



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes - Draft

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Town Clerk 860-441-6640
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860-441-6630

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

Tuesday, February 11, 2014

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Schmidt called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL**

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

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

3. **Calendar and Communications**

Councilors Frink and Moravsik attended a Chamber of Commerce event. Councilor Moravsik noted a robotics competition being held at Fitch High School in March. Mayor Schmidt also attended the Chamber of Commerce event. Councilor Cerf expressed support for and solicited donations for the Fitch Robotics Team.

4. **Approval of Minutes**

2014-0050 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 28, 2014, February 3, 2014, and February 4, 2014 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None.

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

2014-0012 Meeting with State Legislators (2014 Standing Referral)

Discussed

Ted Moukawsher and Elissa Wright were present to meet with the Council. Representative Moukawsher stated that the Governor has an ambitious agenda for the short legislative session. The state is currently generating a surplus. It appeals that all will remain steady for municipalities. There is a large deficit looming in FYE 15 and FYE 16 that needs to be addressed.

Representative Wright noted the state has enacted taxes to reimburse towns for tax exempt state, hospital and college properties. She has submitted a bill to establish two new school based health centers in Groton. The economy is slowly recovering and stronger growth should lead to stronger public financing. Ms. Wright noted that property taxes are out of balance and the state is looking at long term strategies such as regionalization. With the October 2014 grand list, renewable energy improvements undertaken by businesses will be tax exempt.

Mr. Moukawsher noted that topics for discussion include the Governor's commitment to universal Pre-K by 2018; advanced manufacturing fund that would apply to Groton; additional local bridge funds; school security funds; maintenance of ECS grants; restoration of the municipal cost sharing account; and the increase in state aid in FYE 13 for Groton. There has been no mention by the Governor of eliminating the motor vehicle tax. The Speaker is interested in exploring the issue of tax exempt properties, which can represent a real drain on municipalities.

Councilor Peruzzotti noted that the cost of education is shifting to the towns and there has been no relief from the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR). When the MBR is combined with unfunded mandates, it creates a situation where the Council must choose between funding Town services or public education. Councilor Wright asked the Town to quantify its costs associated with MBR.

Mr. Moukawsher agreed that MBR needs to be modified. It discourages innovation. Currently there is a lot of upheaval in the education system, and he is hoping for a more focused, coherent review. Pre-k will be paid for by the state, but towns will probably end up paying for it.

Discussion followed on the state of education, the current surplus and the coming deficit.

Councilor Cerf asked if property taxes could be capped at a certain percentage as has been done in New York. Ms. Wright stated the response in the past has been that the municipalities have the power to do that. Mayor Schmidt noted it is difficult to cap taxes with unfunded mandates.

Flax asked about incentives for regional collaboration and Ms. Wright stated she would provide a list to the Council. Discussion followed on regional efforts.

Mr. Moukawsher noted a renewed interest in the Thames River Heritage Park. He feels that water taxis are a key to the proposal's success and he would like to apply for state bond money, but he needs to develop a detailed proposal. Town Manager Oefinger noted that significant amount of historical information available on the Heritage Park proposal including on water taxis and attempts to get a dock at the Nautilus permitted.

Mr. Moukawsher has had a meeting with the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District. He will be seeking funding to conduct DNA testing on bacteria from the Poquonock River to determine the source. Discussion followed on the impact on shellfishing.

Mayor Schmidt thanked the legislators for coming.

2014-0048

Tri-Town Trail (Bluff Point to Preston Trail) - Update

Discussed

Dave Holdridge, Chairman of the Tri Town Trail Committee, provided background on the committee. The committee followed instructions laid out in the establishing resolution. Mr. Holdridge provided an overview of the committee's efforts and noted a very positive public response to the proposed trail. The committee has transformed from a governmental committee into a volunteer organization, and is currently conducting fundraising to provide grant matches.

Mr. Holdridge noted that Groton Utilities and the Groton City Council have not been willing to discuss access to reservoir lands. The committee conducted a panel discussion on access to reservoir lands in the fall, and it was clear that there has never been a threat to water quality from recreation. Also, there is a strong state law that protects utilities from liability.

Councilor Moravsik asked if consideration has been given to rest room facilities and homeland security issues. Mr. Holdridge stated that rest rooms are addressed in the Master Plan.

Alternative trail locations are available, but they would be on roads, on private property, and not

as scenic. In response to Councilor Frink, Mr. Holdridge noted that only additional land purchased by a utility must allow recreational use.

Councilor Peruzzotti suggested that this be a topic of discussion at the next joint meeting with the City of Groton.

By consensus, the committee recommended a resolution accepting the committee's report, thanking them for their service, and expressing support for their endeavors.

Recommended for a Resolution

2014-0049 John Kelley Memorial Statue - Update

Discussed

Jim Roy, 233 River Road, provided background information on John Kelley and the effort to erect a memorial statute in his honor. The Kelley Fund was established to keep Mr. Kelley's memory alive, inspire future generations, and promote tourism in the Town of Groton. The group has exceeded its goal of \$76,000; additional funds will go toward a scholarship fund. The group has hired a nationally-known sculptor and hopes to unveil the statue this spring.

Mike VanGorder, project manager for Hanlon Sculpture noted recent projects completed. He stated his professional recommendation is to locate the statute in the center of the park.

Mayor Schmidt noted that the utility company may not have enough room to maneuver to service a transformer in the area.

Town Manager Oefinger stated that from staff's perspective there are other locations within the parklet that are better. The park was designed intentionally not to have something in the middle. The preferred site is Area #3 and the sculptor has indicated he can make it work. The middle of the park is an area for people to rest and sit and the statue will be right in front of them. The Town Manager and Mayor encouraged Councilors to visit the site.

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

Mr. Roy stated that there is no conflict with utilities according to Rick Norris in Planning and Development Services, and the statue will not obstruct any view. Councilor Flax asked about the strength of the statue and Mr. VanGorder stated it is made of bronze and granite. The Town Manager noted that Historic District Commission and Planning Commission approvals are required.

The motion carried unanimously

The Committee recessed at 8:49 p.m. and reconvened at 8:57 p.m.

2014-0058 Chipperini Property, Pleasant Valley Road South

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Gretchen Chipperini read a statement regarding the William Seely property and her adjacent property on Pleasant Valley Road South.

Councilor Cerf stated she is uncomfortable discussing this issue since all discussions have taken place in executive session. The Town Manager noted that the Council cannot go into executive session with Ms. Chipperini, and it is unfortunate that Ms. Chipperini cannot avoid talking about Mr. Shiu and his proposal.

Councilor Flax clarified that Ms. Chipperini's goal was to tell the Town Council that the benefits of marketing the two properties together far outweigh any proposal for the Town property, and she stated yes. Councilor Frink noted that the Town Council only needs to decide whether to sell the Town property, not decide what is built there.

Mayor Schmidt thanked Ms. Chipperini for her presentation.

2013-0286

Town Council Goals

Discussed

Councilor Frink asked for input on what he sent out regarding charter revision.

Discussion followed on potential meeting dates to discuss goals. A meeting was scheduled for Saturday, March 1st at 8:30 a.m.

Councilor Somers arrived at 8:30 p.m.

Roll Call:

Members Present: Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Cerf, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Flax, Councilor Frink, Councilor Moravsik, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Somers and Councilor Watson

2013-0232

FYE 2015 Budget

Discussed

Discussion followed on the draft Town Council budget review schedule. The consensus of the Council was to meet two Saturdays and meet with the Board of Education twice. The Council also confirmed their desire to televise/videotape their budget meetings.

Councilor Moravsik read his suggestions for the budget including offering early retirement, outsourcing, combining functions, eliminating middle layers and functions, layoffs, and a hiring freeze.

Councilor Cerf expressed support for early retirement packages, contracting out services, and creating a flexible workforce. She does not favor layoffs.

Councilor Frink agreed with Councilor Cerf suggesting that the Town must contract out more services.

Councilor Moravsik feels that potential areas for outsourcing are snowplowing, grass cutting, and road paving.

Councilor de la Cruz suggested that outsourcing can also lead to enhanced use of social services.

Councilor Flax supports early retirement and review of pensions. He also sees an opportunity to save money with the two subdivisions.

Town Manager Oefinger noted that every time there is a vacancy the position is reevaluated for need and modified if necessary. There are a number of people eligible to retire. He cautioned the Council to discuss early retirement in the context of labor negotiations and in executive session. The Town has 30 fewer people than it did in 2002. Early retirements require a plan. If the Town is not careful, it may inadvertently lose some of the most valuable people in the organization. Positions are reviewed at budget time as well. The Council cannot hand pick who receives an early retirement offer.

Councilor Peruzzotti noted that the Council tried very hard last year to set the tone for the budget, cutting as much as they could where they thought they could. Cuts require the Town Council and RTM to work together, but everyone has a stake in a different area of the Town. The Board of Education comprises about 65% of the budget and the Town Council's hands are tied. The Council tried to cut services and step back from supporting the subdivisions, which were hard choices. Councilor Cerf noted that the RTM saw cuts to the subdivisions, but not Town operations and felt there was a lack of equity. Councilor Flax noted that cuts are not always equitable and it is not realistic to cut across the board. Councilor Somers agreed noting that the Town Operations

portion of the budget has taken a hit for 10 years, whereas the school budget cannot be touched because of the minimum budget requirement.

Councilor Somers suggested that the Council focus on revenue generation.

Councilor Watson noted receipt of a request by the City to meet on the highway budget. The Town Manager reviewed the draft agenda for the February 25th Committee of the Whole meeting.

Councilor Somers asked for an update on the City highway budget mediation. The Town Manager explained that mediation will provide a number for FYE 2014 only. A decision is expected shortly.

Councilor Cerf asked why some of the City's capital improvement projects were not included in the road bond. It was noted that the discussion with the City concerned the replacement of retaining walls.

Councilor Cerf suggested that the Council provide more detailed explanations of their actions on the budget to the RTM.

2013-0291 Adoption of Rules for Twenty-Ninth Town Council

Discussed

Councilor Frink noted that the Temporary Rules Committee has met a number of times to develop the draft rules.

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Moravsik, to adopt the rules of the 29th Town Council.

Town Manager Oefinger distributed a number of comments from staff on the draft rules. The motion and second were withdrawn. Another issue that the Temporary Rules Committee may want to consider is conducting meetings by electronic means. It is allowed under FOI, but the Town Council rules do not allow it. Discussion followed and the consensus of the Council was to allow participation in meetings by electronic means.

Councilor Frink asked Councilors to let him know if they have any objections to staff's comments.

2014-0009 Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2014 Standing Referral)

Discussed

The Town Manager has not been able to confirm a date for a meeting with the Board of Education.

2014-0010 Joint Meeting with Groton Long Point Board of Directors (2014 Standing Referral)

Discussed

The Town Manager has not been able to confirm a date for a meeting with the Groton Long Point Board of Directors.

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

Recommended for Discussion/Deletion:

2009-0124 Ethics Ordinance

Recommended for Deletion

2009-0166 Townwide Police Assessment

Recommended for Deletion

2012-0145 Permanent School Building Committee - Activity Update

Recommended for Deletion

2012-0178 Economic Development Commission - Potential Work Program Items

- 2012-0196 **Recommended for Deletion**
Mystic Streetscape Project - Update
- 2013-0154 **Recommended for Deletion**
Consolidation of Police Dispatch
- 2013-0164 **Not Discussed**
FYE 2014 Budget Follow-up
- 2013-0179 **Recommended for Deletion**
Planning and Zoning Issues
- 2013-0182 **Recommended for Deletion**
Non-Union Pay Plan for FYE14 and FYE15
- 2013-0207 **Recommended for Deletion**
Registrars of Voters Compensation
- 2013-0233 **Recommended for Deletion**
Police Boat Accident
- 2013-0251 **Not Discussed**
West Pleasant Valley Fire District Board Concerns
- 2013-0290 **Recommended for Deletion**
Town Council Orientation
- Recommended for Deletion**

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Councilor Cerf provided a written request for a referral regarding Accounting of Town Budget by Major Function."

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to adjourn the meeting at 9:43 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.