



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Karen F. Morton, Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, June 11, 2013

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

In the absence of Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas was chosen to be Chairman pro tem and he called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Morton, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson

Members Absent: Mayor Somers and Councilor Peruzzotti

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

3. Calendar and Communications

Councilor Watson noted receipt of an e-mail from a member of the Zoning Commission and an email from the Town Manager about combining the Planning and Zoning Commissions. Chairman pro tem Antipas made a referral to the Committee of the Whole regarding Planning and Zoning issues.

Councilor Schmidt stated she has received calls from neighbors about blasting in their area. Councilor Schmidt has spoken with the Town Manager about the issue.

4. Approval of Minutes

2013-0159 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 21, 2013 and May 28, 2013 are hereby accepted and approved.

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

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2013-0089 Plan to Reduce the Number of Voting Districts

Discussed

Registrar of Voters Dave Rose was present and questioned the drive behind consolidating the voting districts. Councilors responded that it the goal is to reduce expenses. Mr. Rose noted that other towns may have fewer voting districts than Groton, but it is because they have fewer voters. Any change to voting districts must consider polling locations, traffic, parking, and the congressional lines. Mr. Rose looked at possible polling locations that could accommodate 6,000 voters if voting districts are combined. He suggested that the Town could use Fitch High School for a combined district 6 and 7. Mr. Roses stated he will still need the same number of poll workers and consolidating district will not save a lot of money nor does he think it is a good idea.

Mr. Rose stated that there are no other polling places big enough to accommodate that many voters.

Councilor Flax asked if all the districts could be redrawn so that the numbers of voters in each districts are more equalized. Mr. Rose noted that consolidation of voting districts is confined limited by the congressional lines. Chairman pro tem Antipas noted not everyone on the voters roll turns out to vote, but Mr. Rose stated he must plan for 100% turnout. Discussion followed on how the congressional lines are drawn by the state.

Councilor Johnson does not feel it is worth the cost savings to consolidate into four districts. Chairman pro tem Antipas asked what the actual cost is associated with maintaining more polling locations for convenience. Mr. Rose stated that there would be very little costs savings as a result of consolidation. He would not be able to eliminate poll workers because the wait time for voters would be too long.

Councilor Peruzzotti arrived at 6:21 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Mayor Somers

Discussed

Mr. Rose presented information on the number of voters in each district. He reiterated that parking is an issue at polling locations and he would need the same number of workers if the districts were consolidated. The cost savings associated with combining districts would be minimal and would increase confusion and discontent.

Councilor Peruzzotti asked for a specific plan to consolidate districts and an examination of parking needs. Mr. Rose reiterated that the only polling place for a combined voting district is Fitch High School. Councilor Peruzzotti asked Mr. Rose to please do the exercise so that a conversation can take place. Chairman Pro Tem Antipas suggested a meeting with both registrars and the Town Clerk in order to identify the costs of various alternatives.

2013-0092 Voting District 4 Polling Location

Discussed

Registrar of Voters Dave Rose has indicated that William Seely will be the polling place for District 4 because cell phones do not work in Charles Barnum, the previously identified polling location. Mr. Rose said the Council could also consider Pleasant Valley School or Mary Morrisson. Councilor Flax noted that other towns do not use schools.

Mayor Somers arrived at 6:32 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson

Discussed

Mr. Rose stated he has not yet spoken to Groton Public Schools about the availability or suitability of schools for polling locations.

2013-0157 Pistol Permit Process - Update

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Police Chief Michael Crowley noted that pistol permit applications have increased significantly and are on track to triple the number of applications last year. All municipalities are experiencing the same increase. The Town Police Department will now be doing fingerprints every Wednesday and additional manpower has been directed to the effort. The Town has issued 69 permits and 100 are in process. The Town is waiting to hear from the state on 87 applications. Chief Crowley noted that the turnaround for the state is 11 weeks versus 6 weeks for the FBI. There are currently

7 applications that are beyond the eight week deadline. Wait time for processing has been decreased to two to three weeks. Chief Crowley expects that demand will continue at this level for the foreseeable future.

2013-0023 Town Police Presence/Jurisdiction in Schools

Discussed

Mayor Somers noted this was a topic of discussion during budget deliberations. Now that students are dispersed throughout the Town due to redistricting, the Town Council would like only Town police in the schools for the DARE program. Councilor Watson noted that the City's DARE program has a different focus than the Town's program. As children from the City were moved to other schools, the DARE program became a shared program in some locations. West Side Middle is the only public school in the City's police jurisdiction at this time. Councilor Watson thinks that Town police should be in all of the schools.

Police Chief Michael Crowley explained that the instructional portion of the DARE program (taught at the 5th and 7th grade levels) is taught to standard in all towns. The graduation ceremonies may be conducted differently. A Town police officer co-teaches with a City police officer at Pleasant Valley and Claude Chester elementary schools. One of the ancillary benefits of the DARE program is the positive interaction of the police officers with the children. Chief Crowley feels it is important that children know the police officers from the City as well as the Town.

Councilor Flax expressed support for kids having interaction with the City police officers. Chief Crowley noted that there has never been an issue with Town and City officers co-teaching. There is no Town police officer at West Side or Sacred Heart. Councilor Flax expressed support for co-teaching at those two schools as well.

Chief Crowley explained that the graduation ceremonies and who is invited to speak at the ceremonies is up to the school, and the program has been consistent at all the schools in the Town. The focus of the ceremonies in the Town has always been the children and their accomplishments.

Councilor Watson suggested that the Town and City Police Chiefs meet to discuss co-teaching in the schools located in the City. The Town Manager recommended that the discussion include the Board of Education. Mayor Somers asked for a meeting with Chief Crowley, the City Police Chief, and the Board of Education or a Board representative. Mayor Somers emphasized that the intent is consistency of teachers and graduation programs throughout the school system.

2013-0154 Consolidation of Police Dispatch

Discussed

Director of Administrative Services Doug Ackerman and Manager of Emergency Operations Joe Sastre were present to discuss consolidation of the Town and City Police dispatch functions, which was raised during deliberation on the City's police budget. Mr. Ackerman described how dispatching works, noting that there are two separate software systems used by the police: a Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system and a Records Management System (RMS). The Town's CAD system has multi-jurisdictional capability.

Mayor Somers believes there are opportunities to handle police dispatching for the City of Groton. When the Council tried to cut the funds during budget deliberations, the Council was told that the Town's CAD system is inefficient and not up to date, and that it was not compatible with the City's system. Mayor Somers noted that the State Police recently combined all of their dispatch operations.

Mr. Sastre noted that regional dispatch is done in other areas and it is a very efficient way of utilizing services. Savings would come from scale. He distributed an overall description of the

dispatching process. Information from an emergency call is entered into CAD. Based on that information, CAD gives the dispatcher a recommendation for a response. Any additional information received after emergency services are dispatched is fed back into the CAD. The same information is sent out to responding units. When the call is complete, all information is stored in the CAD system and information is made available to the departments in question. Currently the Town Police Department, Groton Long Point Police Department, City Police and Fire Departments, ambulances, L&M Paramedics, and North Stonington Fire Department and Ambulance are dispatched by the Town. City of Groton Police Dispatch receives all of the dispatch information that Groton has.

Mr. Sastre when on to explain that no changes to the dispatch system would be necessary for the Town to dispatch the City police. The City Police Department has an RMS that they use to create police reports. Their RMS requires more information than is required for a dispatched call. In some cases, CAD and RMS systems can be integrated so that some information collected by dispatch can be dumped into the police report. Many times the information has to be changed for a police report anyway. For example, the caller may not be the same as the complainant; the type of incident is not as reported; etc. The City's dispatch system does not have a multi-jurisdictional option. Councilor Flax asked if the systems could be integrated and Mr. Sastre stated that it could be done by a computer vendor.

Discussion followed on overnight staffing versus telephone systems that connect to a dispatch center, and other duties of a police dispatcher such as monitoring holding cells. Police Chief Michael Crowley stated that he feels having a police officer on site is imperative because civilian dispatchers do not have all of the answers. He also noted that cells can be monitored by dispatchers in the Town's police station, but dispatchers are not authorized to respond to an emergency there.

Mr. Ackerman suggested that the decision to man a station 24 hours may or may not have anything to do with dispatch services. All 911 calls go through Groton Dispatch now and if the call requires the City Police, the dispatcher will contact City Police Dispatch. The Town has the capacity with existing staff to dispatch the City Police Department.

Councilor Morton feels it would be appropriate to schedule a meeting with the City even though the FYE 2014 City Police funds have been approved. Mr. Sastre stated it is more efficient to have a single dispatch for multiple services because of the flow of information.

Mr. Ackerman noted a state study of regionalized dispatch. In smaller jurisdictions, the personnel who dispatch do very little dispatching and they usually have other support functions. Any discussion of consolidating dispatch functions must include a discussion of personnel and their duties/roles.

Mayor Somers asked that a meeting be scheduled with the City Police Chief, Doug Ackerman, Joe Sastre, and Chief Crowley to discuss the issue. The Town Manager suggested that a couple of Town and City Councilors be included in the discussion, and Mayor Somers also suggested a member of the RTM Public Safety Committee.

The Committee of the Whole recessed at 7:47 p.m. and reconvened at 7:55 p.m.

2013-0158

Road Paving Alternatives

Discussed

Director of Public Works Gary Schneider and Manager Utilities Services John Carrington distributed cost estimates for asphalt under different road paving scenarios. Mr. Schneider noted Town staff has been paving roads for the past 30 years. Road paving can be done with 1) a contractor (bid process); 2) in-house forces acting as general contractor; and 3) in-house forces

doing all work. The Town contracts out specialty work. Mr. Carrington described the work done by the Town. When the Town acts as general contractor, profit and soft costs are eliminated from the cost. Other benefits that are hard to place a value on are the Town's ability to accommodate property owners as the work is being done; assuring that contractors work to the Town's schedule; accomplishing complete road alignment with minimal engineering; utility adjustments and working with utility companies; elimination of bid packaged; and quality and pride in workmanship. The Road Improvement Program has been positive because the Town is now working with a known cash flow and is in sync with the pacing cycle which is estimated to result in a 4% cost reduction.

Mr. Carrington reviewed Asphalt Prices per ton in place (put down as a road). At the end of the construction season, Public Works will provide a report to the Town Council on estimated versus actual costs.

Councilor Flax asked for the total cost to pave a certain amount of road for the Town, City, Groton Long Point, and the contractors listed in Mr. Carrington's information. Mr. Carrington explained that roads vary in width and amount of paving so the per-ton-cost of asphalt is the fairest number for comparison purposes. Also, the costs for catch basins vary by road. Information would be required from the City and Groton Long Point for the items that the Town includes in the cost of a road such as catch basins, traffic control, engineering and inspections.

The Pavement Management Study sets the target pavement condition index (PCI) at 70. Below 50 requires a complete reconstruction and major work. Crack sealing is contracted out because the Town cannot do it as cheaply. The Town also does not do micro surfacing because most Town roads that need paving are structurally unsound.

In response to Councilors' questions, Mr. Schneider noted that cost estimates do not include capital or depreciation costs or fuel. Mayor Somers suggested that then the subdivisions say they can pave roads cheaper than the Town they are only referring to the cost of asphalt. She asked that Public Works pick a road like Godfrey Street and compare costs under the alternative scenarios discussed. Discussion followed on bidding a road to capture costs from beginning to end. Mr. Carrington clarified that the estimates would be based on the state low bid list rather than a real bid. After further discussion, it was decided that one road would be bid and awarded to an outside contractor, but the Town will also prepare a cost estimate for doing the work in-house.

Councilor Flax asked if the Town is working with the City and Groton Long Point to create efficiencies as part of the road improvement program. Mr. Schneider stated that the Town offered to let the two entities join the bid process, but they were not interested and no further discussions have taken place.

Mayor Somers suggested that the Council discuss the issue more and noted a need to combat the perception that the Town's pacing program is so much more expensive than the City's and Groton Long Point's.

Town Manager Oefinger suggested that Town staff write a paragraph about the costs the Council is trying to capture in the report on the results of the first year of the road paving program, have the Town Council review and sign off on the list, and then relay it to the City and Groton Long Point.

Councilor Watson left the meeting at 8:37 p.m.

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Councilor Peruzzotti asked if the Town looks at curbing issues when a road is repaved and Mr. Carrington stated yes. He explained that the only reason that curbs were not initially considered

on Sandy Hollow Road is because of its designation as a scenic road.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter
Members Absent: Councilor Watson

2013-0164 FYE 2014 Budget Follow-up

Discussed

This referral was requested by Councilor Watson. The Town Manager asked if Councilors had any additional items to be considered as a result of budget deliberations and there was no response. Further discussion was tabled to allow Councilor Watson to be present.

2013-0107 Cell Tower on Gary Court

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

The motion carried unanimously

2013-0156 Town Manager Annual Evaluation

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Antipas, to enter executive session at 8:46 p.m. to discussion 2013-0156 Town Manager Annual Evaluation and to invite Town Manager Mark Oefinger to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 9:25 p.m.

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

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:27 p.m.