



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor Rita M. Schmidt, Councilors Dean Antipas, Joe de la Cruz, Bruce S. Flax, Bob Frink, Patrice Granatosky, Rich Moravsik, Deborah L. Peruzzotti and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, September 22, 2015

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Schmidt called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Antipas, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Flax, Councilor Frink, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Watson and Councilor Granatosky
Members Absent: Councilor Moravsik

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

3. Calendar and Communications

Town Manager Oefinger noted the Energy, Efficiency and Conservation Committee has arranged a tour of Pfizer on October 5th at 5:00 p.m. to view energy efficiency efforts, and the Committee is extending the invitation to the Town Council.

Mayor Schmidt and the Board of Education Chair have identified Tuesday, October 20th at 6:00 p.m. for a joint meeting, which would normally be the regular meeting time for the Finance Committee.

The Town Manager requested a special meeting of the Committee of the Whole on October 6th prior to the Town Council meeting to discuss a settlement agreement on the Route 215 sewer line issue and to receive an update on union negotiations from Town Attorney Eileen Duggan and Director of Human Resources Bob Zagami.

Mayor Schmidt noted a request for the Town Council to send a letter by October 15th to the Army Corps of Engineers in support of a proposal to maintain dredging dump sites. No objections were expressed by Town Councilors.

Councilor Watson noted that the Town Council/RTM/Board of Education Liaison Committee meets before the joint meeting on October 20th (the first Wednesday in October) if there are any suggestions for items of discussion.

Councilor Peruzzotti noted that it is inconvenient to not be able to use the green mailbox at Town Hall for tax payments. Town Manager Oefinger noted this is a new policy because people have claimed they paid their taxes, but they were never received. He stated that residents can still use the box, but the Town is encouraging people to come into the building. Councilor Peruzzotti noted that a resident received a letter from the Town after putting a tax payment in there. The Town Manager asked for a copy of the letter.

Councilor Antipas summarized issues with the Board of Education/teachers' union negotiations to date.

4. Approval of Minutes - None

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

2013-0247 Groton Long Point Road Bridge Over Palmer's Cove

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, noted that this project has been studied since 2013. After the presentation by Jim Platosh from AECOM, staff will be seeking guidance from the Town Council on some specific issues.

Mr. Platosh reviewed a PowerPoint presentation and noted the substantial amount of effort that has gone into the project. The presentation included an overview of the October, 2013 presentation to the Town Council for the benefit of new Councilors. Mr. Platosh described the project area and construction limits; public comments received prior to completion of the final report in October 2013; objectives of the study; and existing road, bridge, and causeway conditions.

Mr. Platosh then reviewed a summary of four alternatives for bridge rehabilitation or replacement and construction costs ranging from \$1.7 to \$5.4 million. Alternative No. 2 (replacement with pedestrian bridge) was previously chosen by the Town Council as the preferred alternative. Two alternatives for causeway rehabilitation were presented at a cost of \$500,000 or \$1 million. Mr. Platosh reviewed plans and cross section views of the alternatives. Construction will be in stages to maintain traffic flow and will take two seasons, subject to a number of environmental permits and restrictions that could affect the schedule.

Following the presentation of the final report, AECOM conducted a structure type study that evaluated three bridge types and three pedestrian structures along with a causeway stability analysis. The cost differences are negligible. Roadway construction maintains a width within the 60' right-of-way, provides a sidewalk on one side (TBD), and results in a one foot higher grade to achieve additional clearance. Utility considerations are relocation of overhead utilities and the water main. Mr. Platosh described the proposal for the causeway. The project is eligible for 80% federal funding for eligible costs.

Next steps include additional and more definitive design and identification of funding options.

Councilor Watson asked about including a fishing platform and Mr. Platosh noted it could be accommodated, but it is a policy decision for the Town Council. In response to Councilor Antipas, Mr. Platosh noted that the bridge is being designed for a 100-year life. Discussion followed on the impact on the time line and cost associated with keeping the bridge open to traffic.

Mr. Platosh noted that the bridge girders are not a problem, but the deck is, which means the bridge will not fail overnight. He commended the Town for planning and not waiting for an emergency. The bridge is currently rated well above the load limit.

Discussion followed on overhead utilities the potential for them to block the bridge in a storm and handicap the bridge contractors who will be using large cranes. Mr. Platosh noted that his colleague previously worked for DOT permitting and would assist in preparing the application which could result in a preliminary funding commitment in as little as two weeks.

Councilor Frink asked for additional justification for the project, questioning the response in the case of a catastrophic failure. Mr. Schneider noted that the Town would need to get emergency access through the line trail and install temporary bridging utilizing state resources, which would take days.

Discussion followed on federal funding and assuring it is available. Mr. Schneider stated he will

be seeking funding in the Capital Improvement Program for additional design in order to return to the Council with a recommendation to prepare for a bond referendum.

Discussion followed on bonding costs and the additional expense associated with placing restrictions on the contractor. Mr. Schneider would anticipate a normal construction season and schedule, but there may be restrictions such as Groton Long Point zoning.

Town Manager Oefinger reiterated that the Council previously chose Alternative No. 2 with the separate pedestrian walkway.

Councilor Peruzzotti suggested that the Town needs a commitment from Groton Long Point that they will allow the work.

2015-0073

Fitch Middle School Reuse Plan - Update

Discussed

This item was placed on the agenda at the request of Councilor Flax, who noted receipt of a communication from Natalie Billing. He stated that this project grew out of a goal of the Town Council to create efficiencies between the Town and Board of Education, but because of the cost, he feels the Town should look at other alternatives such as co-locating departments rather than co-locating in one building. Councilor de la Cruz noted that co-location will result in a reduction in the number of buildings, which will need work themselves. The Town needs to identify the cost of that work rather than just focusing on the cost of Fitch Middle School renovations.

Councilor Frink stated he was a fan of consolidation until he saw the cost. He questioned the payback timeframe. Councilor Antipas also expressed concern with the cost and potential issues with the sale of vacated buildings. Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, stated that the next step in the project includes determining the cost savings associated with co-locating.

Town Manager Oefinger stated that this project was never supposed to pay for itself. This is not just about synergy with the Board of Education, but among Town operations, which are located all over the place. He asked the Council what they will do with the vacant building and to consider the value of providing co-located Town operations for citizens. The Council does not need to justify a cost savings to move ahead with the project. Co-location will enhance the Town's capabilities. A single Town Hall if Fitch Middle School even became available has been discussed for at least 30 years. The idea of co-locating with the Board of Education is a more recent idea. Synergy is enhanced when people deal with each other face to face. The Town will never recoup the renovation costs by selling the vacated buildings. He noted that the Council's indecision and changes in direction have caused delays. The Town Manager asked for the Town Council's direction to preserve staff time and consultant costs.

Mayor Schmidt noted that the cost to build a new Town Hall would exceed the cost to renovate Fitch Middle School. Councilor Antipas feels the justification for the project must make economic sense, recognizing that a zero dollar option is not possible. Councilor Peruzzotti noted that Fitch Middle School is centrally located and would provide better service to residents. She added that demolishing vacant buildings is a form of cost avoidance for the Town while reusing buildings would create tax revenue. She noted that she would like to discuss options since the proposal will not only benefit staff, but will also benefit residents. Watson agreed noting that things such as transportation, convenience, and the deteriorating condition of Fitch Middle School cannot be priced easily. Councilor de la Cruz stated this is a great opportunity that is suffering from the school plan. He does not feel that developers would be interested in Fitch Middle School. As Town/Board of Education offices, the location would be more convenient for citizens who do not have cars. Councilor Flax suggested that the Town and Board of Education need to work on efficiencies without co-locating. Councilor Granatosky stated that she cannot justify spending \$15 to \$20 million on the project, but the Town must keep the building and do something with it for the

community. Councilor Flax asked what the other options for the building would be if the project is cost prohibitive.

2015-0236 Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Program - Additional Roads For Calendar Year 2015

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, presented a request to add Briar Hill Road, north of Charles Barnum, to the 2015 paving program. After last winter, the asphalt is cracking and washing away, and a portion of the road needs to be addressed. Briar Hill Road is a dead end that serves six or seven residents. The road condition was not identified because of low traffic. The Department can use funds from the Watrous Subdivision paving project.

A motion was made by Councilor Frink, seconded by Councilor de la Cruz, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

In response to Councilor Grantosky, Mr. Schneider noted that Thomas Road is not on the list and will cost approximately \$250,000. He will report back to the Council in December on the paving program and the status of funds in the bond referendum. Councilor Grantosky also asked for the pavement management index for Thomas Road at that time. Mr. Schneider described the section of Briar Hill Road to be repaved and noted that the right-of-way is not large enough to create a cul-de-sac.

The motion carried unanimously

2015-0237 Preliminary Results of Operations - FYE 2015

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Cindy Landry, Director of Finance, reviewed her memo on preliminary results of operations for FYE 2015 and provided details on expenditures under budget and revenues over budget. The Council reviewed a progression of revenues from the Adopted Budget to preliminary unaudited figures. It was necessary to use additional fund balance due to overestimated revenues when the mill rate was set. The result is a reduction of Fund Balance from the policy amount of 7.75% to 7.37%. The reduction was discussed with the Town's financial advisor who feels that this single incident should not impact the Town's bond rating as long as the reduction in fund balance is not a trend. Ms. Landry stated she will be monitoring and evaluating revenues more closely going forward.

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the expenditures and revenues present a very positive story, but the fact that revenues were overestimated when the mill rate was established creates an impact going forward. Revenues are estimates that go up and down and there are changes that cannot be predicted. The goal now is to return to the 7.75% fund balance as soon as possible and maintain it.

Councilor Antipas asked how often in the last 10 years the property tax revenue has been overestimated and Ms. Landry said she would research it. Councilor Frink noted that the Town and Board of Education returned money, but the subdivisions did not.

The Committee of the Whole recessed at 8:32 p.m. and reconvened at 8:37 p.m.

2015-0219 FYE 2017 Budget Discussion

Discussed

Cindy Landry, Director of Finance, provided a packet of information on proposed changes for the FYE 2017 budget processes, procedures, and document format. She reviewed a summary of the proposed document changes designed to make the budget more condensed, streamlined, and readable. Changes involve the table of contents, the number of tabs and department function grouping, and consolidation of department information. Process changes include an additional cost center for an additional contribution to Capital Reserve; removing Fleet and Computer Replacement Funds out of the functions; and identifying a schedule to fund Fleet at 100%.

Councilor Flax expressed the need to understand the year to year impact of removing the funds from individual functions. Town Manager Oefinger explained that he would prefer to leave the fund allocation as is so that departments understand the impact on their budgets, but the Town has not had the discipline to fully fund the Fleet fund and too much time is wasted discussing the supplemental contribution to the fund. For Capital Reserve, the Town has approved money for projects or cut them without ever discussing the actual capital needs or growing the fund balance.

Councilors were asked to review the information and forward any questions or comments to the Town Manager.

Councilor Frink asked if a graph showing debt service payments could be added to the budget. He then presented his suggestions for the FYE 2017 budget including providing budget guidance for the Town Manager. The Town Manager explained that guidance in the form of providing thoughts and ideas on programs or ways to provide services more cheaply would be welcome as opposed to a percentage. Councilor Flax expressed support for sitting down with department heads, the RTM and subdivisions.

Councilor Peruzzotti noted that at this meeting staff has asked for guidance on two specific issues that have budgetary impact. The Council still needs to keep in mind that 67% of the budget is the Board of Education. She asked if the Council is going to commit to giving the Board of Education more money at the expense of Town services and people. She noted that the Council keeps asking Town operations to do more with less, and still the Town works to return money.

Councilor Antipas suggested that what is important is the increase in taxes (what people are paying). The quantity will drive the qualitative aspects of the budget.

2015-0234

Reauthorization of CIP Funds for Replacement Workstation Console Tables in Emergency Communications Center

Discussed

Joe Sastre, Manager of Emergency Communications, noted a CIP project that was approved to replace the radio control console system in dispatch. That project is almost complete and there will be approximately \$55,000 remaining. The dispatchers' ergonomic work stations that hold the dispatching equipment are falling apart. It will cost approximately \$50,000 to replace eight workstations based on a state bid contract. Mr. Sastre would like to use the remaining funds in the radio control console system project.

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

Councilors expressed concern with the cost of the workstations. Discussion followed on the use of the workstations and the cost.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 5 - Mayor Schmidt, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Frink, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson

Opposed: 3 - Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax and Granatosky

2015-0232

Sale of William Seely School Property

Discussed

A public hearing was held on the sale of the William Seely School property last week. Town Manager Oefinger noted that the Town is not in a position to answer many of the questions raised at the public hearing because the proposed development is unknown. As noted at the public hearing, the Planning Commission recommended in favor of the sale under CGS Section 8-24, and the purchaser would like an adjustment to the purchase sale agreement.

Discussion followed on the impact of development on homeowners and methods that could be

employed such as screening, buffers, topography, and sound attenuation. Any development of the property will require the proper land use approvals.

Councilor Frink noted it is the Town Council's role to determine if there is a compelling reason for the Town to own the property and it is the land use agencies' responsibility to assure that development is done in the right way.

Councilor Watson feels the Council owes it to residents to explain the process and the checks and balances that are in place.

The Town Manager suggestion and an information session for the surrounding neighborhoods, and Committee members concurred.

2014-0256 Procurement of USS Groton Sail and Planes

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger advised that the consultant for the USS Groton Sail committee feels there is sufficient community support for an approximately \$1.3 million project. The consultant has delivered a draft proposal for a 24-month \$120,000 effort. The first nine months would be paid for by the Town and City (\$22,500 each). The \$10,000 still owed by the Town and City will be forgiven with this effort. Because this is not a budgeted item, funds will have to come from Contingency or other budgets. The Town Manager is seeking authorization to commit \$22,500 for the Town's share for the initial nine months of effort. The remainder of the effort will be paid for by proceeds from fundraising.

A motion was made by Granatosky, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti.

The motion carried unanimously

2015-0235 Chelsea Groton Foundation Grant - Parks and Recreation

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

The motion carried unanimously

2015-0239 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Grant

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

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0124 Ethics Ordinance

Discussed

Councilor Antipas noted that he emailed the draft ethics code and report to the Town Council and Town Manager. Human Resources should review the document at the recommendation of the Town Attorney. The code would also apply to the Board of Education as Town officials so Councilor Antipas will circulate the draft document to the Board of Education as well.

2013-0299 Establishment of a Charter Revision Commission

Not Discussed

2015-0194 Groton Utilities - Taxation without Representation?

Not Discussed

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

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Frink, to adjourn the meeting at 10:10 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.