



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

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## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

**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, July 9, 2013

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

#### REGULAR MEETING

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER

*Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.*

#### 2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Watson

Members Absent: Councilor Antipas, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Streeter

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

#### 3. Calendar and Communications

*Councilors were asked to note their absences through the end of September for staff.*

*Mayor Somers recognized Betsy Gibson from an ad hoc committee to promote Groton as the Submarine Capital of the World. Ms. Gibson noted some of the members of the group and provided an overview of the group's activities. Packets that are supplied to people signing into the submarine base will now have welcoming letters from the Mayor and Congressman Courtney. The group would also like to link Welcome Aboard's web page from the Submarine Base with the Town of Groton's web page. The group has also met with Balfour Housing (over 1800 units of Navy housing) and Discover Magazine and the welcoming letters will be included in the packets provided to people moving into the units. The group has also been invited to do a once a month welcome event with Councilors or other Town representatives. Balfour has also requested that maps of the Town of Groton be provided, along with any other information that the Town wants to share. Councilor Schmidt suggested the State of Connecticut Tourism Guide be included. Ms. Gibson noted that the information must be supplied to Balfour.*

*Garbo Lobsters on Thames Street has agreed to install a banner on their building stating Submarine Capital of the World, Groton, Connecticut, the Best and the Brightest."The group will be meeting with Bob Hamilton of Electric Boat to see what they can do to help and Bob Ross from the Governor's Military Affairs Office for promotion through the Governor's office. On July 19th, there will be a Navy housing block party on Tern Avenue from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Ms. Gibson asked if Town representative could participate. The group is also working on organizing a softball game between ship builders and sailors.*

*Town Manager Oefinger noted that the Council requested a tour of the Preston Waste to Energy Facility at the last GRRRA meeting. Possible dates are July 19, 21, 23 and 24 at 3:00 p.m. Councilors Johnson, Schmidt, Watson and possibly Flax indicated they could attend on Tuesday, July 23rd.*

#### 4. Approval of Minutes

**2013-0176 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 June 11,

2013 and June 25, 2013 are hereby accepted and approved.

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

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2013-0180 Introduction of a Town of Groton Blight Ordinance

Discussed

*The Town Manager explained that the next step in the Blight Ordinance process is to introduce the ordinance and schedule a public hearing. The recommended date for the public hearing is August 6th.*

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

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Votes:** In Favor: 4 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Flax, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Watson  
Opposed: 1 - Councilor Johnson

2013-0181 Scheduling of Public Hearing on Town of Groton Blight Ordinance

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

The motion carried unanimously

2013-0183 Collective Bargaining Matter

A motion was made by Mayor Somers, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, that members of the Town Council, together with Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant Town Manager Doug Ackerman, and Town Attorney Eileen Duggan go into executive session at 6:29 p.m. for the purpose of discussing strategy and/or negotiations with respect to collective bargaining with the Local 818 and GMEA bargaining units. This action is taken without prejudice to the Council's right to discuss these matters in a private meeting pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 1-200(2).

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

*The executive session concluded at 6:42 p.m.*

2013-0164 FYE 2014 Budget Follow-up

Discussed

*Councilor Watson indicated that he has spoken with the Town Manager about the FYE 2014 budget issues he raised in his May 7, 2013 communication. Issues 1 and 2 dealt with CIP projects and can be eliminated. Issue 3 deals with the Judson Avenue drainage project which the Council has chosen not to send to referendum in November. At this point, no further discussion on the issue is planned. With respect to issue 4, Mayor Somers asked the Town Manager to develop a letter to the Department of Transportation asking them to find another location for the equipment and material stored at Exit 88. For issue 5, the Town Manager will provide a history of the street light issue. Issue 6 regarding future plans for Fitch Middle School must be discussed with the Board of Education. Mayor Somers asked the Town Manager to develop a letter formally requesting whether or not the Board is going to turn the school over to the Town. There is an existing referral on issue 7 (police presence/jurisdiction in schools) and item 8 regarding pistol permits has been addressed. Councilor Watson will discuss issue 9 regarding the cost of insurance for the Town and Board of Education at the Liaison Committee meeting in September. Regarding cell phones (issue 10), the Town Manager explained that cell phone bills are reviewed every month and procedures have been reviewed with the department heads. The Town reviews the number of phones and various packages and pools minutes. The used pickup truck referred to in issue 11 will*

be given to Groton Long Point this fall.

Discussion then turned to item 12, the Town-wide police study. Councilor Watson noted that it warrants further discussion by the Council and what has been received is not acceptable. Mayor Somers noted that the consultant had difficulty obtaining information from the City. Councilor Johnson asked if a cost to provide services could be obtained from the study and the Town Manager stated he is not sure that is possible. The Town Manager asked Councilors to look at the rough draft and provide their opinion on whether or not the study is salvageable.

Discussion followed on having Town staff do a study of the costs associated with policing Groton Long Point and the City. The Town Manager noted that a study is done for every budget, but staff can do a more robust analysis. Councilor Flax suggested the Council hold public information sessions on police services. Further discussion of this item was tabled to a future meeting.

Mayors Somers stated that she and Councilor Flax met with the RTM Moderator to discuss the communication breakdown during the budget process. During the budget process, the Council receives information from the department heads or subdivisions. When the information is presented to the RTM committees, it may have been modified in the interim. A more streamlined process would be to have the department heads/subdivisions make their presentations to both the Town Council and appropriate RTM Committee (with all RTM members invited) at the Senior Center and to televise the meetings. In that way, the Town Council and RTM would all hear the same information, but they would still deliberate separately. By consensus, Councilors agreed to follow that process for the FYE 2015 budget.

Town Manager Oefinger asked if the RTM Moderator would be presenting the proposal to the RTM. Mayor Somers stated she will talk to the Moderator about when he would like to present the proposal to the RTM.

2013-0179

#### **Planning and Zoning Issues**

##### **Discussed**

Councilors received a memorandum from Town Attorney Mike Carey regarding the process for creating a combined Planning and Zoning Commission. Mayor Somers feels a combined commission will streamline the permitting process. Councilor Johnson asked for the pros and cons of the proposal. Town Manager Oefinger explained that there have been discussions over the years about combining the commissions, but separate commissions have worked well. One area of concern has been workload. The Town Manager encouraged the Council to sit with both the Planning and Zoning Commissions to discuss the idea. Mayor Somers asked that a joint meeting be set up at a Committee of the Whole meeting. She also requested information on other towns that have separate commissions.

Councilor Watson noted that there is also another issue that has been raised with respect to the Zoning Commission that should be dealt with by the Personnel Committee.

2013-0182

#### **Non-Union Pay Plan for FYE14 and FYE15**

##### **Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger noted the Town has a non-union group of about 45 individuals. The non-union pay plan ended in FYE 2011. This proposal would increase the maximum salary ranges by 2% in FYE 2014 and FYE 2015. There would be no change to the starting rates which would effectively expand the range of salaries. There are no steps in the non-union pay plan as there are in union contracts. Currently, there are two employees that have reached the maximum salary. By FYE 2015, there will be eight. When an employee hits the maximum salary, any increase is paid out as a bonus which does not count toward retirement. The proposed increases are consistent with what the bargaining units are receiving.

Councilor Flax suggested that the increases are not consistent with businesses. Assistant Town Manager Ackerman noted that pay ranges are routinely reviewed and modified in the private sector. Every time a union contract is approved by the Town Council, the pay ranges including the maximums increase. Unless pay ranges are very broad, it is very unusual not to increase the maximum; the Town's salary ranges are narrow.

Councilor Flax asked to see a pay rate comparison with other municipalities. Mr. Ackerman noted that when the non-union pay plan was originally established, it was based on a comprehensive pay study (now six to seven years old) and backed up by a study of public salaries. Salary information is difficult to obtain from the private sector because it is proprietary.

Councilor Flax suggested that pay rates are going down not up. Mayor Somers questioned the non-union contribution to health care which is at 10%. Mr. Ackerman stated those provisions will be looked at in the future. Union contracts have been approved by the Town Council that increase wages and maximizes and the overall approach is to treat employees equally.

Mayor Somers asked how the Council would proceed in determining the value of a certain position. Mr. Ackerman stated the Town would look at the competition, which for the Town is other municipalities not businesses. The importance of retention must be considered throughout the organization. There is no specter of arbitration with non-union personnel, but the Town is making this recommendation based on what is equitable in the workforce.

Mayor Somers stated that in business, salary is based on performance rather than a guaranteed increase. Mr. Ackerman noted that it is more difficult to measure performance in a non-profit service organization.

Town Manager Oefinger expressed surprise at the Council's discussion because the non-union employees have been viewed historically as the go to people. The Town Manager has reviewed with the Town Council the value of having such a large pool of non-union employees and it is painful to hear the Council say it would be acceptable for them to unionize. The Town would lose flexibility and the extra hours worked by non-union employees. Councilor Flax feels that the non-union agreement is the only place the Town Council can make a change.

The Town Manager stated there is no urgency to this matter and the Town Council does not have to act, but at some point it must deal with the internal equity of union and non-union positions.

Mayor Somers asked for a comparison with other towns. Mr. Ackerman stated it can be done, but every time studies have been done, they have shown that the Town is slightly above the median. Mr. Ackerman stated he can do a re-survey, rather than a full comprehensive study.

Councilor Watson noted that the administrators in the school system are unionized and are probably making more than the Town non-union employees.

The item was tabled until additional data is provided.

Mr. Ackerman noted the Town is undertaking a broader analysis of the non-union terms and conditions, but he can provide preliminary information on increasing employee contributions to health benefits.

**2012-0243****Review of Town Council Goals****Discussed**

Mayor Somers reviewed the goals. Councilor Johnson stated he would be attending the Economic Development Commission meeting on Thursday and he would check on the status of incentive programs. Councilor Watson will work through the Liaison Committee on developing

*environmental programs with the Board of Education.*

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

*Mayor Somers asked Councilors to review the referral list.*

8. **OTHER BUSINESS**

*Councilor Flax questioned the problems with the Mystic River Bridge.*

9. **ADJOURNMENT**

*A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Flax, to adjourn the meeting at 8:03 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*