



Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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 25, 2014

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Schmidt called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

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

Members Absent: Councilor Cerf, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Somers

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

3. Calendar and Communications

- Request for Financial Incentive/LBI, Inc.

The Council received a letter from LBI, Inc. requesting consideration for financial incentive. The Town Manager indicated this will be placed on a future Committee of the Whole meeting agenda.

4. Approval of Minutes - None

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2014-0057 Pre-Budget Open Discussion with the Public

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Mayor Schmidt invited members of the public to speak to the Council.

Ron Yuhas, 91 South Road, stated he is a member of the Poquonnock Bridge Fire District Board. He expressed concern with retirement and health benefits and urged the Council to look at the issues. Mr. Yuhas suggested that there may need to be budget cuts and layoffs.

Scott Aument, 127 Rogers Road, stated that the Town needs to get a handle on employee benefits. He noted savings in FYE 13 of \$2.6 million and recommended saving it for future shortfalls and raising the fund balance to perhaps 8%. Mr. Aument asked the Council to consider implementing the recommendations in the police study. Mr. Aument then reviewed his recommendations with respect to capital improvement projects.

Roseanne Kotowski, Ann Avenue, submitted a letter from a neighbor and read a prepared statement. She suggested a budget with a zero increase in taxes and expressed concern with the budget being developed by the Board of Education. Discussion followed on special education costs, the size of classes, and comparisons with other towns.

Larry Croxton, 35 Knoll Drive, attended Groton schools and is now a teacher in Groton. He feels the education system is what brings people to Groton and keeps them here. He explained some of the situations that result in the \$small classes" cited by Ms. Kotowski.

Natalie Billing cited a newspaper article with revenue and expense projections. She suggested that the Council provide a general discussion about their thoughts on the budget at the first budget session instead of starting right in with departments. Ms. Billing expressed support for education and the education budget, but noted that some things that can be reduced. She questioned the need for programming on Channel 19. The Council should request suggestions for reductions from the Superintendent and Town Manager and plan for the future. Ms. Billing recommended that the Council look at the CIP projects for the schools and spend more time on the education budget. She questioned the need for school security upgrades. Discussion followed on pre-K in Groton.

Mayor Schmidt thanked residents for attending the meeting.

2014-0022

Request for Police Chiefs to Appear before the Town Council to Comment on Town-Wide Police Study

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Jeff Nixon, Police Chief in Groton Long Point; Tom Davoren, Police Chief in the City of Groton; and Steve Smith, Deputy Chief for the Town were present.

Councilor Moravsik stated he would like input from the chiefs about the Town-wide police assessment.

Chief Davoren expressed support for pooling investigative services, noting it can be more streamlined than suggested in the report. The marine and dive divisions already conduct joint operations and pool resources, patrolling and enforcing events on the waterways. There is also an effort underway to regionalize a dive team.

Chief Nixon stated he is comfortable with 90% of the recommendations in the report. Utilizing seasonal personnel works for Groton Long Point. Groton Long Point already participates with the Town of Groton on prisoner processing and 9-1-1. The police departments work collaboratively already. With respect to cross-communication, having one radio system would still result in wait time. Chief Nixon mentioned a state communication system. He agreed with sharing information, but feels there must be a strategic plan for the future. The state's Public Safety Data Network still needs to be actualized. Chief Nixon noted that mandated training and regionalization of resources is already occurring.

Deputy Chief Smith agreed that the three entities have worked together formally and informally for years. He expressed no problems with the recommendations in the report and noted the Town is prepared to continue to work together to benefit all of the agencies.

Councilor Frink asked if there is any redundancy or opportunities to combine services. Chief Davoren stated that is a policy question. Mayor Schmidt noted that in the City, non-police officers man the desk and the Town uses civilian dispatchers. Councilor de la Cruz noted that the Coast Guard has an auxiliary group that may be able to help on the marine unit on a volunteer basis. Chief Davoren explained that the Coast Guard is law enforcement dependent, not a dive unit.

Councilor Flax noted that the report recommends combination of units, not just collaboration. Deputy Chief Smith explained that for dive operations, everyone will be training to a standard regionally. Councilor Flax asked if a committee could be established for long-term planning with a commitment from the chiefs and the subdivisions. Chief Nixon stated he cannot speak for the Groton Long Point Board of Directors. He is pro regionalization, but it will take a significant amount of time and investment to put the infrastructure in place. Chief Davoren added that working together is less communication dependent so interoperability is not as important. With centralized dispatch, there must be a single communication channel. Dispatchers in the City also monitor prisoners. Chief Davoren does not necessarily see a cost savings with combined dispatch. With respect to shared CAD/RMS, Chief Davoren does not want to hire someone to input data

again. The report also references Community Service Officers, but officers cannot be replaced by Community Service Officers. Councilor Flax noted that extensive research was done as part of the study with information provided by the chiefs and the report made recommendations. He stated there should be more of a discussion.

Chief Nixon stated that he was hired the last two weeks of the study preparation, and although he made himself available, he was not contacted by the consultant.

Councilor de la Cruz stated the Town is looking for cost savings. Chief Davoren suggested there are contradictions in the report. For example, eliminating dispatchers and replacing them with CROs at a higher pay rate would cost money. Over time, there is a potential for cost savings in dive operations. Chief Davoren addressed data sharing opportunities.

Councilor Flax asked Joe Sastre if he would like to make any comment. Mr. Sastre stated that everything is doable, but it takes some thought and planning. There will not be a large savings immediately and it takes political will to implement changes. Councilor Moravsk recommended referring dispatch consolidation to a committee. Councilor Watson agreed that political will is the key. He suggested picking an area like dispatch or dive services and talking about it in a committee.

Mayor Schmidt concluded by noting that there is a lot of collaboration taking place already and the Town needs to find a way to do it more thoroughly. She thanked the Chiefs for attending.

2014-0008

Joint Meeting with City of Groton (2014 Standing Referral)

Discussed

City Councilors Sheffield, Dempsey, Ilvento, Gerrish, Jervis, and Hedrick and Mayor Galbraith were present to meet with the Town Council

Mayor Galbraith noted a discussion that occurred at the last joint meeting regarding CIP projects for retaining walls not included in the road maintenance bond. Mayor Galbraith distributed photos of the project areas.

Mayor Galbraith submitted the highway budget to the Town Manager and reviewed the information with the Council. The packet includes:

- Transmittal letter.
- Budget narrative and cost center analysis.
- Budget document. (The effects of the new budget format are shown in the FYE 2014 Budget, FYE 2014 Estimate, and FYE 2015 Request; the FYE 2013 Actuals could not be adjusted to the new format).
- Detail sheets using same the object codes as the Town (to the extent possible).
- Worksheet to be completed by the Town (to complete apples to apples comparison).

Mayor Galbraith explained that the FYE 2014 Actuals will be higher than the estimates shown because of snow events (salt, overtime, and repairs). She explained the savings in personnel (hiring of a laborer vs. an engineer), medical insurance, and fleet and the increase in state road aid. Increases are shown in vehicle replacement, retirement, and OPEB.

Three City Councilors have been chosen to meet with the Town Council on the City's highway budget (Councilors Jervis, Gerrish, and Hedrick). Discussion followed on the process. It was noted that the City Council has already approved this highway budget. Mayor Galbraith suggested that in the future the discussion with the Town Council could take place in December as the budget is being formulated.

Councilor Flax stated it would be helpful to know where the department head started, what the Mayor recommended, and what the City Council adopted. Mayor Galbraith showed Councilors the City budget version compared to the Town budget version. She explained that adopting a new chart of accounts for the highway and police budgets would require new numbers for all City departments.

With respect to the recent highway budget mediation, Mayor Galbraith noted that it did not address what should be paid for, but suggested a dollar amount for discussion. Town Manager Oefinger stated he does not have anything from the mediator at this point. Mayor Galbraith read a copy of the mediator's report that she received. The Town Manager explained that the mediator was more interested in what was done in the past and what budgets were cut. The Town has asked to have a minority opinion attached to the decision. The apples to apples budget doesn't determine what the Town should pay for; it just provides a method for comparison. Although it is late in the game, there is value in having a meeting between the City Councilors, the City Mayor, and the Town Council. The spirit of the legislation was to have the discussion before being in the throes of the budget.

The meeting was scheduled for the March 25th Committee of the Whole meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Mayor Galbraith was asked to provide her list of what constitutes the making and repairing of a road."

2014-0061 Resolution Approving Amount of Bonds to be Issued in FYE 2014

Discussed

Sal Pandolfo, Director of Finance, requested authorization of bonds to be sold in April 2014 for the Thames Street Rehabilitation Program, Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation, and Senior Center Additions and Renovations. Mr. Pandolfo reviewed the amounts of the bonds and how the amounts are determined. Information was also provided on payments and estimated mill rate increase over the life of the bonds; comparison of debt limits and Town Council policy; current and proposed bonds; and current outstanding debt, tax-exempt and taxable bonds, existing and proposed debt service. Mr. Pandolfo noted that explanatory text for Senior Center had projected a 5% interest rate and the rate is lower so there is a savings.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2014-0066 Charter Oak Federal Credit Union Foundation Grant

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

The motion carried unanimously

2014-0038 Community Development Block Grant Application

Discussed

Susan Cullen, Planner II, explained that this round of block grant funds will be used for handicap conversions and energy efficiency measures for Pequot Village operated by the Housing Authority. Matching funds will be put up by the Housing Authority, but the Town must apply for the grant. The Town has entered into a three party agreement between the Town, ECHO, and the Housing Authority for the project.

The Town Manager explained this is a significant project. He described ECHO's role in the project. The Housing Authority is a standalone operation, but the Town receives 10% of rent receipts and contributes the sewer use fee.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2014-0062 Fair Housing Action Plan for 2014

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

The motion carried unanimously

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

Discussed

The Temporary Rules Commission is meeting on Thursday, February 27th at 1:00 p.m. at Town Hall Annex.

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

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Town Manager Oefinger distributed the agenda for the March 1st goal setting session and noted he will not be present at the meeting as he will be working on the budget.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor de la Cruz, to adjourn the meeting at 9:07 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.