



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

Wednesday, May 18, 2016

6:00 PM

Groton Senior Center

#### SPECIAL MEETING - JOINT MEETING WITH BOARD OF EDUCATION

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER

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

#### 2. ROLL CALL

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

*Board of Education: Watson, Ackerman, Fitzgerald, Newsome, Weitlauf, White, Superintendent Graner*

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

#### 3. NEW BUSINESS

2016-0117

#### Introduction of Ordinance on School Facilities Initiative

##### Discussed

*Mayor Flax explained that this meeting is to discuss the next steps in the school facilities initiative in light of the changes in the project resulting from the inability to obtain special legislation. Dr. Graner reiterated that the Town has a plan, has invested 3½ years in that plan, and must move forward with the plan in unity.*

*Board of Education member Volkmann arrived at 6:09 p.m.*

*Dr. Graner continued by providing an overview of the history and benefits of the Groton 2020 plan, noting the success of magnet schools throughout the state and in Groton. He concluded by Groton must take a leap of faith and have resilience to bring the plan to fruition.*

*Councilor de la Cruz noted that he has been consistent in his support of the plan and he feels it is up to Groton's leaders to share information about the plan. He noted it will be harder to consolidate schools once money is expended to fix them. Councilor de la Cruz left the meeting at 6:16 p.m.*

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

##### Discussed

*Jon Heller, Chairman of the SFITF, emphasized that the proposal before the Council was originally Plan A and met the goal of keeping the cost to Groton taxpayers under \$100 million. The public survey showed that at the \$84 million price point there is 54% (+/- 4%) support for the project.*

*Mayor Flax expressed concern with having already presented Plan B (new construction) as the best option, getting the word out about the change, and overcoming other obstacles such as the land swap.*

*Craig Koehler of the SFITF noted the need to educate people about the special legislation and how it was never guaranteed. He does not feel that a piece meal approach will ever address the whole problem. Mr. Koehler cited low interest rates and the Town's low debt service, and expressed his support for moving forward.*

*Discussion followed on discussions that have taken place with people who support doing something for the schools and those who do not trust any plan put forward.*

*Discussion then turned to the possibility of closing another elementary school. Mike Zuba of Milone and MacBroom stated that the plan will hopefully bring students back to the Groton School district. The decision to close another school can be made after enrollment trends are looked at again.*

*State Representative John Scott noted this is the same general plan - a new middle school and two elementary schools - that was studied in Phase II and that has now been vetted by three different consultants.*

*Councilor Peruzzotti asked the Council to consider posing multiple referendum questions to address the middle school and elementary schools separately. Mr. Zuba noted that the community survey showed that Groton was split on the new vs. renovate to new question, which means the project could go either way.*

*Councilor Morton expressed concerns with the way the new construction plan was presented, but she stated her support for the project and the need to be vocal and to address the Merritt property. Mr. Zuba noted that a conservative cost to purchase land for a swap has been included in the total project cost.*

*Jane Dauphinais shared rudimentary plans to educate citizens about the referendum including forming a PAC, making presentations to various geographic areas and groups, producing cable television shows, and networking with PTAs and teachers.*

*Dr. Graner noted that a 'do nothing' option includes losing more children to other school districts, citing the competitive nature of attracting students.*

*Board member Volkmann recognized Natalie Billing who shared her concerns about the plan passing. Ms. Billing represented herself as the group's 'reality check.'*

*Mr. Koehler suggested that the 'reality check' is the fact that it will cost people more down the road if the referendum is not approved. Groton has an opportunity with Electric Boat expanding its workforce to keep children coming to the area in the Groton school system.*

*Mr. Zuba noted that he is very familiar with Groton and he has done work all over the state. Surrounding communities are making investments in their schools. Electric Boat is increasing its localized job base and the Town wants to attract those people. Schools are the key driver. Groton must invest in the community to bring in businesses.*

*Discussion followed on breaking the project into multiple questions. A copy of the draft ordinance was distributed to the group. Mr. Zuba noted that the ordinance must match the application made to the state in June. If any portion of a multi-question referendum fails, it would require a new application and delay the project.*

*Mr. Koehler noted that the project is a package and the elementary school components address the racial imbalance issue.*

*Mr. Zuba explained how the SFITF went from a renovate to new project to asking for special legislation for new construction. He also assured the group that the Town has progressed quite far in its negotiations with the state about a property exchange for the Merritt property.*

*Four actions are required to advance the ordinance to referendum: Introduction of the Ordinance, schedule of a public hearing, and referral of the project to the Town Planning Commission and City of Groton Planning and Zoning Commission.*

*Councilor de la Cruz arrived at 7:40 p.m.*

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

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

**The motion carried unanimously**

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

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

**The motion carried unanimously**

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

**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**

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

**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**

**4. ADJOURNMENT**

*A motion was made by Mayor Flax, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to adjourn the meeting at 7:42 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*