



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

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

Wednesday, May 27, 2015

2:45 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting started at 2:47 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Frink and Councilor Moravsik

Members Absent: Councilor Antipas, Councilor Cerf, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Flax, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson

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

3. NEW BUSINESS

2015-0050

Legislative Policy Initiative to Increase Revenues

Discussed

Although there was no quorum present, Councilors met with the consultants to discuss the project.

Ken Schwartz, a consultant with VHB, explained the three phases of the project:

- *Regulatory Review (Zoning and Subdivision Regulations).*
- *Market Analysis (regional and local market trends and opportunities)*
- *Review of Opportunity Sites (to focus economic development strategy)*

Mr. Schwartz explained that the focus of this meeting is zoning, and Camoin Associates will return in July for the market portion of the project. He asked Councilors to help identify what works, what doesn't, problem areas, and the types of development coming to town.

Rob Camoin of Camoin Associates explained that developers avoid communities with a heightened risk of uncertainty for projects.

Councilor Frink stated his focus is to:

- *Use zoning intelligently to increase land values.*
- *Recognize that environmental protection is important.*
- *Enhance user friendliness.*

With respect to regulation friendliness, Mr. Schwartz noted that Groton is customer friendly, but the process is cumbersome.

With respect to specific things in the Zoning Regulations that need to be addressed, Councilor Frink cited the following items:

- *Water Resource Protection District*
- *Independent zoning areas*
- *Multiple fire districts/marshals and code interpretations*

- *Keeping the document current*

Town Manager Oefinger explained the history of the special permit provisions, which were designed to allow development opportunities with some controls.

Mr. Schwartz noted that the Town's parking standards need to be updated. Also there are many new uses that need to be addressed, as do resiliency and climate change.

Councilor Frink suggested that less is better when it comes to signage.

Councilors were asked to identify priority sites for economic development. Mayor Schmidt stated the airport and Route 184; Councilor Frink stated downtown Groton and Thames Street; and Councilor Moravsik stated Flanders Road.

Discussion followed on the failure of the referendum on the Flanders Road utility extensions project. Mr. Camoin stated that the Town can identify priority areas, but if there is no infrastructure and investment requires a public referendum, then that is a concern for developers.

Town Manager Oefinger discussed the history of development and investment in the Town and the need to build relationships with developers.

With respect to the characterization of residential development, the Town Manager stated that 50% of Groton's housing stock is multi-family. Since 2008, most of the land available for single family residential has been developed. There are no plans for multi-family developments and there has not been much retail development. Groton's population is stable. Town manager Oefinger explained the population loss on paper during the 2000 Census count.

Discussion followed on the shopping centers in Groton, which do not meet modern standards for major retailers. The current owners are not interested in redevelopment. Mr. Camoin noted that he has done a number of market studies of downtowns. In most cases, development doesn't make sense economically so it comes down to incentives. A downtown is a symptom of the larger economy for the community, not the economy itself.

Mr. Schwartz noted the significant number of hotel rooms in Groton. The Town Manager explained that the wide range of facilities caters to tourism, provides alternative forms of housing, and provides off-site meeting space.

In conclusion, Mr. Schwartz stated the consultants will be back in October/November for the final presentation. He asked Councilors to identify what needs to be addressed as part of this effort.

Councilor Frink:

- *Increase revenue; increase land values.*
- *Jobs*
- *Environmental protection*
- *Keep Groton affordable (diverse community)*

Mayor Schmidt:

- *Make Groton an attractive place for developers and for people to live*
- *Retain charm*

Mr. Camoin asked if development equates to a loss of charm in the eyes of the community. The Town Manager explained the different pockets of Groton's population and difficulty achieving

consensus. As for demographics, overall the community is aging, but there is a younger population associated with the Submarine Base.

Councilor Moravsik:

- Use of resources to bring economic development to the area (airport, railroad, industrial property).*
- Disregard Navy population because it skews everything.*

The discussion with the consultants concluded at 4:00 p.m.

4. ADJOURNMENT