



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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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 18, 2014

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING - JOINT MEETING WITH RTM

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Schmidt called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

2. 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

Councilor Somers arrived later in the meeting.

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher.

RTM members present were: Moderator Conley, Reps. Adams, Granatosky, Longino, Merritt, Meyer, Monaghan, Neugent, Pasqualini, Scott, Semeraro, Swindell, Turnbull and Watrous.

3. NEW BUSINESS

2013-0232 FYE 2015 Budget

Discussed

Mayor Schmidt opened the discussion by stating the opportunities for the RTM to attend COW Budget meetings.

Representative Granatosky stated that she appreciates the proposal for the RTM to attend Town Council budget sessions and offers the same to the Town Council. She went on to state that she was offended when the Town Council used political party caucuses to make budget decisions during the last year's budget process without offering any public reasons for their cuts.

Representative Neugent asked how to watch the Board of Education budget meetings on television. Representative Adams suggested that she check with the Library. Councilor Cerf suggested using the Town website to access the Board of Education website to view meeting schedules and to view taped meetings. Councilor Watson suggested that this item could be added to the Town & City Council/RTM/Board of Education Liaison Committee agenda.

Councilor Frink expressed his interest in reviewing the FYE2015 budget. He is most interested in looking for multi-year proposals and efforts to encourage reductions in expenditures and encourage savings for taxpayers. He would like to organize the town's current services to maximize savings and efficiencies.

Councilor Peruzzotti offered two initiatives 1.) Fund \$10,000 to Economic Development for expenditures such as trade shows; 2.) Consider hiring a Research/Grant Writer.

Representative Scott commented on the \$10,000 proposal for Economic Development and stated that it was not a sufficient amount of money. He would like to see Economic Development become a top priority and include significant funding for Economic Development in the FYE2015 proposed budget. Representative Swindell would like to see a plan in place before funding is

approved. Councilor de la Cruz supports a serious economic effort and supports funding. Rep. Pasqualini would like to see a plan that explains how the town would get a return on any investments. Councilor Cerf states that there's a hue and cry in our community for a vigorous Economic Development program and that perhaps it should be independent from the Planning Department.

Rep. Pasqualini stated that we need "Ambassadors" that will promote business opportunities in our town.

Rep. Merritt suggested that the town look for new business other than we currently have.

Rep. Meyer stated that the town needs to be more business friendly.

Councilor Moravsik stated that we need to develop and execute a plan of development. He suggested that we may need to examine the services of our current Planning Dept.

Councilor Peruzzotti asked the Town Manager if funding for Economic Development could be placed in a Capital Improvement Program instead of a specific Department as a line item in their budget. The Manager responded by stating that the Economic Assistant Fund is a growing fund that is used for special capital improvements such as sidewalks and drainage. It is not used to fund any staff. He went on to say that the Legislative Policy line item could be used to fund specific economic programs such as for trade show fees and specific expenditures.

Moderator Conley supports grant writing and would support hiring a consultant instead of creating a position. Councilor Moravsik suggested using Connecticut Conference of Municipalities employee Rebecca Adams as a contact to research grant opportunities. Rep. Scott stated that a grant writer needs to be focused on a specific subject such as energy efficiency, specific economic opportunities and education. Councilor Watson suggested that CCM could provide information on what other towns are doing. Councilor de la Cruz would like to know what other towns are getting for grants. Rep. Neugent commented that you have to spend money to make money and that a grant writer might be able to bring in enough grants monies to fund their position.

Councilor Frink discussed an alternative method to attract business and Economic Gardening, where you "grow" businesses. He told the group that the Town of Groton is in direct competition with surrounding towns. Rep. Meyer asked how we attract businesses to Town. Rep. Merritt pointed out that moving one business into a different location within town doesn't help the grand list. Councilor Cerf stated that if you help a business make more money and grow their business, that will increase the town's Grand List. Town Manager expounded on his opinion as to why businesses have left town. He also stated that he believes that there has been a lot of misinformation circulated. He believes that most members of the community and both elected bodies don't fully understand how to build the Town economically. He stated that 90% of the Grand List is based on current business. He agrees that we all need to continue to support our current businesses.

Moderator Conley has the opinion that the public has a general understanding of economic issues based on available information. She stated that the Town needs to do a better job of advertising the good news in Groton. She suggested a newsletter or press releases. Rep. Pasqualini also agrees that we need to support current businesses in town that are already part of our tax base.

Councilor Cerf discussed other budget reducing options such as outsourcing snowplowing and street paving. Rep. Neugent questioned how effective is it to outsource jobs. In response to Rep. Turnbull's question, the Town Manager stated that we already outsource a lot of services. He will supply a list of what we outsource to the RTM and Town Council. He cautioned the group on the

pitfalls of outsourcing. He stated that the costs involved in restarting failed outsourced programs may prohibit the idea. Councilor de la Cruz agreed and went on to say that we might be hurting our community by replacing tax paying citizens with these outsourced jobs. He went on to say that these people could end up as a burden in our social services programs.

Councilor Flax commented on how useful the meeting has been and how healthy it is. He believes that the two bodies should continue the dialog. Budget discussion should be attended for both bodies and joint committee meetings should be held together whenever possible.

Councilor Moravsik shared some information he and Councilor Frink gained from their discussions with other Towns. The consensus of these towns is that the biggest expenses for them are employee medical and retirement benefits.

Councilor Peruzzotti reiterated the benefits of both bodies working together on the budgets. Rep. Granatosky agrees that the Town Council needs to attend more of the RTM budget meetings in order to share information. Councilor Flax agrees and looks forward in sharing his knowledge. Councilor Cerf agrees that the Town Council should share information directly with the RTM subcommittees.

Rep. Pasqualini would like all outside agencies to account for the previous year's allocations. Rep. Swindell stated that it would be helpful if the RTM had a narrative on cuts that the Council makes.

4. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.