



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Rita M. Schmidt, Councilors Dean Antipas, Genevieve Cerf, Joe de la Cruz, Bruce S. Flax, Bob Frink, Rich Moravsik, Deborah L. Peruzzotti and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, May 19, 2015

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Schmidt called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Cerf, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Flax, Councilor Frink, Councilor Moravsik and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor Peruzzotti

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

3. **NEW BUSINESS**

2015-0136 Effects of Heroin on the Community

Discussed

Mayor Schmidt thanked everyone from the Town and public for attending the forum.

Councilor de la Cruz asked for this meeting in response to the article about the Gloucester Police Department's new program to assist people who are addicted. Councilor de la Cruz's goal is for Groton to adopt a policy like Gloucester. He mentioned a new group called Shine a Light On Heroin (SALOH) which has been formed to bring attention to heroin addiction. Councilor de la Cruz described his personal experience with getting his son into rehab and then learning from his son that many people were forced to leave rehab due to lack of funds. Councilor de la Cruz asked those present to introduce themselves.

Jim Spellman of SALOH addressed the Town Council about how heroin affects families and the conspiracy of silence, which is why SALOH was born. The problem needs to be addressed by experts, law enforcement, health care professionals, and others working together. Mr. Spellman wants dealers off the street, but it is equally important that victims receive needed treatment. Mr. Spellman noted a large shipment of heroin recently seized in New York City. SALOH recently held an event that was attended by first responders. They will be conducting a heroin awareness event on May 30th at Ocean Beach Park as a precursor to a June 3rd event. Mr. Spellman stated that the Gloucester program is innovative and brilliant. The program offers a means of assisting heroin addicts and it can be replicated in Groton. He urged Councilors to listen to this evening's speakers.

Councilor Watson asked what currently happens when a victim approaches Ledge Light, or Human Services, or the police. Krista Quattromani of SALOH noted that part of Gloucester's plan is to assign an "angel," which is similar to the recovery coach program in Rhode Island. There is a limited number of professionals available and a recovery coach program is designed to provide an additional layer of knowledgeable people. There are solutions, but agencies are not working together. SALOH is working to connect resources. Mr. Spellman noted that the domestic violence program is a good model for a referral service, with the police referring to an agency. However, there are too few open beds. He added that an "angel" is equivalent to a sponsor in AA.

Councilor Frink asked what the Town government's role is, realizing that the Council creates policy and funds programs. How asked how the problem manifests itself in the various departments. Deb Burke from Human Services noted that putting a face on addiction is a start, as is referring to addiction as a health problem. Not many people come directly to Human Services for help, although they do have issues with addiction.

Mr. Spellman noted that many addicts are steered to rehab by the police. Groton Town Police Chief Steve Smith noted that a lot of what is occurring in Gloucester is occurring on an informal basis in Groton. The Groton police do everything in their power to assist individuals to reach a better place.

Councilor Cerf noted that it is a problem because it is illegal to possess heroin so people are afraid to come forward with the problem. She suggested that there needs to be a solution to address the criminal aspect of addiction and to immediately address withdrawal. Chief Smith noted a lack of resources to address the problem so helping someone immediately is not always possible. Councilor Cerf asked about what is being done at the state level. Chief Smith stated nothing except for legislation protecting the person calling to report an overdose and legislation regarding the administration of medication to someone who has overdosed. Mr. Spellman cited an example from Rhode Island where three out of six medical interventions for overdoses resulted in victims seeking treatment.

Councilor Flax noted the need to educate all around -- parents, teachers, and community leaders. A goal should be establishing educational programs.

Superintendent of Schools Mike Graner stated that the court system is heavily involved with drug issues. The entry drug at the high school is prescription drugs, which are more expensive than heroin. The courts impose severe punishments including incarceration for prescription drug cases because they recognize that heroin is the next step when kids can no longer afford prescription drugs.

Mr. Spellman added that the economy and sense of hopelessness have led to an increase in heroin use. There has also been an increase in crime attributable to heroin use.

Councilor de la Cruz explained that many people have to enter rehab programs in other states, which limits important family interaction during rehabilitation. The people who show up at the police station are most likely desperate and out of drugs. Councilor de la Cruz would like to see the victims picked up and helped rather than judged.

Russell Melmed of Ledge Light Health District (LLHD) noted that their surveys indicate that heroin use is really low in the high school (1-2%), but the precursor, prescription medications is at 8%. Treatment is part of the discussion, but so is prevention. Mr. Melmed advocated for keeping prescription drugs out of kids' hands and educating parents and grandparents to dispose of unused medications or keep them locked up.

Mr. Spellman spoke to his experiential knowledge of the problem. He suggested that a heroin user will not answer truthfully on a survey. He emphasized that the community is in crisis and young people are dying. He suggested that the Town Council can take a major step forward and make an impact in the Town of Groton.

Chief Smith feels that additional legislation must be passed, but the courts will also give people a chance if they are not a frequent flyer." Chief Smith feels the resources must be place so there is no wait when an addict wants help.

Councilor de la Cruz spoke with a police officer in Gloucester because the Chief of Police was in

Washington with the governor seeking funding to put necessary resources in place. He feels that Groton could mimic what Gloucester is doing legislatively.

Mr. Spellman stated this is an opportunity for the Town Council to step to the forefront and to go on record as actively seeking to combat the heroin crises by whatever means available, including emulating the program being pioneered in Gloucester.

City of Groton Police Officer Trish Lieto noted that the police are looking for some way to help when a person is in crisis. She does not necessarily want to arrest them unless they have drugs on them. However, there is not much that can be done for someone seeking help except to give them referral numbers and recommend that they ask for help when they get to court.

Dawn Bradanini, a Public Defender, stated she has never seen in a police report that someone asked for help during booking and she feels that would be a good thing for the court to know. Once people have been arrested, they are waiting 8 to 12 months for a bed. Ms. Bradanini feels that Gloucester has a great idea, but individuals are more likely to approach hospitals for help rather than the police.

Ms. Quattromani stated there is no immediate answer to the shortage of detox beds. In addition, there has to be continuing treatment after detox. Meetings alone are not enough and some people need medication-assisted treatment. Mr. Quattromani mentioned a new treatment called Vivitrol, which is a 30-day injection of an opiate blocker. Unlike other medications, Vivitrol does not require a special license for administration. Only two physicians in Groton prescribe the drug and one physician is no longer taking patients. Reaching out to physicians about Vivitrol is another option to address the heroin problem. Ms. Quattromani described her experience as an employee at Pond House at L&M Hospital. She further noted that Methadone and Suboxone are still opiate based; Vivitrol is not.

Councilor Antipas cited the NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) problem associated with establishing rehab facilities.

Councilor Cerf suggested that LLHD engage L&M on the subject of Vivitrol. She also suggested that pharmacists hand out information about disposal and security to people who receive prescription medications. Another idea would be to televise a public information session on GMTV-2.

Councilor Moravsik suggested ongoing meetings to make the public aware of the problem.

Marge Fondulas, Director of Human Services suggested that pharmacies let people know about the police department and senior center depositories for unused medications.

Mayor Schmidt thanked everyone for attending and contributing to the discussion.

4. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Flax, to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.