



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

Tuesday, May 24, 2016

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Flax called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. 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

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

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2016-0145 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 May 10, 2016, May 17, 2016, and May 18, 2016 are hereby accepted and approved.

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

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

Councilor Watson arrived at 6:03 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

2016-0142 Establishment of Tax Rate for General Fund (FYE 17)

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the RTM has finished budget deliberations and the state has adopted a budget. Projected revenues have been updated by the Town.

Cindy Landry, Director of Finance, distributed a staff referral memo on setting the tax rates for the General Fund, Mumford Cove District, and Groton Sewer District. The FYE 2017 Proposed Budget of \$125, 618,072 would have resulted in a 1.73 mill increase. After Town Council and RTM action, the FYE 2017 Budget totals \$121,558,250. This includes the use of \$66,693 of General Fund Balance and maintains a 7.75% Fund Balance as required by the Town's Debt

Policy. The budget will increase the General Fund mill rate by 0.78 mills, the Mumford Cove District mill rate by 0.310 mills, and the Groton Sewer District mill rate by 0.25 mills.

Ms. Landry reviewed the following attachments to her referral memo:

- Reconciliation from Manager's to Council's to RTM's Budget
- Reconciliation from Manager's to Council's to RTM's Capital Projects Budget
- Budget Summary (including RTM Committee recommendations and RTM notes)
- Capital Projects Summary (including RTM Committee recommendations and RTM notes)
- Comparison of FYE 2016 Adopted/Adjusted Budget to Adopted FYE 2017 Budget by Function
- Comparison of FYE 2016 Adopted/Adjusted Budget to Adopted FYE 2017 Budget by Fund
- FYE 2016 and FYE 2017 Revised Major Revenue Estimates
- General Fund Revenue Detail
- Progression of FYE 2017 Budgets and Mills Rates Compared to FYE 2016
- Calculation of Grand List, Mill Rate and Fund Balance

Mayor Flax asked if there could be an analysis provided of what the cuts will mean to Town services. The Town Manager noted that staff is beginning to work on identifying those impacts, and he expects to be able to present the information to the Council at the first Committee of the Whole meeting in June.

The Town Manager expressed concern that he has no direction with respect to services and priorities for next year. The FYE 2017 budget was balanced on the backs of Town operations, and no consideration was given during the budget process to the cuts made by the Town Manager and staff to reduce the budget. The Town Manager suggested that the Town Council and RTM meet outside of the budget process to identify priority services.

Councilor Antipas suggested forming a task force to identify what the Town does, what services can be eliminated, and how best to do the services that remain. He admitted that the Town Council and RTM take the easy road and look at the number because the quantitative is much easier to deal with than the qualitative.

Councilor Morton reminded Councilors that one of the Town Council's goals is prioritizing Town services. She suggested looking at funding only those things that are legally required.

Councilor de la Cruz supports spending money wisely. He feels the cuts to be budget were too deep and result in a "face to the bottom." He suggested that the cuts will probably result in lost revenue and will affect those who need the services the most.

The Town Manager noted that during the RTM meetings, misinformation was stated over and over, regardless of how many times it was corrected. While staff was available at the meeting, the RTM did not engage the Town Manager or staff in discussions. He emphasized that the Town leaders need to make some conscious decisions.

Ms. Landry agreed that FYE 2018 will not be any easier, and it will be time to look at "need to have" versus "nice to have."

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0143

Establishment of Tax Rate for Mumford Cove District Fund (FYE 17)

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0144 Establishment of Tax Rate for Groton Sewer District Fund (FYE 17)

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0121 2016 Plan of Conservation and Development**Discussed**

Director of Planning and Development Jon Reiner and Assistant Director Deb Jones were present to address the Council. Mr. Reiner noted the Planning Commission's public hearing on the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) will be held on June 29th. Connecticut General Statutes require that the draft POCD be submitted to the Town Council for review. The Council can endorse the plan, not endorse the plan, or ignore it. The Town Council can also have its own public hearing if desired.

The POCD is a 10 year vision document for conservation, development, and infrastructure. The POCD does not have the authority of law, but it is a guidance document. The Town must update the POCD every 10 years, or the Town is not eligible for discretionary state funding. A POCD Steering Committee was established that guided development of the document. When a draft was reviewed by the Planning Commission in 2014, the Commission suggested major changes. The POCD addresses the Town including Noank, but not the City or Groton Long Point. Town staff is already starting to implement some of the recommended policies. The POCD has been referred to other agencies as required by statutes, and the document is available in the Town Clerk's Office and on the Town's web site. Additional copies are available for review at various public buildings. The Planning Commission is soliciting feedback at the public hearing.

Mr. Reiner provided an overview of the document. The 2016 POCD has the same general themes developed in 2002 and there are no major policy changes. The elements of energy and sustainability have been added throughout the plan. Mr. Reiner provided a brief overview of population and housing trends, land use, and employment. Recommendations of the POCD include:

- Updating the WRPD (currently underway)
- Developing low impact development regulations
- Strategically expanding recreation areas and open space and developing management plans
- Creating a coastal overlay district
- Connecting coastal access points
- Protecting historic and natural resources
- Providing for creative reuse of historic structures
- Creating a sense of community
- Revising regulations to continue established development patterns
- Encouraging sustainable development
- Encouraging walkable development patterns
- Encouraging sustainable economic development
- Enhancing transportation options
- Adopting 'complete street' policies
- Creating a rail station in downtown Groton
- Enhancing and maintaining community facilities
- Extending utilities to underserved areas

The Future Land Use Map in the POCD identifies what the Town would like to see happen in the future. The plan also includes a future action plan. Mr. Reiner briefly reviewed 14 things for the Council to consider. The action items are laid out by theme, not by priority.

The Town Manager asked that Councilors provide comments before or at the public hearing. He

noted that if the Town Council wants to hold a public hearing, a date must be identified soon. The consensus of Councilors was to not have a separate public hearing. Mr. Reiner reiterated the actions that the Council can take on the POCD and noted that regardless of Town Council action, the Planning Commission can adopt the document.

The Town Manager suggested it may be premature to endorse a plan that has not yet had a public hearing. Mr. Reiner noted that it would be helpful for the Planning Commission to have the Council's support before the public hearing.

Councilor Antipas questioned the relevance of the POCD to municipal improvements. Mr. Reiner explained that municipal decisions should be consistent with the POCD, but it is not required. The Town Manager clarified that CGS Section 8-24 referrals consider POCD compliance. The POCD also provides the authority for the Planning Commission to require conforming development.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Morton, to endorse the 2016 Plan of Conservation and Development.

It was noted that the endorsement does not prevent the Town Council from commenting at the public hearing. Discussion followed on the timing of the endorsement. The motion and second were withdrawn.

Mr. Reiner noted that future land use in the City's and Groton Long Point's POCDs is shown in the Town's plan. Although the Town has limited control in those areas from a planning perspective, the POCD looks at the community as a whole.

The Committee of the Whole recessed at 7:34 p.m. for a special meeting of the Town Council and reconvened at 8:20 p.m.

2016-0139 Groton Public Library Neighborhood Assistance Act Program Application (2016)

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger provided an overview of the Neighborhood Assistance Act Program and the projects proposed by the Groton Public Library and Odd Fellows Home of Connecticut.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0140 Odd Fellows Home of Connecticut Neighborhood Assistance Act Program Application (2016)

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0088 Neighborhood Assistance Act Program Application (2016)

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the Town expects to receive two additional Neighborhood Assistance Act Program applications from the City of Groton and the Mystic Museum of Art.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Grim, to schedule a public hearing on Neighborhood Assistance Act Program applications on June 7, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0040 Adoption of Rules for the Thirtieth Town Council

Discussed

Councilors received a draft set of rules for consideration. Councilor Antipas described the Temporary Rules Committee's proposed changes including expanding the description of meetings of the Council to bring them in line with FOIA. He stated that he wants to include Unfinished

Business and delete Other Business from Town Council agendas. The proposed rules expand the limits of debate and establish only three standing committees: Committee of the Whole, Rules, and Personnel and Appointments. The rules propose disallowing speakers to yield their time to another speaker and provide a caveat about recording meetings. There is new rule about Councilors not speaking on behalf of the Council unless specifically authorized to do so. Town Manager Oefinger expressed his feeling that there is value in having Other Business on Town Council agendas. Discussion followed on the need for the Council to vote on expanding debate.

Councilors decided to add Other Business (after New Business) under Rule 7.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0147

Yankee Gas/Eversource Route 1 Gas Line Project

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger and staff have had discussions with Yankee Gas/Eversource regarding extension of a natural gas line to serve the high school and potentially the new middle school, St. Mary Church, and the Town Hall Annex complex. Eversource is looking for a commitment from the Town to convert at least one building to gas within five years. As a result of a recently authorized project at Pfizer, Eversource has a rare opportunity to access funding to extend gas lines. The Town Manager is looking for authorization to sign an agreement stating the Town will tie in at least one Town building in the next five years. Groton Public Schools has already committed to converting the high school. An agreement with the Town will allow Eversource to extend the line to the Annex frontage at no cost to the Town. Gas is a cheaper, cleaner fuel that does not require underground tanks.

The state is undertaking a Route 1 paving project from South Road to the top of Fort Hill. The portion of the project from the bottom of Fort Hill to the top of Fort Hill will be undertaken in the fall to accommodate the gas line extension.

Rick Norris, Sustainability Program Project Manager, presented information on the potential annual savings from converting heating systems in Town buildings to natural gas.

Mr. Norris noted that the streetlight audit associated with the streetlight conversion project should be completed this week. The next step is a reconciliation process followed by project design.

In response to questions and comments from Councilors, Mr. Norris explained that Eversource would pipe to a meter and the internal piping would be the Town's responsibility. The Agreement has not been finalized or reviewed by the Town Attorney at this time. The Town's cost per Ccf of \$0.91 cited in Mr. Norris's analysis includes all fees. The rate of return will vary based on the costs to convert the systems in the various buildings.

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

The motion carried unanimously

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

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Councilor Antipas noted a seasonal Farmer's Market being held at Washington Park.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Barber, to adjourn the meeting at 9:13 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.