



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk (860)441-6640  
Town Manager  
(860)441-6630

## Meeting Minutes - Draft

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

*Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Dean Antipas, Kathryn M. Brown-Tracy, Bruce S. Flax, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, and Paulann H. Sheets*

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Tuesday, May 26, 2009

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

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#### REGULAR MEETING

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1. **CALL TO ORDER**

*Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.*

2. **ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Flax, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Sheets

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.*

3. **Calendar and Communications**

*None.*

4. **Approval of Minutes**

**2009-0122 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 meeting of April 28, 2009 are hereby accepted and approved.

**A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to adopt.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2009-0138 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 meeting of May 12, 2009 are hereby accepted and approved.

**A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to adopt.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

5. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

*None.*

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

**2009-0135 Establishment of Tax Rate for General Fund (FYE 10)**

**Discussed**

*Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo noted that the RTM has completed its review of the budget. The proposed General Fund mill rate is 17.95; the Sewer District mill rate is 0.28 mills; and the Mumford Cove mill rate is 0.279 mills. Mr. Pandolfo reviewed the reconciliation of the General Fund and Capital Projects Budgets from the Town Manager to the Town Council to the RTM. He then reviewed revenue projections for FYE 2009 and FYE 2010.*

**A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that this matter be**

Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

**2009-0136 Establishment of Tax Rate for Mumford Cove District Fund (FYE 10)**

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

The motion carried unanimously

**2009-0137 Establishment of Tax Rate for Groton Sewer District Fund (FYE 10)**

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

The motion carried unanimously

**2009-0133 Local Option to Suspend Revaluation Phase-In**

Recommended for a Resolution

*Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo, Assessor John Philip, and Tax Collector Nancy Dytko were present to address the Council on this issue. Mr. Pandolfo provided a history of the phase-in of the 2006 revaluation. The 2008 grand list would include the third and final year of the phase-in. Recently, the state adopted a legislative option to suspend the phase-in. Mr. Pandolfo noted that such an action would involve recalculating the grand list; resetting the mill rate by some of the fire districts that have already set their rates; and delaying taxes until September 1 (rather than July 1). If the phase-in were delayed, most taxpayers would see a smaller increase in their taxes than last year. However, the same amount of money must be collected whether the phase-in is suspended or not. Costs associated with the delay would require a transfer from Contingency. Mr. Pandolfo noted that delaying the payable and due dates for taxes will negatively impact the fire districts that collect all of their taxes in the first installment that is usually payable on July 1 and due August 1.*

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Brown-Tracy, to proceed with implementing the third and final year of the three year phase-in of the 2006 revaluation.

Councilor Sheets explained her reasons for supporting the suspension. She cited a mistake in an e-mail on the subject that she sent to the Town Manager and noted receipt of an e-mail from Ed Johnson. Councilor O'Beirne supports the motion and finishing the phase-in. He originally opposed the phase-in because taxes are a zero sum entity. If one person pays less, one person pays more. Some residents and businesses have paid significantly more than their fair share because of the phase-in. Councilor Monteiro noted that as a result of the phase-in, personal property taxes were higher which minimized the savings associated with residential taxes. Councilor Schmidt suggested that delaying the phase-in would only postpone the inevitable and not save anyone any money. Councilor Sheets noted that New Haven is suspending their phase-in. Mr. Philip explained that in 2006, Town staff and the revaluation consultant were well positioned to institute the phase-in since the revaluation had just been completed and that would not be the case in the future. Councilor Sheets stated she would have liked to see a cost benefit analysis by staff as well.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Votes:** In Favor: 7 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Flax, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Schmidt

Opposed: 1 - Councilor Sheets

Abstain: 1 - Councilor Antipas

**Discussed**

*The Town Manager noted that he distributed comments that he received on the phase-in issue to Councilors. Also, the Town Manager met with Mayor Popp this morning and Mayor Popp expressed his desire to have the Council proceed with the phase-in.*

**2009-0007 Labor Negotiations (2009 Standing Referral)**

A motion was made by Councilor Monteiro, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that members of the Town Council, together with Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Director of Administrative Services Doug

Ackerman, Manager of Labor Relations Joyce Sauchuk, and Attorney Eileen Duggan go into executive session at 7:51 p.m. for the purpose of discussing strategy and/or negotiations with respect to collective bargaining concerning the Police bargaining unit. This action is taken without prejudice to the Council's right to discuss these matters in a private meeting pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 1-200(2).

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

*The executive session concluded at 8:29 p.m.*

*Staff and the Town Attorney feel this is a fair and equitable agreement for both parties. Town Attorney Eileen Duggan noted the wage increases are 3% retroactive to 7/1/08, 2.5% for 7/1/09, and 2.5% for 7/1/10. There is also an increase in insurance cost share and co-pays.*

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

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0117

#### **Parks and Recreation Program/Service Pricing Contract**

Discussed

*Jerry Lokken, Manager of Recreation Services, noted that the Parks and Recreation Department is undertaking a master planning process in two parts: system-wide and Sutton Park. Norris Design will be conducting community meetings to present the findings of the two plans. One issue identified in the Master Plan and during the budget process is how the Town recovers costs for programs. A pricing study will help identify what level of subsidy is appropriate for different programs, how to adjust fees, and how to run sustainable programs. Parks and Recreation is looking for authorization to contract with Norris Design. A vacancy in the Parks and Recreation Department has resulted in available funds in the budget that would cover the cost of the study. Mr. Lokken further explained that the study will attempt to assign a value system to Parks and Recreation programs. Most of the exercise will involve staff and an analysis of historical data. Councilor O'Beirne expressed his opposition suggesting that the prices can be set by Town staff. Mr. Lokken noted that currently, all programs are created equally. The study would identify programs in the special revenue fund that should carry more of the weight. Such a study would require an inordinate amount of time and effort by staff. Discussion followed on the need for this study, staff's ability to set appropriate fees without outside assistance, and the impact on the special revenue fund. Councilor Sheets feels this is an investment in efficiency and preservation of programs.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Brown-Tracy, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Votes:** In Favor: 6 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Sheets  
Opposed: 3 - Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax and Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

2009-0126

#### **Services Shared with Stonington**

Discussed

*Town Manager Oefinger explained that a referral was received from the RTM to establish a task force on shared services with Stonington. Councilor Kolnaski stated she would like to discuss this issue with the Board of Selectmen at the June 23rd meeting before proceeding with a task force. A majority of Councilors supported starting the process now. Mayor Watson noted that RTM Moderator Natalie Billing has suggested a number of names for the task force. The Council asked staff to prepare a resolution for review and discussion with the Board of Selectmen. Councilor Sheets indicated she would be interested in serving on the Committee.*

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

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0124

**Ethics Ordinance**

Discussed

*Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent noted that any Code of Ethics should be reviewed by the Town Attorney. He has reviewed the model code pending in the legislature and CCM's current position on the code is favorable. Mr. Vincent indicated he could reformat the code into a form that could be used by the Town for consideration. Any Town code must meet the state's model code at a minimum. Mr. Vincent does not expect the state code to be approved this year so Groton will be ahead of the state. He suggested that the Council tackle one subject area at a time at its Committee of the Whole meetings. The Town must also determine how to constitute Groton's Ethics Commission. Mr. Vincent suggested that this process requires a high degree of public input and may require soliciting outside advice or consultation.*

2009-0139

**Submarine Capital of the World Inc. Request for Donation**

Discussed

*Town Manager Oefinger noted that the Town made a \$5,000 contribution to Submarine Capital of the World Inc. in the past. This request is for \$350.*

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

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0009

**Legislative Policy (2009 Standing Referral)**

Discussed

*Mr. Vincent stated there is nothing new to report at this time. Councilor Sheets asked about potential cuts in education grants. Mr. Vincent explained that there are three categories of stimulus funds for education and they must supplement, not supplant, current funding. This rule has been interpreted differently by the State of Connecticut. Because of the state's cap on spending, they can not accept the stimulus funds unless they supplant current spending.*

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

*None.*

**8. OTHER BUSINESS**

*Councilor Kolnaski stated she would like the Council to discuss the Town Manager's salary in advance of his July 1st evaluation date. Mayor Watson made a referral to the Committee of the Whole. Also, Councilor Kolnaski feels there is an opportunity to report out at meetings what other committees or departments are doing, similar to what is reported in the Weekly Status Report. Mayor Watson made a referral to the Personnel Committee.*

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

*A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, to adjourn the meeting at 8:56 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*