



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
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, March 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 6:04 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Cerf, Councilor de la Cruz, 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**

None.

4. **Approval of Minutes**

2014-0094 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 March 11, 2014 and March 18, 2014 are hereby accepted and approved.

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

The motion carried unanimously

5. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None.

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

2014-0089 Presentation by Goman and York Property Advisors, LLC

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Jay Fisher of Goman and York explained that he and members of his firm were present to have an open conversation and dialog with the Town Council about providing possible assistance to the Town of Groton for economic development. Mr. Fisher described his background. Rob Ralston also reviewed his background including working in West Hartford on economic development.

Mike Goman reviewed his background and explained that the firm does traditional brokerage work and provides development services usually with existing buildings. They are not developers. The firm's approach is market and data driven. They take investors' money and put it to work in real estate development. The firm has planners and designers on staff. They address financial feasibility and permitting so that pre-development risks are removed from the project. Goman and York also provide economic development advisory services (marketing, identification of appropriate development plans, refinement of systems and procedures).

Councilor Frink noted that people have said the land use application process in Groton is difficult. Mr. Ralston stated that is not uncommon and he cited his experience in West Hartford. He stated

a review of regulations is necessary to make sure they are streamlined, comprehensive, and understandable. Mr. Fisher agreed adding that staff that is focused on getting someone through the development process. Mr. Goman emphasized that regulations should be swift, simple, and certain. Developers want to know that the land use regulations are measurable and objective with no discretionary language.

Councilor de la Cruz asked if the Town should start by identifying its most marketable property or addressing the land use regulations. Mr. Goman suggested that marketing and streamlining of processes can be concurrent.

Councilor Cerf noted Groton's multiple "downtowns": Thames Street, downtown Groton, and downtown Mystic. Mr. Goman explained that real estate development is a long term process. A comprehensive Plan of Development is an important guiding document, but the Town must be responsive to the market. Mr. Fisher suggested involving businesses in the vision team. Also, the Council needs to meet with the business community on a regular basis and engage them in discussion.

Councilor Flax asked how the firm found Groton. Mr. Fisher explained that his family owns property in Groton Long Point down the street from Councilors Cerf and Moravsik. In conversations with his neighbors, people were asking him questions about the process in Groton.

Councilor Flax stated there are properties that need some help such as the Tilcon property (is it marketable?) and the vacant school properties. He asked how Goman and York would help. Mr. Goman said that the firm does development services work. A better strategy is to put together a package for a target market. Mr. Goman stated the commercial real estate market is soft. There is not a lot of retail; industrial and multi-family are strong. Office depends on the area.

Mr. Goman recognizes that the Town must follow a procurement process and his firm is happy to respond to Requests for Proposals.

Councilor Cerf noted that Mr. Fisher has experience with Gretchen Chipperini's property and she recently made a presentation to the Council on a lifestyle center development. Mr. Fisher explained his connection to Ms. Chipperini, his familiarity with her property, and his recommendations. Lifestyle centers are not always successful in New England because the area is not weather friendly. With respect to Tilcon, a split of the property may be appropriate and there is significant potential. The utility extension referendum failed, but it could be done with private funds. That does not speak to whether or not there is a market.

Councilor Frink asked about the firm's experience with repurposing municipal property. Mr. Goman noted that office rents are so low, that it is not feasible to build new. Also, the Town is not overbuilt in retail, but under-demolished. Multi-family and industrial are potential uses. Age-restricted communities are possible based on results of underlying research on the market.

Mayor Schmidt thanked the group for attending the meeting.

2013-0209

Groton Veterans Memorial - Update

Discussed

Jim Streeter introduced Matt Morton and Lee Vincent from the ad hoc committee for improvements and upgrade to Veterans Memorial Park. Other members of the committee were not able to attend. Mr. Streeter reviewed a packet of information provided to the Council including the history of this effort.

Plans include the installation of six flag poles for flags from each branch of service, and a donor marker. Fundraising has resulted in \$22,000+ to date. A veterans plaza will be constructed with

8'x 8' blocks engraved with a veteran's name, branch, highest rank, and conflict or dates of service. The plaza will accommodate approximately 1100 blocks. A portion of the funds raised will be used to purchase blocks for each of the 67 Groton casualties. The plan also includes upgrades to lighting and landscaping. The total project cost is \$40,000. Estimated income is \$25,000 plus \$70,000 for the blocks, which will create an endowment for future upgrades and maintenance. The site plan application is currently under review by Planning and Development Services, and Mr. Streeter is seeking Town Council approval to go ahead with the project.

Mayor Schmidt expressed her appreciation for Mr. Streeter's efforts.

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the Town Council has already authorized the additional war memorial panel; this plan is for the plaza blocks. Councilor Frink asked if this is envisioned to be used as a ceremonial space and Mr. Streeter stated yes.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2014-0067

Godfrey Street - Request for Easement

Discussed

The Town Manager described the location of the paper street off Godfrey Street in Mystic, which serves 20 Godfrey Street, Rita's Rest Home, and other properties. The Town has received a request for an access easement over the paper street. This is a 'housekeeping' item, which does not obligate the Town to any more or less than the existing situation. The easement requires a CGS Section 8-24 referral to the Planning Commission.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to refer the request for easement for 20 Godfrey Street to the Planning Commission under CGS Section 8-24.

The motion carried unanimously

2014-0075

Request for Financial Incentive - LBI, Inc.

Discussed

Mayor Schmidt noted that the Council toured the LBI facility the previous day. Town Manager Oefinger noted this item is on the agenda for discussion purposes. Mr. Legnos has asked for some consideration under the Town's economic development incentive program. With incentives, it is important to keep in mind that nothing exists now, but after five years the new development will be fully on the tax rolls. The Town Manager distributed information, based on a number of assumptions, estimating the benefit/incentive requested by Mr. Legnos over a five year period. There may be another incentive program available to Mr. Legnos known as the Urban Jobs Program. The Town Manager reviewed benefit/incentive estimates under that program.

The Town Manager asked that a public hearing be scheduled (date to be determined) to start the process.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Flax, to schedule a public hearing on LBI, Inc.'s request for financial incentive.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

Councilor Cerf noted that the benefit to Mr. Legnos would be greater under the Urban Jobs Program, but less for the Town. She expressed her support for the incentive. Town Manager Oefinger noted that equipment is not included in this program. He then reviewed the use of the Town's incentive program in the past.

2014-0004

Pending Litigation (2014 Standing Referral)

A motion was made by Mayor Schmidt, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that the members of the Town Council Committee of the Whole, Town Manager Mark R. Oefinger and Town Attorney Eric

Callahan go into executive session at 7:38 p.m. pursuant to General Statutes Section 1-200(6)(B) for the purpose of discussing strategy and negotiations related to pending litigation and/or pending claims concerning Pettini Contracting Corporation and Phase I of the Mystic Streetscape project.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 8:00 p.m.

2009-0124

Ethics Ordinance

Discussed

Councilors were provided with the legislative history and the latest draft of the ethics ordinance. Councilor Flax and former Councilors Dean Antipas and Paulann Sheets developed the draft. Councilor Cerf expressed concern that there is no ethics code as required by the Charter. Councilor Flax explained that the draft code covered absolutely everything. He suggested inviting Mr. Antipas in to review the document after the new Councilors have read it. When the completed document was submitted to the Council, several points and challenges were brought up. Additionally, there was some discussion at the Council of Governments about establishing a regional ethics board, which would have addressed many of the issues raised. The Town Manager explained that it was determined that the Council of Governments may not have the authority to establish a regional board under state statute. There was an attempt to get legislation introduced to allow it, but it never happened.

Councilor Cerf stated that she, Councilor Moravsik, and Councilor Frink attended the CCM course on ethics and accountability. She feels it is a complicated issue, but it is important to start. Councilor Moravsik would like to review the Town's draft code and suggested dedicating the month of May to the ethics code effort. Councilor Frink suggested establishing a committee. Councilor Flax reiterated his suggestion that Mr. Antipas make a presentation before starting a new committee. Town Manager Oefinger agreed, noting that the Town Attorney could also provide a review. He suggested that the Council as a whole identify what is to be accomplished, what ethical issues are a concern, and have a discussion before setting up another committee.

The consensus of the Council was to invite Mr. Antipas to make a presentation in May.

2014-0093

Tour of Former Noank School

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Mayor Schmidt noted that some Councilors toured the Noank School the previous day. She feels that the building is in very bad condition and needs to be demolished. Councilors de la Cruz, Frink, and Moravsik agreed. The Town Manager noted that funds have been included in the FYE 2015 Capital Improvement Program for demolish the building (\$400,000+).

Councilor Watson recognized Robert Palm and Clint Wright who will be making a presentation to the Council in the future on the proposed community garden at the site. Mr. Palm stated that originally he thought his group might use a portion of the building but have since decided that their focus is on preserving the six acre site for passive recreation, with or without a building. If it is the will of the Council to demolish the building, the group has no objections. They are a conservancy of citizens that want to maintain and beautify the property; they are not interested in managing a building.

Councilor Peruzzotti noted that giving the group time to develop a plan for the property does not negate the fact that the building needs to come down. She expressed support for the community garden project, but feels the building demolition is a separate issue.

Mr. Wright noted that everyone who has looked at the building has come to the same general conclusion. The garden proposal has nothing to do with the building. Mr. Wright reiterated the group's support for the Council's decision.

Mr. Palm noted that the group would like to make their presentation in May, which requires an extension of the six-month time period granted by the Council. Councilors concurred with granting an extension.

2012-0050 Potential Disposition of William Seely School Property

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger explained that this item is on the agenda to have a further discussion about whether to dispose of the Williams Seely School property and if so how.

A motion was made by Councilor de la Cruz, seconded by Councilor Moravsik, to enter executive session at 8:29 p.m. to discuss 2012-0050 Potential Disposition of William Seely School Property and to invite Town Manager Mark Oefinger to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 9:05 p.m.

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

Recommended for Deletion:

2013-0125 City of Groton FYE 2014 Highway Budget - Request for Mediation

Not Discussed

2014-0042 Non-Union Personnel Matter

Not Discussed

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor de la Cruz, to adjourn the meeting at 9:06 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.