



Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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, September 13, 2011

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

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

2. **ROLL CALL**

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

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

3. **Calendar and Communications**

None.

4. **Approval of Minutes**

2011-0179 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 August 19, 2011 and August 23, 2011 are hereby accepted and approved.

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

The motion carried unanimously

5. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None.

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

Town Response to Hurricane Irene - Discussion

Joe Sastre, Manager of Emergency Operations and Communications, presented a map showing hurricane inundation zones by category of storm. He reviewed a detailed time line of the Town's response to Hurricane Irene that included early e-mail warnings to Town staff; public updates through various outlets; participation in conference calls with the state; staff preparations; opening of an emergency shelter at Fitch High School; tree clearing; coordination of efforts with the Red Cross and CERT volunteers; transportation of individuals needing assistance to the shelter; issuance of a mandatory evacuation order for low lying areas; dealing with power outages across 90% of Groton; increased staffing at Dispatch including a Public Works liaison; clearing of trees not involving power lines by Town crews; traffic control at intersections provided by the Police at intersections; pump outs by WPCF personnel for residents with grinder pumps and no electricity; relocation of medically dependent persons when the shelter was closed; the lack of response from CL&P in identifying live power lines so that the Town could cut trees; opening of a respite center at the Senior Center including two trailers for showers and hot meals; distribution of Meals Ready to Eat (MRE), water, and ice from Poquonnock Plains Park; and opening of a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center at the Senior Center.

Mr. Sastre noted that social media proved a good tool for disseminating information. He complimented Town departments and their willingness to get the job done. Mr. Sastre thanked the many volunteers who assisted in numerous ways and praised the IT Department for keeping the Town's network up the entire time. It was evident that today, residents are more dependent on electricity including a large segment of the population that is medically dependent on electricity. The Town also discovered that cell phones work great until the batteries run out or the generators are not fueled.

There will be many conversations with CL&P about their response. The Town must determine why CL&P's communication with Groton failed. Mr. Sastre emphasized that the Town cannot count on the state to follow through on established plans or to respond to requests in a timely manner. Mr. Sastre will continue to review the Town's response to the storm to identify areas for improvement.

Mr. Sastre then presented Councilors with MREs to sample.

Mayor Streeter thanked and commended Town employees, Navy personnel and citizens who assisted during and after the storm. Councilor Monteiro commended Public Works and Groton Utilities who were out in force. Discussion followed on the need to be prepared and not get complacent. Irene came ashore as a tropical storm not a hurricane. The Town Manager acknowledged both Joe Sastre and Jeff Williams and the excellent job that they did.

2011-0174

Results of Operations - FYE 2011

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo presented preliminary, unaudited numbers for FYE 2011 Results of Operations. Expenditures were under budget by \$803,240. This figure includes funds returned by Town departments (\$683,131) and unused Contingency (\$112,455). Revenues were over budget by \$1,091,131. Mr. Pandolfo explained the impact on revenues of state actions and the actual collection rate. Mr. Pandolfo explained that the lower tax collection rate is due to the economy and staffing issues in Tax Collection.

Town Manager Oefinger state that when the audit is complete, he would like to visit the issue of raising the Fund Balance. At 7.5%, Groton is below the median (10.8%) and the mean (11.4%). A recent across-the-board recalibration of ratings by the bond agencies put the Town in a different peer group and it is becoming obvious that the Town needs to consider increasing the Fund Balance. Had the Council decreased the General Fund Balance as was discussed during FYE 12 budget deliberations, it would have been a serious issue during the recent bond rating.

Councilor Sheets expressed support for increasing the Fund Balance. She discussed the impact the ratings agencies have had on the economy.

The Town Manager emphasized that staff is not recommending a jump from 7.5% to 10%. Councilor Johnson asked if municipalities identify a specific percentage or ranges of percentages for Fund Balance. The Town Manager the Council had discussed, but did not support, a percentage range when it adopted the most recent fiscal policies. The bond rating agencies do not have a magic number. Mr. Pandolfo noted that the Town's relative standing in its peer group is comparable to its standing in the previous peer group.

2011-0165

Status of Mystic Education Center

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that there is a meeting on Monday with the Commissioner of the Department of Administrative Services to discuss the Mystic Education Center. Mayor Streeter and Councilors Flax and Watson indicated they would like to attend the meeting.

2011-0177

John Kelley Memorial

Discussed

The Council previously received a letter from, and was addressed under Public Communications by, James Roy who expressed a desire to erect a statue or memorial to John Kelley on Pequot Avenue where the John Mason statue originally stood. Mr. Roy feels that a quick response is necessary because the effort will require major fundraising. Councilor Sheets expressed support for the location, if there is no community opposition. Councilor Kolnaski would like to see a committee formed to decide on an appropriate memorial. Councilor Watson was very enthusiastic about the proposal. Mr. Roy needs the Town Council's approval to use the site because it is owned by the Town. The Town Manager suggested that the location should be vetted and perhaps other locations would be suitable as well. The site is considered sacred ground by some in the community. Councilor Johnson suggested conducting a public hearing on the proposal. The Council asked that Mr. Roy be invited to the next Committee of the Whole meeting.

2011-0178

Community Information Areas in Local Libraries

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Town Manager Oefinger explained that this referral is in response to a resident's inquiries about the community information area at the Library. The library has surveyed other towns and the issue has been discussed by the Library Board. Betty Ann Reiter, Library Director, explained that the Library's unwritten policy and longstanding practice has been to allow postings by non-profits only. The survey of other libraries indicated that is the general practice. The few who offer business postings find it difficult to maintain. The Library Board would like to retain the current policy and limit posting to non-profits for practical and philosophical reasons. They did discuss ideas for supporting businesses other than through the Library such as creating a virtual bulletin board or conducting a business fair.

Councilor Monteiro expressed support for non-profit postings only. Councilor Watson asked if there is plan to create a policy, and if so, he believes it should be brought before the Town Council. Councilor Sheets asked if there was any discussion about promoting services that support patrons' interests. Ms. Reiter reiterated that it would difficult to monitor. Councilor Flax expressed concern with displaying information even for non-profits. He would feel more comfortable only displaying governmental information.

The consensus of the Committee of the Whole was to leave the policy as it is.

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

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Mayor Streeter indicated he would like to schedule joint meetings with the Board of Education, City of Groton, and Commanding Office of the Sub Base in the future.

The Martin Luther King Dinner will be held on October 20th at 6:00 p.m. at the Mystic Marriott. Councilors interested in attending were asked to contact the Town Manager's office by September 19th.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Flax, to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.