



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, May 10, 2016

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Flax called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Flax, Councilor Barber, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Morton, Councilor de la Cruz and Councilor Watson

Members Absent: Councilor Grim, Councilor Nault and Councilor Peruzzotti

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

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2016-0115 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 16, 2016 (special meeting #2), March 29, 2016, March 30, 2016, April 25, 2016, and April 27, 2016 are hereby accepted and approved.

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

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

Councilor Grim joined the meeting at 6:09 p.m.

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

Members Absent: Councilor Nault and Councilor Peruzzotti

2016-0116 Ledge Light Health District Community Health Assessment

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Steve Mansfield and Russ Melmed from Ledge Light Health District (LLHD) were present to address the Council. Mr. Melmed reviewed a PowerPoint presentation on the Community Health Assessment conducted by LLHD and Lawrence and Memorial Hospital (L&M). The goal of the assessment is to answer questions about health; to determine how the region compares to other areas; and to examine the differences. Many topics are covered in the assessment for various geographies such as the state, New London County, the L&M service area, the LLHD area, towns, and census tracts. Mr. Melmed noted various data sources. The PowerPoint presentation focuses on the 2015 Wellbeing Survey. Mr. Melmed reviewed survey responses to various questions including: overall health assessment; access to recreation; condition of parks and recreation

facilities; towns' responsiveness to needs of residents; the job done by police; unemployment; food insecurity; overweight or obese; high blood pressure; diabetes; and cardiovascular disease mortality.

Mr. Melmed noted sample sizes, weighting of responses, and the method of surveying.

Other information covered included access to a car; smoking prevalence; tick borne diseases by area; asthmas rates; hospitalization rates; opioid admissions; accidental poisoning mortality; and infant mortality.

Next, LLHD will be releasing the full report and conducting a prioritization event on May 18th from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Filomena's Restaurant in Waterford. LLHD will then develop an improvement plan and a strategic plan.

Discussion followed on engaging pharmacies in the fight against opioid addiction that starts with prescription medications.

2016-0113

Tax Incentive Agreement for Branford Manor

Discussed

Matt Finkle, President of Related Affordable, the purchasers of Branford Manor, described the company and general plans for the property. Dave Pearson, Senior Vice President of Related Affordable, described Branford Manor which consists of 442 units in 47 buildings on 37 acres that are in need of substantial renovation. The HUD affordability agreement that protects the residents is set to expire this year and the property was marketed. Related seeks to be long term owners of the property and to preserve the affordability. Mr. Pearson reviewed a handout on their proposal to invest \$18.6 million to renovate the units including energy efficiency upgrades, aesthetic improvements, and major system replacements. There will also be a new resident services building.

The financing structure involves tax exempt bonds with the Groton Housing Authority (GHA) being the conduit for the bonds in a public-private partnership. There will be no liability for the GHA. A critical component of the plan is real estate tax certainty. Related is proposing a tax abatement agreement that sets out a 30-year taxing schedule so that the property can be structured for the long term benefit of the residents. The property is located in the Enterprise Zone and the Town has statutory authority to enter into the agreement.

Mr. Finkle and Mr. Pearson answered Town and City Councilors' questions noting that laundry facilities will be located building wide rather than within individual units. Renovations are done with residents in place, unless there are environmental issues.

Councilor Antipas questioned the taxes that the Town would be giving up over the term of the agreement. Mr. Finkle noted that the long term value of real estate is determined by many factors. Mr. Pearson explained that Related is seeking the preservation of affordable housing, not market value housing so there is a tradeoff. The scheduled tax payments would be set, regardless of changes in property value.

City Mayor Marian Galbraith posed a number of questions. Mr. Pearson confirmed that despite wording in the draft agreement, tax payments would be fixed. The improved value includes the new building. Mayor Galbraith requested a breakdown of the \$18.6 million improvements and questioned economic development benefits of the project. Mr. Finkle cited purchasing of materials, hiring for construction jobs, and improvement of residents' lives, which cannot be quantified. Mr. Finkle explained that Related has a replace and reserve schedule that will be set up with the project to replace improvements as they wear out.

Town Manager Oefinger questioned the applicability of the Enterprise Zone which provides incentives for the delta of the increase in value and asked how it would affect the draft agreement. Attorney Jeff Godley noted the format and details will need to be worked out.

The GHA has indicated that the potential bond amount is \$50 million. Mr. Finkle noted that the higher amount covers acquisition, renovation, soft costs, financing, fees, escrows, and a development fee. The fee to the GHA (\$375,000) is a percentage of the issued bond. Mr. Finkle added that Related's bond counsel will provide the information and explanation as to why GHA is not liable for bond repayment. With respect to maintaining affordability, Related will seek to renew the Section 8 designation with HUD for 20 years.

Town Manager Oefinger suggested that Town and City staff meet with Related to discuss the proposal in more detail. He noted that the Town is conducting a revaluation that will be effective on October 1st and the Town will want to use the new valuation number for the agreement.

Mr. Pearson noted that Related needs to close in August so the agreement must be finalized sometime in June.

The Committee recessed for five minutes.

2016-0117

Introduction of Ordinance on School Facilities Initiative

Discussed

Members of the School Facilities Initiative Task Force and Board of Education were present along with Representative John Scott and Mike Zuba of Milone & MacBroom.

John Heller, Chairman of the School Facilities Initiative Task Force, noted that the Town is in an unfortunate situation with the state pulling the special legislation that was designed to help Groton. Mr. Heller assured that Council that everyone involved followed the proper procedures for the special legislation including meeting with Commissioner Curry. They were well aware of the process and the timing of the request and at no time did any state staff member raise any concerns with Groton's request prior to Commissioner Curry choosing not to put the special legislation forward. Groton will now make a regular grant application and attempt to qualify for a diversity school. Currently, Groton is just barely in compliance with racial balance and expects to be out of compliance next year.

Mr. Zuba reiterated that Groton's request to the state was for consideration of the project. Groton's representatives articulated Groton's situation and the need for additional dollars to have a successful referendum. Diversity school status is predicated on October 1st enrollment in the same year the application is made so Groton did not qualify for the current school year.

The group has returned to the idea of renovating like new the two middle schools as elementary schools, which changes the project time line. Groton reimbursement rate for renovate like new has increased from 54% to 57.5%. Total project cost decreases from \$196 million to \$184.4 million with a net cost to Groton of \$84 million. This is the same program envisioned in Groton 2020. The grant applications will be made in June. Mr. Zuba stated that Groton needs to bring the project to the state and go through the traditional process to ask for waivers. It is unknown what the state will do if the Town is in balance by only a few students.

Discussion followed on addressing voter confusion. Mr. Zuba stated that this is substantively the same plan, but it reuses old buildings with additions rather than constructing new buildings.

Dr. Graner noted that there was misinformation reported in the newspaper. He walked the Council through the developments of the last week that found the Superintendent and Board of Education Chair lobbying for a bill that had already been pulled by the Commissioner.

Mr. Zuba reviewed the public survey results on price points. As costs went down, support went up, but the \$94 million project still had about 50% support. This is a viable project at \$84 million, but leaders will need to explain the project to the voters.

Discussion followed on the cost savings associated with consolidating the middle and elementary schools.

Councilor Morton expressed concern because she feels that the Town Council represented to taxpayers that they would not move forward with the plan if the special legislation did not come through.

Kevin Trejo, a member of the Task Force, disagreed and urged the Council to move forward citing the benefits of the plan, even at \$84 million. Councilor de la Cruz also expressed support for the plan noting that the Task Force worked for three years to develop a good plan.

Councilor Grim left the meeting at 8:20 p.m.

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

Discussed

Representative Scott noted that the school bonding bill will be addressed later this month. He reviewed the process for the Council. Moving forward, the Town should trust the reimbursement numbers provided by the state.

Councilor Watson left the meeting at 8:24 p.m.

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

Discussed

Mr. Heller, Representative Scott, and Mr. Zuba explained the reason behind seeking the special legislation and why the Task Force originally moved away from the renovate like new plan. The Town will need to seek a waiver of the maximum cost per square foot for renovate like new.

Councilor Grim returned at 8:27 p.m.

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

Discussed

Councilor Antipas noted that there is not a "do nothing" option.

Racial balance figures will be known on October 1st so Groton will know if it is eligible for a diversity grant. Town Manager Oefinger explained that the referendum authorizes the entire project, but the explanatory text can explain potential reimbursement. He reiterated that a lot of effort has gone into the school plan over the last three years and the renovate to new project was the original plan for most of the process. The first decision for the Town Council is whether or not the plan is acceptable and will the voters approve it at the new price point. The project is based on two premises - a waiver or legislative change of the maximum cost per square foot and receipt of a diversity grant. A decision must be made in the next couple of weeks to move forward with a November referendum. The Council always has the authority to pull the project, even after the voters approve it. He asked the Council to consider if not this plan, then what? If not now, then when? Groton still needs a plan.

Dr. Graner advocated for having a plan and moving forward in a united, positive way.

Councilors were asked to forward questions to the Town Manager's office so they can be answered.

A special joint meeting of the Committee of the Whole and Board of Education was scheduled for Wednesday, May 18th at 6:00 p.m. at the Groton Senior Center.

2016-0118 Public Hearing on an Ordinance on School Facilities Initiative

Not Discussed

2016-0119 Referral of Ordinance on School Facilities Initiative to Planning Commission under CGS Section 8-24

Not Discussed

2016-0120 Referral of Ordinance on School Facilities Initiative to City of Groton Planning Commission under CGS Section 8-24

Not Discussed

2016-0134 State Department of Transportation I-95 Signage Initiative

Recommended for a Resolution

Mayor Flax explained that the state is redoing I-95 signage. In 1989, the Council passed a resolution requesting no signage on Exit 89. Jon Reiner and Paige Bronk of the Office of Planning and Development Services were present to request that the Council allow signage on I-95 at Exit 89 to direct people to downtown Mystic. Without the Council's approval, the state will maintain the status quo based on the 1989 resolution. The deadline for comments to the state on the signage project is May 20th.

Mr. Bronk noted that the roads in question are state roads (I-95, Allyn Street, Route 1) and there is no local ownership of the roadways. Allyn Street was designed and constructed for larger volumes of traffic than just local traffic. Mr. Bronk noted that the Town has ramped up economic development efforts in the last year and the recently completed marketing study includes specific recommendations for local signage. Exit 89 Mystic signage would provide an immediate benefit to Mystic businesses, without local funding. The marketing study anticipates growth from small and medium businesses like those in Mystic. This proposal is supported by many businesses.

Councilor Barber read a statement from Councilor Nault in support of Mystic signage at Exit 89. Councilor Barber echoed her support. Councilor Morton was also supportive noting that she does not believe there will be a big increase in traffic since most people rely on GPS when travelling.

Councilor Antipas questioned the process and noted that the businesses were aware of the issue before the residents were. He provided a history of the issue going back to when Allyn Street was built. He suggested that increased traffic leads to increased parking in surrounding neighborhoods.

Town Manager Oefinger explained how he was approached by the state about this issue. He provided an historical overview of the issue, noting this is a policy issue for the Town Council.

Councilor de la Cruz expressed support for the proposal. He also suggested establishing a trolley operating out of the commuter parking lot at Exit 88 going to downtown Mystic and the Thames River Heritage Park.

Mayor Flax noted that many people who use Exit 90 never make it to downtown Mystic. Exit 89 signage is supported by the Chief of Police who believes it might slow traffic down. Mayor Flax feels the exit should be signed, but the Council should be respectful of the neighborhoods and

work with DOT to lessen the pain. Ideas to lessen the impact include directing people to parking with adequate spaces; installing signage for Exit 90 attractions before Exit 89; and providing additional crosswalks at the Allyn Street/Route 1 intersection.

A motion was made by Councilor Morton, seconded by Councilor Barber, to rescind the Resolution Expressing Opposition to Changing Signs for the Allyn Street Exit on Interstate 95 passed on May 16, 1989.

Councilor Antipas noted that the cost of this will be borne by the residents. Councilor de la Cruz noted the deadline from the state to make a decision. Councilor Barber stated she is mindful of the residents and can request other things from the state like a traffic light in lieu of the blinking light at Library Street.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 5 - Mayor Flax, Councilor Barber, Councilor Grim, Councilor Morton and Councilor de la Cruz
Opposed: 1 - Councilor Antipas

2016-0122 Vergennes Court - Update

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, distributed packets of information on Vergennes Court. Funds were appropriated in 2005 to study dead-ending of the road and funds were subsequently approved for construction. Mr. Schneider presented a plan showing the proposed closure of Vergennes Court, which would provide a barrier for regular traffic, but allow emergency access. The plan also creates a proper crosswalk on Route 1. Mr. Schneider presented statistics on traffic movements collected in 2005. There was a total of 30 movements. The project would be completed with state funds with a 10% local match. A letter was sent to abutting property owners about surveying for the project,. A public information meeting will be held in June. Once design is complete, the project will go to the state for their review.

In response to Councilor Morton, the Town Manager noted that there was a fatality in the area, but there has been no one precipitating factor for the proposal. The Traffic Authority has looked at the area many times because of the traffic movements and there has been an ongoing desire to improve traffic flow, and minimize delays in the mornings and afternoons.

There are two other access points into the neighborhood at traffic lights. The 2005 traffic study noted that the minimal traffic movements at Vergennes Court would have no impact on the other access points.

Mr. Schneider stated that the plan can be posted at local businesses prior to the public meeting to notify property owners. Discussion followed on the project's inclusion in previous Capital Improvement Programs and identified funding sources.

2016-0111 Historic Documents Preservation Grant (2017)

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0114 Port Security Grant

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0123 Appointment to Noank School Public Gardens Task Force

Discussed

The Noank School Public Gardens Task Force has recommended Heather Somers to fill a vacancy created by the resignation of Robert Palm.

A motion was made by Mayor Flax, seconded by Councilor Antipas, that this matter be Recommended

for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0121 2016 Plan of Conservation and Development

Discussed

Jon Reiner, Director of Planning and Development, noted that the draft Plan of Conservation and Development has been completed and a public hearing is scheduled for June 29th at 6:30 p.m. The Town Council has also hold a public hearing and must adopt the Plan. Mr. Reiner noted that the Planning Commission can make a presentation to the Council.

2016-0110 Disposition of Former Colonel Ledyard School

Discussed

If Councilors would like to tour Colonel Ledyard School, or other vacant schools, they should notify the Town Manager.

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

Recommended for Deletion:

2014-0208 Policy Initiatives to Increase Revenue

Not Discussed

2015-0257 Connecticut Partnership Plan 2.0

Not Discussed

2015-0285 Town Council Orientation

Not Discussed

2016-0093 FYE 2017 Proposed Budget Deliberations

Not Discussed

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Antipas, seconded by Councilor Barber, to adjourn the meeting at 10:08 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.