money to be saved in shared services.

Councilor Antipas noted student enrollment has decreased in the past from 6,000 to 4,000 students and questioned the school population and where it will be in 5 to 10 years. Discussion began about possible reduction of classrooms at particular grade levels, not filling teaching positions or transferring teachers into other positions if they are certified. Dr. Graner mentioned the possible closing of another elementary school if there is a reduction of 100-150 elementary students. This would be an area that would save the Board of Education money as well.

Council Antipas noted that it is not reasonable to see a 0% increase for the Board of Education year to year as he believes there will be a buildup that will eventually folt'the Town.

Councilor Peruzzotti mentioned that revenue is one of the factors the Town needs to focus more on noting that it is the revenue that negatively affects the budget every year. Councilor Morton agreed with Councilor Peruzzotti and noted the taxes have increased because of the continual declining revenues. The Town needs a plan in place to make up for the loss in revenue from the

State.

- Managing ECS Reduction

The Board of Education shared their concern of cuts being made to the Educational Cost Sharing Grant. In August the Board of Education authorized Dr. Graner to freeze roughly \$247,481. He requested all principals reserve 25% of their individual site budgets and the school's maintenance budget leaving them running at 75% instead of 100% to make up for the loss. Kim Watson distributed a handout that gave some indication on the effect overall.

Discussion followed on the impact of reductions on the school system. Dr. Graner explained the schools spend their money upfront but have been operating at 75% of their budget with some schools not even spending that. When he heard about the cuts, he recommended that the Board of Education absorb the reduction. The Board of Education can direct Dr. Graner not to spend the money which would be transferred to the general fund. He notes the schools are reducing funds a little from each area and not cutting any area entirely. Dr. Graner stated the schools have also cut money from the Reader's Workshop Program which allows for classrooms to obtain a large classroom library. Technology has been set aside. Money in repair accounts is difficult to balance because of the unknown repairs. Mr. Kilpatrick has been working under the 75% rule as well. The replacements of some maintenance equipment and a pickup truck have been postponed. Dr. Graner is just balancing and cutting areas that have the least impact.

Dr. Graner is hopeful that if there are no emergencies or set asides the schools will end up with 85% percent of their budget losing 15%. Dr. Graner mentioned that most times Boards of Education tend to cut textbooks and this is not a good decision as you need updated materials to teach children. Dr. Graner noted the 25% hold back was a good decision and an opportunity to not feel the cut so deeply in one area. This was a tough conversation with the principals and with the Board of Education.

Discussion began on the amount of the Board of Education budget, when the remaining school budget money will be released for use and if the Board of Education is doing this to remain at a zero percent increase. Dr. Graner responded that the Board of Education budget is at \$76,464,739 and he hopes to free up some of the 25% by May. He also responded that the Board of Education is making the cuts because they believe that the Town should not be responsible for absorbing the \$247,000 cut. Discussion began about how much of a cut the Town had to take in the LOTCIP money. Mayor Flax noted that this is not a competition between the Town and the Board of Education. He also noted that if the Board of Education was unable to absorb the cut, the Town would not be able to function. He commended the Board of Education for the sacrifice they are making.

Board of Education member Andrea Ackerman noted that she did not agree with the Board of Education taking the cut. She explained new residents will come to Groton due to the job openings at Electric Boat and will add to the tax base. She also stated schools will bring people to the area but parents will not want to move to an area if the education budget is at zero or minus zero. Councilor Barber stated that the Town has to be affordable as well as having a great school system. She believes you cannot keep raising taxes to make up for the loss as taxes were just raised last year. Mayor Flax reminded the members that taxpayers have approved the new school plan and the Town and Board of Education are trying to find the best balance.

- Explanation of Strategic Planning

Board of Education member Kim Watson spoke about the meeting being held on Thursday regarding the strategic plan and her excitement about all the initiatives. This meeting will bring to light what the Board of Education wants, the goals and outcomes and how to work toward meeting

them. The invite was sent out to the Town Council via email if they would like to attend and give their input as well.

2016-0260

FYE 2018 Budget Discussion

Discussed

- Fleet Fund

Town Manager Mark Oefinger explained that there was a Fleet Fund set up 20 years ago to set aside money on an annual basis to cumulatively pay for itself. In 2009 there was a restricted budget and the Fleet Fund was no longer contributed to with the exception of Water Pollution Control and the Golf Course. Presently the Town has run out of fund balance and it has raised the issue of whether this item should continue to be a pay as you go item or consider contributing to the Fleet Fund once again. Discussion began on how much the Fleet Fund should be funded.

Town Manager Mark Oefinger offered clarification on how vehicle replacement is decided; it is not the miles on the vehicle that makes the determination but more of the hours the vehicle has been idling. He noted his concern for the Town being in triage mode and the need to rebuild this fund.

Mayor Flax concluded the discussion with the consensus to fund the Fleet Fund at 100% pulling the number out of the departments and in to one line item in the Town Manager's budget. If the Town Council or RTM wants to make an adjustment they can do so with the one account instead of taking it from each individual department.

Mayor Flax requested a break at 7:51 p.m.; back in session at 7:59 p.m.

- Computer Replacement Fund

Mayor Flax mentioned the Computer Replacement Fund goes out 20 years or so and he thinks that there is a need to review as technology is always evolving. He also explained there is a need to discuss if this fund will be handled the same as the Fleet Fund.

Brian Hancock, Director of Information Technology, noted the plan is projected out to 2025 stating that the schedule is adjusted every year according to what is needed within the Town. He mentioned that he does not dispose of the old items and instead repurposes them for spares. As the technology changes and we obtain some of the newer items he will adjust the plan. The Computer Replacement Fund is a 5 year replacement with some other items lasting longer. He mentioned computers are beginning to last 10-12 years for replacement. The current balance of the fund is \$389,000 with no contributions made to the fund this year. Brian mentioned he has not purchased monitors that were cut from the fund although a month ago 24 of them had died. Instead he was able to obtain the monitors through the Board of Education surplus to replace as many as he could. Discussion followed.

Mayor Flax made note that the Computer Replacement Fund will work the same as the Fleet Fund, pulling the suggest amount by the Town Manager out of departments and making it as its own line item.

- Capital Improvement Program Projects

Mayor Flax wanted to review Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects.

Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated there was a need for the Capital Reserve dollar amount and he was hoping to have it by March 3rd. He noted the big items are the North Stonington Road Bridge and Computer Technology.

Discussion began about the North Stonington Bridge and if the Town Council still wanted to fund it. Mayor Flax asked that it be put on an upcoming agenda inviting Rob Courtney and Fire Chief Hilbert for the discussion.

Mayor Flax asked Town Manager Mark Oefinger for his recommendations on the CIP. Town Manager Mark Oefinger noted the Capital Improvement Projects of importance are the North Stonington Bridge, Computer Technology, Fitch High School asbestos removal (with State funding 50% reimbursement), Energy Efficiency and the Town Hall gas project. He also mentioned the Thomas Road project keeps rising in costs and that the Town Council should speak with the Board of Education about what the necessary education CIPs are. There was also mention that the Water Pollution Control Facility needed to have some things done as well. The Town Council was asked to review the narratives and it would be put on a future agenda.

Mayor Flax stated that 2.25 million would be the maximum he would want to spend and will wait for recommendations from the Town Manager Mark Oefinger.

- Town Council Budget Review Calendar

The Town Council reviewed a draft of the budget calendar. Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that the budget calendar was lined up with the RTM committee assignments and availability of the Town Councilors. He explained the Council should review the dates as there is a restrictive calendar with the addition of the Council meeting with Randi Frank as well for the Town Manager recruitment. There was mention of Mayor Flax not being able to attend on April 1st and Councilor Barber not being able to attend any Saturdays. They decided to discuss it again on Tuesday.

Councilor Antipas left the meeting at 9:01 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Flax, Councilor Barber, Councilor Grim, Councilor Morton, Councilor Nault, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Watson and Councilor Moravsik
Members Absent: Councilor Antipas

2016-0204 Review of Town Services and Operations

Discussed

- Public Works

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, provided an overall summary of the last 10 years of the budgets for the Public Works Department noting that the 2017 budget is lower than the budgets of 2008 and 2009. Since 1991 until the present he noted that 40 positions have been eliminated through not filling positions and/or layoffs. He mentioned contracted services came from these layoffs and explained that the reductions from last year affected his department by having more citizens' concerns with a lack of support personnel. He explained the largest citizen concern is with the replacement of streetlights due to the Town only having one contractor that replacing street lights. Recently the contractor's truck was out of service and created a backup of complaints. This issue will be resolved once the streetlights are changed over to LED lights. The conversion is planned to be completed in May by Eversource.

Discussion then began on the impact of reductions in other areas such as not having additional staff during storm and hurricane preparation, not being able to assist outside agencies with garage maintenance, cuts in Poquonnock Plains Park irrigation, Burrows Field and Noank Public Gardens and not being able to assist other departments such as Parks & Recreation with William Seely. Gary noted Fitch Middle School will be included in the CIP to bring the building up to code for future Parks & Recreation use. He then stated that if there are future reductions, they will be taken out of the operations side.

Gary informed the Council that the landfill at Welles Road is finally closed noting it will be

presented to DEEP in February to show the close of the landfill is not affecting the wells. Once that is done, DEEP can closeout the consent order. There was mention of a new storm water permit being put in place by DEEP, EPA and the State of Connecticut that will require more testing of 82 outfalls for their impact on impaired waters. Gary also informed the Council that the State of Connecticut through DEEP is going to implement a Waste Management Plan for the 60% diversion of solid waste. Southeastern Connecticut Regional Resource Recovery will (SCRRA) be involved in that plan as well.

Gary explained he keeps snow plowing to a minimum when outsourcing as he has the ability to acquire saving in this area. Discussion began about the plowing staff having other job responsibilities when there is no snow to be plowed. Gary explained that there is no downtime for staffing. When there is no plowing work they are paving, replacing catch basins, tending to brush, drainage, street sweeping, working on street signs, construction and the Copp Property.

Councilor Grim asked Gary if he was given a huge amount of money what he would use it on. Gary responded he would use it on our buildings noting the Town Hall Annex, Police Department, Library and Groton Senior Center are all in need of improvements.

4. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Moravsik, seconded by Councilor Nault, to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.