



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, Joe de la Cruz, Greg Grim, Karen F. Morton, Bonnie Nault, Deb Peruzzotti, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, February 23, 2016

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Flax called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Flax, Councilor Barber, Councilor Grim, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Morton, Councilor de la Cruz and Councilor Peruzzotti
Members Absent: Councilor Nault and Councilor Watson

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

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2016-0065 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 February 9, 2016 and February 16, 2016 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor de la Cruz, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2016-0061 Market Analysis and Regulatory Audit Presentation

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Jon Reiner, Director of Planning and Development Services, explained that the consultants for the Town's Market Analysis and Regulatory Audit would be making a presentation followed by a question and answer session. Mr. Reiner provided a brief background on the Town Council initiative. While the Plan of Conservation and Development provides a vision for development in Groton, that vision must jive with the market and land use regulations to be implemented. The studies involved a focus group of 25 members from diverse groups.

Ken Schwartz of VHB worked on the regulatory audit and made a presentation on the executive summary of the project. The complete technical memo is available through the Office of Planning and Development Services.

Mr. Schwartz reviewed the goals of the study:

- o "Less is more"*
- o Be user friendly: clear and concise*
- o Simplify the approval process*

- o Provide predictability*
- o Provide incentives to meet economic development objectives*
- o Recognize best practices"*
- o Ensure consistency with Town's Plan of Conservation and Development*
- o Recognize demographic trends that relate to development patterns*

The purpose of the study is to:

- o Identify areas of concern*
- o Suggest changes*
- o Provide a Roadmap"to assist the Town in implementing recommendations*

Mr. Schwartz noted that focus areas of the study. Three zoning opportunity areas were identified: the Nautilus Memorial Design District, the Downtown Design District, and the Waterfront Design District.

During stakeholder interviews, VHB interviewed a variety of people and Mr. Schwartz highlighted some of their comments. He also noted a number of general comments, which are the observations made by VHB as professionals looking at the Town's zoning regulations.

VHB's recommendations are:

- 1. Pave the way for high quality economic development that reinforces a sense of place.*
- 2. Create user-friendly regulations.*
- 3. Simplify the regulations.*

Mr. Schwartz reviewed next steps, noting this is a team effort'lead by Planning and Development Services. Next steps are to:

- o Implement Priority One'recommendations*
- o Create a new Mixed Use Special Permit which can be applied along the Route 1 corridor*
- o Simplify use tables*
- o Initiate a master plan for the Route 1 corridor*
- o Conduct land use studies in select built industrial areas to better understand development characteristics and establish baseline for making adjustments to dimensional and density requirements*
- o Create a developers handbook*
- o Enhance use of technology (website, on-line permitting)*
- o Address streamlining, including potential to hold joint hearings*

Jim Damicis of Camoin Associates started his presentation with the summary of the Groton Economic and Market Trends Analysis. A few key points were identified:

- o It is better to do fewer things of high quality than to spread resources thin*
- o Quality development, design, services and amenities*
- o High quality and responsive customer service*
- o The market has changed and is driving the focus*

Recommendations are mixed use development; making sites available for new industrial and manufacturing; quality customer service across the board; and public-private partnerships.

The purpose of the study was to look at diversification of the tax base, to inform strategic decision-making, and to move from planning to action. Mr. Damicis noted that economic development is a holistic system with many components that the Town does not have direct control over.

Christa Ouderkirk Franzi of Camoin Associates explained that the core focus in Groton is to blend land use and zoning with economic and market analysis. The overlapping elements are quality of life and place, infrastructure, permitting process, sustainability, consensus building, and implementation capacity.

Mr. Damicis and Ms. Franzi reviewed observations and opportunities in the economic, physical, and business environments. Initiatives to be undertaken are:

- o Increase collaboration*
- o Establish communication channels for effective digital marketing*
- o Redefine what it means to do business in Groton*
- o Reinvalidate the built environment with a focus on quality*

The consultants reviewed the initiatives in more detail and suggested specific actions.

Ms. Franzi reviewed the digital marketing and communication channels initiative. Projects include a standalone economic development website; e-mail distribution lists and marketing campaigns; and social media accounts.

Reinvigorating the built environment efforts are to make the Route 1 corridor a place; create a reinvestment incentive program; and reexamine the referendum to bring water and sewer to industrially zoned properties.

Changing perceptions and redefining what it means to do business in Groton involves branding Groton as a great place to do business, engaging in a discussion about removing complex layers of government and service areas, and forming public-private partnerships.

Priority projects identified in the study are:

- o Change codes and regulations*
- o Continue to fix customer service*
- o Prove the market -- choose one or two priority projects*
- o Approve tax increment financing (TIF) for priority projects.*

Mr. Damicis explained TIF and public-private partnerships.

Ms. Franzi addressed the perception about the impact of the Navy on demographics and the household income calculation. She reviewed relevant statistics and noted that even though Camoin does not know the exact effect, they would not change their recommendations.

The consultants and staff responded to Councilors' questions. Mr. Damicis noted that the multiple jurisdictions in Groton were noted during interviews, but the lack of a single Town fire marshal was not raised as a specific issue in Groton. In other communities, having multiple fire marshals creates the problem of different interpretations of the code.

Mr. Schwarz noted that exploring the potential to combine the Planning and Zoning Commissions was included in the recommendations, but it is more important to update the regulations. Jon Reiner, Director of Planning and Development, noted that the Town is in the process of updating the Zoning Regulations. Combining the commissions may not be necessary after the regulations are streamlined. Duties that may be delegated to staff include approving applications below a certain threshold that meet all the requirements.

Mr. Reiner explained that the Town is using consultants now to work on certain sections of the Zoning Regulations. In the FYE 2017 budget, Mr. Reiner will be requesting \$150,000 to finish

rewriting the Zoning Regulations. An additional \$20,000 will be required for the design piece and \$25,000 for an economic development website. The rewrite process will take about 18 months. Councilor Peruzzotti requested periodic updates on the effort. Councilor Grim asked for a Master Plan that could be shared with the Council.

Discussion followed on the Route 1 corridor opportunity area and the need to eventually engage property owners as stakeholders to achieve join in versus buy in. Updating the regulations and offering incentives will help the effort.

Mr. Reiner addressed staffing requirements, noting that many of the efforts can be accomplished with outside help, but long term he will need more staff to do everything. Big steps are required to change the way the Town does business. In the meantime, staff will work on trying to develop properties consistent with the POCD. Discussion followed on how to engage stakeholders.

Mayor Flax thanked the consultants for their presentation.

2016-0045

Vehicle Purchases

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger explained that the Town has made arrangements to purchase the FYE 2016 vehicles and there are remaining funds in the budget. Staff is seeking the Council's approval to purchase a police vehicle and to provide funding for the Town's match for the electric vehicle grant. If the request is not approved, the remaining money will stay in the Fleet fund. Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, explained the electric vehicle grant and noted that approximately \$40,000 remains in the budget. Police Chief L. J. Fusaro noted that the detectives' vehicles are older and are maintenance problems. He would like to move vehicles from the marked fleet to the unmarked fleet and replace a total of four vehicles. Three are already ordered and this request is for one additional patrol car.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0062

Mystic Education Center Property

Recommended for a Resolution

Town Manager Oefinger noted that he has had a discussion with Representative John Scott about the possibility of submitting legislation to transfer vacant parcels broken off of the Mystic Education Center property from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to the Town.

Representative Scott distributed a copy of last year's conveyance bill showing how property is conveyed to towns. The application would be made by the Town and legislation submitted by Representative Scott by March 1st. He noted that transferring the property to the Town would allow the Town to be a partner in the potential sale and redevelopment of the property.

Town Manager Oefinger described the location of the property. Jon Reiner, Director of Planning and Development, and Paige Bronk, Economic and Community Development Manager, have been talking to the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and they are willing to make funds available to help the Town market the property. Mr. Bronk stated the transfer to the Town would be a positive for the overall development and marketability of the property.

Representative Scott described the legislative conveyance process and distributed a copy of the application. He urged Councilors to support the conveyance at a public hearing that will be scheduled. Action is anticipated in the last week of the short session in May.

The consensus of the Council was to support the application.

Councilor de la Cruz left the meeting.

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

Members Absent: Councilor Nault, Councilor de la Cruz and Councilor Watson

2016-0005 Pending Litigation (2016 Standing Referral)

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Barber, that the Committee of the Whole, along with Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Human Resources Director Robert Zagami and Town Attorney Eileen Duggan, go into executive session at 8:19 p.m. pursuant to General Statutes 1-200 (6) (B) for the purpose of discussing strategy and/or negotiations regarding pending litigation and claims involving multiple bargaining units, three current employees and one former employee.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

Councilor de la Cruz returned to the meeting and joined the executive session while it was in progress. The executive session ended at 9:22 p.m.

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

2016-0047 Noank Town Dock Pier Reconstruction

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, explained that in order to complete the project of replacing the Noank Town Dock and repairing the seawall, an additional \$50,000 will be required. Bids for the project came in higher than expected. Staff is recommending that the funds be placed in the FYE 2017 CIP if the Council chooses to move ahead with the project.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0048 Sidewalk on Johl Property Open Space

Discussed

Jon Reiner, Director of Planning and Development, requested Town Council approval for the Town Manager to sign a letter and wetlands application for a sidewalk to be built on a portion of Town owned open space on High Rock Road.

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

Town Manager Oefinger explained that the Town reserved the right to require a sidewalk across the street at the time the Pfizer day care facility was built on High Rock Road. The building has been purchased by Stonington Institute and the developer is willing to build the sidewalk at this time.

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0049 Relinquishment of Sewer and Drainage Easement at Watrous Subdivision, Pleasant Valley Road North

Discussed

Jon Reiner, Director of Planning and Development, explained that a drainage and sewer easement were granted as part of the Watrous Subdivision on Pleasant Valley Road North. There was a significant amount of ledge, which required three separate sewer easements instead. This request is for the Town to relinquish the sewer and drainage easement, and a revised easement for drainage only will be obtained from the developer.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0063

Sale of William Seely School Property

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Gretchen Chipperini distributed income and household information as well as information regarding retail expenditures. She disagreed with some of the demographic information generated by Camoin Associates in the Market Analysis. She expressed support for assisting developers. She noted the Town Council can vote itself the Zoning Commission. She objected to the due diligence period provided to Kincora in the contract. She suggested that the due diligence period should be three months and run concurrently with the time period in her contract. Mayor Flax noted that the Town has already signed the Purchase and Sale Contract.

Jon Reiner, Director of Planning and Development, has met with the developer and Ms. Chipperini. Planning and Development staff is able to initiate the zone change once Kincora does its due diligence and decides what it wants to do.

Ms. Chipperini stated she will not sign a contract with Kincora until the Town changes the zone. She asked that Camoin's numbers not be published. Mr. Reiner expressed support for Camoin's data, but stated he can look into the numbers.

2016-0064

National League of Cities (NLC) Legislative Agenda

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Town Manager Oefinger explained that Councilors Nault and Watson will be attending the National League of Cities conference in Washington D.C. in March. This item is on the agenda to discuss what issues the Town Council would like the Councilors to advocate for.

Discussion followed on possible topics as follows:

- Establishment of a commuter rail station in Groton
- Route 1 corridor streetscape
- Impact aid
- Nautilus dock
- Thames Street economic development

2015-0298

Establishment of a Charter Revision Commission

Discussed

The Town Council identified the following dates/times to conduct 15 minute interviews of candidates for the Charter Revision Commission:

Saturday, March 12th from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Monday, March 14th from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

The Council asked that the solicitation for applicants end on Friday, March 25th.

2016-0023

Town Council Goal Setting

Recommended for a Resolution

All Councilors concurred with the draft goals developed at the last goal setting session.

2014-0312

School Facilities Initiative Update

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger confirmed a presentation to the Town Council and Board of Education by the consultant for the School Facilities Initiative Task Force at a special meeting on Wednesday, March 16th at 6:00 p.m. The next meeting of the Task Force is March 3rd.

The Town Manager reviewed the schedule to achieve a November referendum.

2015-0219 FYE 2017 Budget Discussion

Discussed

Councilors received the draft schedule for budget review sessions and a calendar showing Councilors' conflicts.

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

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor de la Cruz, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to adjourn the meeting at 10:20 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.