



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

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, March 21, 2017

5:30 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Flax called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

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

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

3. Calendar and Communications

Councilor Nault met with the Town Manager, the Commanding Office of the Submarine Base, and the City Mayor regarding the sub base dock. She also attended a meeting the previous night on ECS funding.

Councilor Morton attended the swearing in ceremony for two newest promotes in the Police Department (a Sergeant and a Lieutenant).

4. Approval of Minutes

2017-0068 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 meeting of February 28, 2017 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Morton, seconded by Councilor Nault, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. NEW BUSINESS

2017-0025 Small Cities Community Development Block Grant - 2017 Application

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that a public hearing was held on the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant application at the last Town Council meeting. No public comments were received.

Paige Bronk noted that details of the request were provided at the public hearing. Community Development is seeking authorization to move forward with the application.

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

Councilor Antipas asked about an accounting of how the money is spent. Town Manager Oefinger noted that the program has changed over the years. While there is some rehabbing of single family homes, it is now done with a contract through ECHO. Mr. Bronk noted that the program is reviewed annually by the State Department of Housing, which provides significant oversight of the

program. Any questions regarding expenditures can be addressed to Mr. Bronk, but not all information is public. The cost of application preparation by ECHO is approximately \$5,000, which is reimbursable by the grant.

The motion carried unanimously

2017-0069 Request for Letter of Support for Thames River Innovation Place (TRIP)

Discussed

Hannah Gant, associated with Spark Makerspace, described her request for a letter of support for a Thames River Innovation Place project grant application and designation of the communities of Groton and New London as an Innovation Place. No financial support is requested at this time.

Councilor Peruzzotti arrived at 5:47 p.m.

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

Ms. Gant noted the effort has received significant staff support from the Town's Economic Development division. Paige Bronk noted it has been more in-kind support, but the project is now moving into the implementation phase, which involves many project proposals and private partners. Ms. Gant and Mr. Bronk noted proposed projects that could impact Groton including a Community Concierge and the Undersea Consortium. Ms. Gant spoke to the collaborative nature and strategy of the effort to retain employees, but also to encourage entrepreneurship regionally. The goals of the program are innovation, human capital retention, and place-making.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2017-0042 Zoning Regulations Rewrite - Update

Discussed

Zoning Commissioners present were Sue Sutherland, Steve Hudecek, Sue Archer, and Sue Marquardt along with Director of Planning and Development Jon Reiner and Assistant Director Deb Jones.

Mayor Flax stated that this joint meeting is not a meeting about the pending WRPD regulations, but about Zoning Commission meeting conduct.

Ms. Sutherland complimented the Zoning Commission and the mix of members. She noted their goal is to make the process friendlier to business.

Councilor Nault read the e-mail sent to the Town Manager from Councilor Watson expressing concerns with how the February 1st Zoning Commission meeting was conducted. Councilor Nault concurred that the meeting was not run in accordance with Robert's Rules. Ms. Sutherland suggested it is unfortunate that Councilors do not attend more meetings or that Councilor Watson was not at the beginning of the meeting. The invitation to address issues as they arise during the meeting was extended to everyone in the audience. Ms. Sutherland feels it is more interactive and more efficient.

Mayor Flax noted that when it is announced at the beginning of the meeting, those in attendance are prepared, but other members of the public were not notified before the meeting, which seems unbalanced. Ms. Sutherland noted that Robert's Rules allows flexibility and it has been done at other meetings.

Councilor Antipas noted that there is an impression that the Groton Open Space Association (GOSA) is more intimate with the Zoning Commission than it should be. He asked how the Chair

would address the concern. Ms. Sutherland noted that the Town Council is the appointing authority and the control. The Zoning Commission has a track record of working with businesses to get applications approved. Mr. Hudecek asked the Council not to confuse attendance at a meeting with collusion and stated there is no evidence based on the Commission's record.

Mayor Flax noted that the direction the WRPD regulations are going in and the recommendations are not consistent with the consultant's recommendations and could impact development in Groton.

Councilor Peruzzotti asked if the Commission feels it follows Robert's Rules and Ms. Sutherland stated yes. Councilor Peruzzotti stated that she feels it should be made clear on the agenda that public comment can be accepted at any point during the meeting. Councilor Peruzzotti noted that this is the third time that the Zoning Commission has been asked to meet with the Council because the Commission is not supporting a fair and open process. Councilor Peruzzotti is on the Personnel and Appointments Committee, and she takes her role very seriously. She feels that committee membership should be balanced. The one time she asked an applicant if they had any outside affiliations such as with GOSA, she received e-mails from GOSA calling her discriminatory and unfair. When people are not honest in the appointment process, it leads to the perception noted by Councilor Antipas.

Councilor Nault stated there is no way to find out who is a member of GOSA, and it is not listed on GOSA's website. Councilor Nault observed at the February 1st meeting that Mr. Steever was treated with reverence and the representative from Cardinal Honda was dismissed and referred to staff.

Councilor Barber suggested that it sounds like the meeting was manipulative, and she expressed concern that Chairman Sutherland interprets Robert's Rules her own way.

Commissioner Hudecek noted that during a public hearing, people can only speak during that portion of the meeting and once the public hearing is closed, they can no longer speak.

Commissioner Archer feels this is a single issue. She questioned how many people have expressed the negative perception of the Zoning Commission. She feels the meetings are well run. Commissioner Marquardt stated she needs to familiarize herself with Robert's Rules.

Mayor Flax stated that the Town Council has been very supportive of economic development, and the Council recognizes the importance of the Zoning Regulations re-write. However, the proposed regulations were modified in a way that does not support economic development, which is what raised the red flag. Since Councilors do not always attend the meetings, they assume that what happened at the February 1st meeting is what happens at every meeting.

Ms. Sutherland noted the Zoning Commission meets the first Wednesday of every month and the Council is invited to attend.

Mr. Reiner opined that it is important for boards and commissions to know what the Council's priorities are so that everyone is going in the same direction. Ms. Jones noted the Commission has been diligent about working on the regulations.

2016-0277

Disposition of Town Owned Property Acquired through Tax Foreclosure

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted receipt of the Planning Commission response to the CGS Section 8-24 referral concurring with staff's recommendations on the disposition of seven Town-owned properties. The Town Manager reviewed the seven properties and recommendations (to offer two properties for sale and to hold five for future disposition).

Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2017-0061 Supportive Housing Program Grant

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger explained that TVCCA provides funds to collaborating agencies to support housing needs. The funds are used by the Town of Groton to partially supplant salaries of existing Human Services staff and are included in the Department's funding plan.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2017-0062 Department of Education Youth and Family Services Funding

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger explained that these grant funds from the Department of Education are used to partially supplant salaries of existing Human Services staff. Matching funds are included in the Department's budget and grant funds are included in the Department's funding plan.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2017-0063 Department of Education Youth Services Enhancement Grant

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger explained that these grant funds from the Department of Education are used to support youth services programs. Matching funds are included in the Department's budget and grant funds are included in the Department's funding plan.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0260 FYE 2018 Budget Discussion

Discussed

Councilors have received the FYE 2018 Proposed Budget document. The Town Manager explained this is an unusual year with respect to state revenues. The budget identifies four possible scenarios, which were outlined by the Town Manager. The budget is based on scenario 2, which assumes a \$5,000,000 reduction in ECS funding. At the ECS forum held the previous night, Senator Somers and Representative de la Cruz indicated that they do not feel that the Governor's proposal to have towns pay one-third of teachers' retirement will go anywhere. Senator Somers suggested picking a mid-point between what was received last year for ECS and what is proposed in the Governor's budget. The Town Manager has also suggested a process that the Council may want to follow as they deliberate on the budget, since the Council will need to adopt the budget before revenues are known. The Town does not have the ability under the Charter to provide budget adoption relief. The Town Manager suggested that the Council keep a running list of things that could be cut or added back in based on actual revenues, and then pass those thoughts on to the RTM.

Councilor Nault noted that Senator Somers encouraged that letters be sent to the Appropriations Committee asking that the state budget be completed on time and noting how unfair the cuts are to Groton.

Councilor Moravsik feels the Council should agree on a scenario before deliberations begin, and Councilor Antipas agreed. Councilor Barber would like to hear from the Superintendent of Schools about cuts to education. Councilor Morton stated she will not support any scenario that

results in a large tax increase, and she would support cutting anything not mandated by statute, the charter, etc. as well as duplicate services. Councilor Barber agreed and noted her concerns with the education budget and duplicate services. Councilor Grim feels it is important to choose a scenario to guide the discussion. He supports Scenario 2 with the ability to re-adjudicate the decision. Councilor Nault agreed with Councilors Morton and Barber. Councilor Peruzzotti stated the Council must do its due diligence with every department's budget and make the right choices for the right reasons at the right time for the Town.

Councilor Moravsik was hoping the Council would meet before the budget public hearing on March 29th. Councilor Nault suggested adding it to the agenda for the March 23rd special meeting of the Committee of the Whole.

2017-0054 City Highway Budget - FYE 2018

Not Discussed

2017-0007 Property Acquisition/Sale (2017 Standing Referral)

Not Discussed

6. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Nault, seconded by Councilor Barber, to adjourn the meeting at 7:29 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.