Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes - Draft

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

Tuesday, October 8, 2013 | **6:00 PM** | **Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

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

Also present were Assistant Town Manager Doug Ackerman and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. Calendar and Communications

4. Approval of Minutes - None

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2013-0164 FYE 2014 Budget Follow-up

Discussed

- *Fire District PILOT Payments*

City of Groton

City Mayor Marian Galbraith, Chief Nick Delia, and Finance Director Michael Hillsberg were present to meet with the Council. Mayor Somers noted the purpose of the meeting is to have an open discussion about the fire district operations.

Mayor Galbraith noted that the City is classified as a borough as opposed to a fire district and the PILOT amount is determined by the state. Mayor Somers explained that the meeting is simply an opportunity to have a conversation and does not concern the amount of the funding.

Councilor Flax asked how PILOT funding is determined. It was noted that the PILOT distributed by the state and the PILOT distributed by the Town are both based on formulas based on the amount of tax-exempt property within the district.

Councilor Flax noted that it has been difficult to get all of the fire districts together to have a discussion about communication, equipment, trash collection and other issues. He asked if the City would be willing to meeting. Chief Delia noted that the City has been before the Council a few times. A proposed tax abatement for volunteers was shot down by the Council. Chief Delia noted that the area chiefs meet monthly and work together to obtain economies of scale. They do not joint purchase equipment for co-ownership. Although the fire districts are separate entities, there is only one incident command system, one rapid intervention system and one mayday system,

and their equipment is compatible. Also, there is one dispatch and all districts work off a CAD system. Everyone helps each other out in large incidents. Chief Delia noted the boundaries of the West Pleasant Valley Fire District which contracts with the City of Groton.

Councilor Peruzzotti arrived at 6:17 p.m.

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

Discussed

Councilor Antipas explained what PILOT funding is.

Councilor Morton asked how many paid and volunteer firefighters there are in the City. Chief Delia responded that there are 17 career staff and 4 to 5 active volunteers, with 4 additional volunteers coming up. The paid staff is unionized and the pension is managed by the City pension board.

In response to Mayor Somers, Chief Delia noted the City covers 3.1 square miles. The mill rate does not separate out the fire service, but it represents $2.5 million out of a $16 million budget. There are two rapid response boats for rescues. All personnel are trained on how to use the boat and they tour major response areas. Two people in the fire service have captain's licenses and there is a three-person committee that runs the program. Mayor Somers asked about the City's mutual aid response with their ladder truck to Poquonnock Bridge. The Chief explained that the department signed onto a statewide plan to bring in firefighters from anywhere in the state for backup. The City is not doing an automatic response to Poquonnock Bridge with the ladder truck because it was determined not to be appropriate. If there is an immediate need, the City's ladder truck can be requested as a mutual aid asset.

Councilor Peruzzotti discussed the circumstances surrounding the installation of portable classrooms at West Side Middle School. She asked about the involvement of the City fire department in the planning process. Mayor Galbraith explained that the plans were stamped by engineers that they met specifications for fire truck access, but the plans or the installation were incorrect. Councilor Peruzzotti expressed concern with a report that City staff mocked the process. Chief Delia stated he would be happy to talk to the person who reported that and he would be stunned if it were true. Mayor Galbraith stated that all City staff worked to correct the situation as quickly as possible. The Deputy Fire Marshal was very upset by the situation and he would not mock what happened.

Councilor Streeter asked how new equipment is funded. The last piece of apparatus purchased was with a grant and matching funds and the remainder was bonded. Prior to that, the City saved money as part of a long-term plan. Mr. Hillsberg reviewed specifics of the most recent purchases. Discussion followed on the City's practice of putting money aside in reserves for equipment. Mayor Galbraith noted that was the basis for the agreement that the City tried to reach with Poquonnock Bridge.

In response to Councilor Streeter, Chief Delia noted that volunteers are Fire Fighter Is or higher, except for two accountability people. Career staff must go through Fire Fighter I, II, instructor, and officer. Volunteers can either go through fire or EMS training based on their schedules and what they want to accomplish. Councilor Streeter asked if there are any programs that encourage volunteerism. Chief Delia provided an overview of the public safety mentoring program at West Side Middle School that supports a long term plan to have people trained when they leave high school. The Groton Fire Officers are also working with Grasso Tech and the Boy Scouts Explorer program, as well as Three Rivers to provide college credits for high school seniors as part of an internship. The fire service is competing with everyone else for volunteers. In addition, with the economy people are working two jobs and there is no consistency in schedules. Councilor Streeter

asked if there is an alternative hazmat program in case the Navy decides not to provide mutual aid. Chief Delia noted that there is a regional team that can fill the role. However, the sub base is a key player in several operations throughout the region, not just hazmat.

Councilor Streeter thanked the City of Groton fire department for the service it provides to the City and other districts.

Mayor Galbraith noted that a more immediate concern is a letter that was recently received from the Poquonnock Bridge Fire District stating they are at a reduced capacity to provide mutual aid because they do respond to the City.

In response to Councilor Flax, Chief Delia reviewed the City's equipment which consists of two front line engineers, one reserve engine, two SUVs, a squad vehicle, a 20' incident command communications vehicle for the hazmat team, and a trailer with heavy rescue equipment. The City Fire Department is a first responder and all the apparatus is equipped with medical equipment. Medical calls comprise 67% of responses. Total calls were 1344, but that is high because it covers the time period when the City was providing automatic response to Poquonnock Bridge. Chief Delia noted that the department dispatched depends on the nature of the call. Also if mutual aid is sent to another district, the chief responds as well.

In response to Councilor Antipas, Chief Delia stated that the department trains at the fire academy and an abandoned house at Avery Point. The Norwich State Hospital Kettle Building has been given to the Preston Fire Department for training. In addition, Mystic and Old Mystic have fire trailers for training.

Chief Delia addressed the question of why so much equipment shows up at a call. The department plans for the worst and hopes for the best. The purpose for the response is to provide preventative care as fast as possible. The average response time is just over 4 minutes. The department needs to respond to medical calls with two vehicles in case a second call comes in. Also, multiple vehicles frees up fire personnel to respond to another emergency while leaving medical personnel behind.

Mayor Somers stated she would like to explore a different way to provide medical services through the fire department with different types of vehicles. Chief Delia stated he is always looking for ways to be more efficient and considering what is best for the City.

The Mayor thanked the group for coming in.

West Pleasant Valley Fire District

Ben Courant, Brad Julian, Warren Seabury, and Chief Nick Delia were present to address the Council. Mr. Julian explained that West Pleasant Valley is the smallest fire district. It owns no equipment and does not have a dedicated fire service. The district contracts for fire service from the City of Groton based on a City of Groton formula. The district's main concern is the upcoming expansion of Fairview. Approximately 60% of the district's EMS calls go to Fairview, which is a not-for-profit organization that does not pay taxes. The district is also concerned with the unfinished buildings on Mardie Lane.

Chief Delia explained that the West Pleasant Valley payment is calculated by dividing the City fire department budget by the City's grand list and applying that number to the West Pleasant Valley Grand List. The cost of fire hydrant rentals is included in a different account. Under a prior negotiation, 1 mill is added for first responder service and 1/8th of a mill is added for processing. The department provides all the same services to West Pleasant Valley that they do in the City.

There were 164 calls from July 1 through June 30. The majority of the calls are to Fairview. The City also responds on behalf of West Pleasant Valley to accidents on Route 12, but most accidents on Route 12 do not involve West Pleasant Valley District residents.

Mr. Courant stated there are 17 pieces of non-taxable property in the district. All revenues for the district come from taxes and the PILOT program.

There is no trash collection in the district. Chief Delia noted that in the City, the hydrants and fire alarm boxes are maintained by Groton Utilities. The West Pleasant Valley fire district hydrants are billable to the fire department at the same rate as all others. The fire alarms are an internal cost to Groton Utilities. West Pleasant Valley's mill rate is 2.8.

Discussion followed on why the fire district is separate from the City of Groton. Chief Delia explained that in 1962 there was an effort to consolidate the fire district with the City, but it was determined by the state that everyone from both districts would have to agree. Mr. Julian noted that it would not be a benefit to West Pleasant Valley fire district taxpayers.

Mr. Courant noted that the district does have a problem getting taxpayers to attend their meetings.

Mayor Somers made a referral to the Public Safety Committee on the concerns expressed by the West Pleasant Valley Fire District board.

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

Recommended for Deletion:

2012-0069 Police Station Renovations

Recommended for Deletion

2012-0246 Pending Claim

Recommended for Deletion

2013-0014 Pfizer Update

Recommended for Deletion

2013-0018 Flanders Road Utility Installation - Future Bond Referendum Potential

Recommended for Deletion

2013-0023 Town Police Presence/Jurisdiction in Schools

Recommended for Deletion

2013-0068 Blight Ordinance

Recommended for Deletion

2013-0178 Strategy and/or Negotiations with Respect to a Pending Claim Concerning the Appointment of Special Counsel

Recommended for Deletion

2013-0224 Preliminary Results of Operations - FYE 2013

Recommended for Deletion

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Antipas, to adjourn the meeting at 7:27 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.