



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

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

Monday, September 17, 2012

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING - JOINT MEETING WITH BOARD OF EDUCATION

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman of the Board of Education Hoyt called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

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

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

Board of Education: Robert Peruzzotti, Kim Watson, Chaz Zezulka, Beth Gianacoplos, Pat Doyle, Rita Volkmann, Kirsten Hoyt, Shelly Gardner

3. NEW BUSINESS

2012-0005

Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2012 Standing Referral)

Discussed

- Redistricting

Mike Zuba and Rebecca Auger of Milone and MacBroom (M&M) were present to review the redistricting plan which is not yet final. Public comment and anticipated enrollment figures will impact the final plan. Mr. Zuba reviewed a PowerPoint presentation covering process and timeline; criteria and constraints; scenario development; and scenario exploration. M&M is looking to have a plan in place in December, a timeline that is dictated by the state process. October 1st enrollments will be plugged into the redistricting plan and projections will be updated. M&M will hold a community-wide meeting in October with four neighborhood meetings at strategic locations in October and November. A draft plan will be submitted to the state in early November.

The criteria for the redistricting plan is to address the state mandate and reduce socio-economic disparity; align enrollments with capacity and balancing objectives; minimize impact to neighborhoods; and develop a plan for a five-year horizon.

The constraints to developing of the plan are state mandates; quick turnaround; geographic distribution of schools relative to population centers; operation capacities of the schools; shifting demographics; past planning efforts; and community fatigue.

Scenario development involved identifying a baseline data of existing conditions; developing redistricting options; and judging each scenario based on the criteria, keeping in mind the desire to achieve a five-year horizon.

Mr. Zuba reviewed the targeted capacity for each school and preferred maximum class sizes. M&M divided the community into logical neighborhoods for moving pieces of the puzzle for redistricting. Seven scenarios were explored in great detail at the neighborhood level. The

scenarios were successive, building on key elements of each. Through this process M&M was able to identify key neighborhoods with the greatest impact on racial balance criteria.

M&M is recommending scenario G."This scenario moves 20% of the students in the elementary system. Mr. Zuba reviewed the proposed elementary boundaries on a map and specific areas of change. He explained that the boundaries split Branford Manor to achieve sufficient percentages at Catherine Kolnaski. Also, the Fort Hill Homes neighborhood is split. One benefit of this scenario is the ability to use Claude Chester for a pre-K program.

Mr. Zuba noted an enrollment snapshot with key indices; pre-K enrollment figures are not included. The best locations for the program will be decided based on the impact on capacity. It will no longer be necessary to move the pre-K programs for balancing purposes.

The next step is to review and modify (if necessary) the redistricting plan based on the latest enrollments and updated projections. The plan will then be presented for public comment and neighborhood meetings will be held.

The pre-K program will be discussed and developed throughout the process. Redistricting has implications for the budget process. Having a plan in December will allow the Board of Education to consider reorganization of space and staff. M&M has considered transportation and bus times. There do not appear to be any problems, but the plan can be modified as the process goes along.

Councilor Flax noted this plan is significantly different from the redistricting plan that was previously developed, but not implemented. He asked about how priorities are ranked in redistricting. Mr. Zuba responded capacities, programs, mandates, neighborhoods/transportation, and future development. The proposed boundaries allow flexibility to do some school planning. M&M will listen to public comment and make changes if they can still meet the mark, however changing any major piece (such as the 180 students at Branford Manor) would create difficulties.

Mr. Zuba noted that the plan may not provide direct feed from the elementary schools to the middle schools, but that can be addressed going forward.

Discussion followed on the impact of racial balancing, the schools that are in pending imbalance, transitional students, the 'minority' classification, and the increase in enrollment at Mary Morrisson.

- School Facilities Initiative

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the last time the Town Council and Board of Education met there was a lot of discussion about whether or not there is consensus to move forward with a school facilities initiative. The Town Manager expressed concerns from a staffing standpoint and noted that the Town may not be in the best position to move ahead. He cited the Board of Education's redistricting effort and Milone and MacBroom's work on the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) update as well as Wes Greenleaf's retirement. The Town Manager has discussed this issue with the interim Superintendent who shares his concerns. Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the school facilities initiative will benefit from completion of the redistricting analysis and POCD data gathering.

Mayor Somers noted that Mike Zuba of M&M is of the same mindset. She noted that a School Facilities Initiative Task Force could have an initial meeting, but any work should wait until after the first of the year.

Ms. Watson would like to see the Task Force move forward and take time to understand the historical perspective. Councilor Flax agreed noting that there is surveying to be done and decision to be made on one or two middle schools. Mr. Peruzzotti agreed suggesting that the Task Force review the educational specifications.

The Town Manager reiterated that there is no Superintendent, no Wes Greenleaf (who has played a critical role in past efforts), and there has been difficulty obtaining direction from the Board of Education.

Mr. Zuba stated that the Town is in a difficult position to move forward. He cited a lack of staffing and vision and a loss of institutional knowledge. It is unknown how quickly stability can be established. With respect to the survey, it must be carefully crafted. New staff will have their work cut out for them and it may be difficult to get information for a school facilities initiative. The Board is currently working on an elementary school redistricting plan which needs to be finalized. When the Town undertakes a facility plan, there should be momentum from the beginning and everyone should be on board. Mr. Zuba emphasized that there needs to be a pace to the plan and the pieces must be in place. Mr. Zuba does not know who is guiding the school plan at this point.

Mayor Somers suggested that the Town should wait, noting that quick fixes do not work in Groton. The Town needs to collect information and do it in a methodical way. Sean McKenna was asked for his opinion about moving forward and he reviewed enrollment numbers at the middle schools. He noted a disparity in terms of total school population and predicted that numbers will go up at West Side and down at Cutler.

Carolyn Dickey noted that central office staff is in a very difficult organizational position and it would be difficult to provide the support that the Task Force would need. Councilor Morton noted that all of the people responsible for providing information to a School Facilities Initiative Task Force are saying they are in a difficult position. She feels it is premature to move forward if information cannot be provided by staff.

Mr. Zezulka suggested that the public does not want inertia and people are ready to go. He is not sure how much staff is required for the Task Force to get started.

Discussion followed on involving the Task Force in the redistricting effort so that they have background. The same demographics are used for redistricting and facilities planning. Mr. Zuba suggested that the Board of Education and Town Council consider what would be the right time to proceed considering the flux that is going on. How many things need to be put to rest before the Town can have clarity and focus? Mr. Zuba further explained that it is rare to have productive committee/public meetings during November and December unless there are extenuating circumstances. Mr. Greenleaf expressed support for waiting until January. If the Town hires a facilitator, there will be a tighter time schedule than in the past. After redistricting and POCD information gathering, the Task Force will have more information to make decisions. Mr. Greenleaf feels the Town needs to do it right and get it right.

Mayor Somers polled Councilors and Board members. The consensus was to schedule an initial orientation meeting, ask Task Force members to attend redistricting meetings, and start regular meetings in January.

- Update on Middle School Consolidation

Sean McKenna reviewed middle school enrollments and class sizes. He noted that the schools are not too crowded and the consolidation has gone very well. Climate, culture and instruction are all going well. Wes Greenleaf reviewed physical modifications and improvements to the buildings and noted that energy efficient lights have been installed at West Side. The portable classrooms will

not be up and running until October 29th due to some specialized components. There has been a shift in enrollments, with an increase at West Side and a decrease at Cutler. Mr. Zezulka noted that the atmosphere is very positive and there has been tremendous support for Groton Public Schools staff.

Councilor Watson questioned participation in extra-curricular activities. Mr. McKenna stated he will get more information on how kids are being accommodated in the sports programs.

- Update on Superintendent

Chairman Hoyt noted that a letter has been issued to Paul Kadri and the Board is waiting for a response. The Board is interviewing tomorrow for a new interim Superintendent.

2012-0231

Amended Agreement Regarding Fitch High School Baseball Field - Update

Discussed

The Town Manager noted that there is a final draft agreement that can be forwarded to Chairman Hoyt.

4. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Streeter, to adjourn the meeting at 8:44 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.