Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes - Draft

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor James L. Streeter, Councilors Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Paulann H. Sheets, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, August 23, 2011 **6:30 PM** **Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Streeter called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Streeter, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Sheets

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

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2011-0168 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 August 9, 2011 are hereby accepted and approved.

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

The motion carried unanimously

5. NEW BUSINESS

2011-0004 Pending Litigation (2011 Standing Referral)

A motion was made by Mayor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Flax, that the members of the Town Council, together with Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Town Attorney Bryan Fiengo, go into executive session at 6:35 p.m. for the purpose of discussing pending litigation with respect to the imposition of state sales tax on the Town's provision of solid waste collection services to commercial establishments within the Town of Groton and the liability associated therewith.

The motion carried unanimously

Councilor Sheets arrived at 6:37 p.m. and joined the executive session.

Members Present: Mayor Streeter, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Peruzzotti

2011-0004 Pending Litigation (2011 Standing Referral)

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 7:00 p.m.

2011-0170 Office of Statewide Emergency Telecommunications (OSET) Grant

Discussed

Joe Sastre, Manager of Emergency Communications, explained his request for the Town Council to authorize a grant application to OSET to purchase a new voice recorder for the Dispatch

Center. Funds in the amount $25,000 have been authorized in the CIP and this grant would provide supplemental funds of up to $20,372. The Town has not yet selected a vendor, so the exact cost of the recorder and ultimate amount of the grant are not yet determined.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2011-0167 Supportive Housing Program Grant

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted this is an annual grant from TVCCA to assist with housing activities.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0039 Recommendations of the Task Force on Climate Change and Sustainable Community

Discussed

Mayor Streeter asked for Councilors' questions or comments on the final report.

Councilor Flax questioned the statement in the report that it is difficult to develop a single town strategy.

Mayor Streeter asked that Councilors discuss the four recommendations of the Task Force.

Councilor Sheets suggested that Zell Steever lead the Council in a discussion of the former Task Force's recommendations. She noted the report prepared by an intern in OPDS and a report by the City of Chicago presented to the former Task Force by Mr. Steever. Councilor Sheets reviewed the Task Force's recommendations and the purposes for them, and suggested they must be prioritized.

Mr. Steever responded to Councilor Flax and noted that the Town's efforts will have little impact on the global problem. However, when the problem becomes a crisis, the Town will be better prepared to manage greenhouse gasses and will have saved money if the Town starts now using technology currently available.

Councilor Monteiro addressed the four recommendations as follows:

1) Resolve to support climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies as central organizing, planning and development principles for Groton.

- Councilor Monteiro explained she is a skeptic with respect to climate change mitigation. She is supportive of energy conservation and efficiency.

2) Establish an Office of Climate Change and Sustainable Community in the Town Manager's Office, staffed by a mid-level Climate Change Officer, by July 2011.

- Councilor Monteiro does not favor hiring a full-time Climate Change Officer at this point in time due to budget considerations. The Planning Department has been decimated and pushed to its limits. If a position is not established, the work will fall to Planning.

3) Establish a permanent Task Force on Climate Change and Sustainable Community.

- Councilor Monteiro does not support establishing a permanent Task Force without a dedicated

staff member. She reiterated that she fears the staffing responsibility will fall to the Planning Department if a position is not created. Although the Task Force report indicates that a new position could be funded by grants, Councilor Monteiro has no confidence that grants will be available in the future.

4) Establish the Groton Energy Fund (GEF), a revolving fund created by the dollars saved in energy efficiency and energy rebates to fund additional public energy efficiency and conservation retrofit projects in the community.

- Councilor Monteiro feels a fund can be established if grants are received.

Councilor Monteiro noted the former Task Force indicated that Planning was not as responsive as they would have liked. She agreed with Councilor O'Beirne that a permanent committee's purview must be well defined. Overall, she feels the recommendations have more to do with climate change, rather than energy efficiency, than she would like.

Councilor Johnson feels the Task Force should be reestablished for at least two years. He is not opposed to hiring someone if they can bring in money and provide other services. Councilor Johnson stated he has no interest in debating the causes of climate change, but the Town should be more efficient if the technology is available.

Councilor Flax noted that the Council has a history of establishing committees and then not following through on the recommendations. He supports focusing on how to save Groton money rather than the reasons for climate change. Councilor Flax suggested that if a new position provides a better return on investment for the Town, then it could be instituted on a temporary basis and evaluated after a year. With regard to establishing a Committee, Councilor Flax would not want to proceed without first defining specifically what the Council wants and providing the Committee with direction.

Councilor Watson expressed support for hiring a person if they could make the Town money. If a permanent task force is established, there should be an educational component for the schools.

Mayor Streeter noted the name he suggested was the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Committee. He feels the Town Manager is taxed and needs some help, but not someone specifically designated as a Climate Change Officer. Mayor Streeter does not feel the former Task Force should be reestablished. Mr. Spicer suggested, and Mayor Streeter would support, creating a group consisting of key government departments, industries, military and scientific communities, etc. An energy fund could be established with the savings.

Councilor Monteiro clarified that if there was an assurance that the new position's salary would be covered by grants, she would not be opposed. However, if the grants dry up or come with significant stipulations, it would further burden the Town. She is not sure the position should be in the Town Manager's office as she would like to consider an Assistant Town Manager position in the future.

Mr. Steever noted the Council has had the report for six months and does not seem to understand it. The former Task Force responded to the issues requested by the Council. They brought in a grant, conducted public meetings, and gained community support. Planning and Development Services did very little work on the grant. Grant money is available for state, local, and tribal governments. Mr. Steever suggested that a task force cannot act on behalf of the Town. A staff person would be instrumental in helping the Town Manager decide how to get projects like the solar panels done and would provide a good return on investment. Climate change issues cross departmental boundaries, so it would be appropriate for the position to be located in the Town Manager's office. A person is required to look for grant opportunities. Mr. Steever stated that this

effort is about making the Town more energy efficient, saving money, and making it safer in the long run. The sea level is rising and jeopardizing the Town's tax base. Mitigation and adaptation are inter-related. Mr. Steever feels that the four recommendations are the minimum actions needed to provide a start up for the program.

Councilor Johnson asked if a new committee could work with an intern to prepare something for the next budget in six months. Mr. Steever feels a professional employee is necessary.

Town Manager Oefinger stated that having a dedicated person would be important. The effort started with existing staff and became an additional work program undertaken while the Town was losing people. The Town has utilized three interns, but it should not use an intern for the next step. Other alternatives include hiring or reassigning staff. The Town has set aside utility company rebate dollars that could be used along with future savings to hire someone. Time would be needed to get the person up to speed. A dedicated person would be helpful to narrow down the focus of the effort. The Town Manager stated he would need time to work with the RTM on the position, given comments made during the budget session, if the Council decides to go down this path.

Councilor Flax does not see the effort progressing without a dedicated staff person. He suggested giving the former Task Force the ability to meet through May and establish a position within the Town. If the position is not created, there is no need to move forward.

Town Manager Oefinger feels the first task is for the Council to clearly define what a permanent task force would do. The task force should not define what it is doing. Once the task force parameters are defined, the Council can determine how to provide staff.

Councilor Sheets feels there is a consensus to conserve energy and resources. She would recommend establishing the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Committee until June 30, 2012 and trying to establish a position in the Town.

Mayor Streeter indicated he would work with the Town Manager and Planning staff to come up with a committee, and he asked the Town Manager to provide recommendations for funding a position, for the Council to discuss. The Town Manager noted that staff would need to do more work to establish a revolving fund format and guidelines.

2011-0165 Status of Mystic Education Center

Discussed

Several Councilors toured the facility. Town Manager Oefinger asked if the Council had any feedback. Town representatives will be meeting with the Commissioner of Administrative Services in September to have an in-depth discussion about options. The primary focus seems to be keeping the Pratt building open. There are currently no alternatives for therapeutic aquatics programs. The Town Manager is looking for direction as to how involved the Council would like to be with the property. Discussion followed on the Pratt building, the state's next steps, and future reuse. Town Manager Oefinger noted that an extensive inventory of the property was prepared as part of the Economic Development Strategic Plan and Phase I school program. He reiterated that the Town has advocated for identifying the highest and best use for the property before marketing it, but has had no success with the state in the effort. Mayor Streeter would like to see environmental reports on the property before the Town considers the property. At the tour, the state indicated they will provide costs associated with the Pratt building. Discussion followed on the possibility of using the property for a business incubator. The Town Manager feels there are lessons to be learned from the Norwich Hospital and Seaside properties, and the state and Town must get in front of this issue before the buildings deteriorate further.

6. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Flax, to adjourn the meeting at

8:27 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.