



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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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, October 20, 2015

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Schmidt called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

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

Board of Education: Andrea Ackerman, Mary Kelly and Kim Watson, and Superintendent Mike Graner

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Administrative Secretary Lisa Hylton.

3. NEW BUSINESS

2015-0132 State Funding for Education

Discussed

Dr. Graner distributed an Excess Cost, ECS and Board of Education handout for FY09 through FY16 along with a Legislative Update 2015 handout for the Council's review. Dr. Graner spoke on the issue that ECS funding is decreasing as the Board of Education budget increases. Dr. Graner also made clear that while the amount of funding provided is roughly the same amount each year; the percentage continues to decrease as the Board of Education budget keeps increasing. A discussion followed between Dr. Graner and the Town Council on how minuscule State funding has become, the State's responsibility to provide funding for the education of children and how the formula is calculated to determine the amount of ECS funding the Board of Education receives. Dr. Graner informed the Council that the ECS funding has been at a standstill for roughly fifteen years. Dr. Graner proposed speaking with State Representatives and the Senate for change.

Councilor Frink stated he would send a letter to State Legislators regarding the concern of underfunding and would get as many districts possible to sign the letter.

2015-0133 Federal Funding for IDEA

Discussed

Dr. Graner stated that the IDEA Grant came in at 1.1 million and is provided using a complicated formula again based on a number of children. He stressed the enormous cost of special education is and is directly affected by Federal Legislation. He explained that Federal Legislation enforces mandates ensuring that children succeed. Those mandates then control the plan put in place for each special needs child. If the district cannot meet the needs of the child, the parents may require the child's educational needs be met elsewhere outside of the district having a costly effect on the budget.

Discussion began on the history of Federal funding and again how much it has decreased over the years. Councilor Granatosky questioned if the updated legislative programs would exhaust some or all of the 1.1 million from the grant. Dr. Graner confirmed that the new legislative updates

would be funded by the grant money received.

Councilor de la Cruz noted if the original plan for federal funding was 50% the grant should be up to 10 million. He stated that the amount of funding being received is not going to amount to much in the future.

Councilor Frink questioned if our Town is doing more than area Towns. Dr. Graner stated across the board Special Education is usually about 20% of the budget.

Discussion then began about the importance of providing support to the special needs children in the classrooms through paraprofessionals and realizing that special education is difficult for all involved.

Councilor Flax stated he felt that education is not something that can be cut. He mentioned that additional money needed to be found elsewhere and cannot be taken away from education. He also reminded everyone that educators are good advocates for the children and not all children have good advocates in their parents.

Councilor Frink questioned if there was any hope of increasing IDEA. Dr. Graner stated it was something to look back on. Councilor Frink mentioned he would follow-up with a letter to Joe Courtney.

2015-0134**Civilian School Children Residing in Navy Housing****Discussed**

Dr. Graner stated that the children living in Balfour Beatty are being included in the military count for funding. He also mentioned all parents of children in the school system fill out a form stating if they work on federal property and those civilians do factor into the count for this reason. Dr. Graner stated again that the formula is not a simple one. The money received for civilian children is not as good as the Navy children but it does help.

Councilor Frink stated the last count of children living in the Balfour Beatty housing was 140. He went on to say that he saw the Balfour Beatty website and it may be something to watch for in the future as more people may want to rent in that location.

Dr. Graner went on to state that Navy personnel have first choice to the rental units. Councilor Granatosky mentioned that possibly the college students at Avery Point could be referred to the Balfour Beatty units for housing.

Councilor Moravsik suggested that other Towns and States with similar issues should be looked into. Dr. Graner stated that it is the same system, same rules, and same compensation nationwide.

Councilor de la Cruz questioned if any of the children living at Balfour Beatty attended any magnet schools. He stated that the Town pays \$3,000 for children in Town to do so and wanted to see how many students the Town was paying for. Dr. Graner stated that he did not have that information and would have to look into it. Councilor de la Cruz thought that it would be something worth looking into. He mentioned that if the Balfour Beatty units were on private land, what the Town would be missing out on.

2015-0135**State Mandates for Education****Discussed**

Dr. Graner started off by stating that the problem is not the mandates. He feels the real argument is the State sharing the burden with municipalities. He went onto say that property taxes are really paying the education for our children. It is now being mandated that all school districts in the region have the same calendar schedule. This will help cut costs in transportation and in other areas.

Councilor Antipas mentioned that the Board of Education budget covers a lot of areas including mandates. He noted that there are also things in the budget that are reoccurring like snow removal and fuel. Councilor Antipas suggested if it would be helpful for the Town to provide some of the reoccurring expenses like fuel. Councilor Antipas wondered what the Town could provide for the school system to help with the budget.

2015-0219

FYE 2017 Budget Discussion**Discussed**

Dr. Graner hoped to have a completed draft of the budget ready after Christmas. He proposed to have a joint meeting on January 19th to have a budget discussion. He stated the budget is currently being worked on.

Mayor Schmidt questioned if the Board of Education would have something concrete to present to The Day for Capital Improvement Projects (CIP). Dr. Graner responded that the CIP projects for the present fiscal year have been submitted.

Councilor Watson questioned when Dr. Graner presents the budget on January 19th will it be prior to it being presented before the Board of Education. Dr. Graner responded that the Board of Education will have had three opportunities to view the budget.

Dr. Graner and the Town Council began a discussion about joining departments from both the Town and Board of Education to save money. Some of the departments that were discussed were the Information Technology Department and the Payroll Department. Dr. Graner stated his concern that Information Technology for education is not the same as Information Technology for a traditional office setting.

Councilor Flax stated that it will take time to look at areas where costs can be cut without hindering the teaching process.

Councilor de la Cruz noted that this can be done first by relocating all departments to Fitch Middle School.

Councilor Moravsik stated he was in agreement with the suggestion of Counselor de la Cruz to move all departments to one location but not with the renovation of a building to do so. Counselor Moravsik stated that the Council needed to find other ways to cut back the budget.

Councilor Peruzzotti stated that the Council is on common ground to find ways to cut back to improve the budget. She stated that this is an area that needs to be analyzed and an avenue that needs to be further investigated. She also mentions that the Council needs to be aware that it cannot be dictated to the Board of Education how to spend the budget money. The decision is not an easy one to decide what area needs to be cut and what the Board of Education can do without. Councilor Peruzzotti reminded everyone that this is the same conversation that is had every year. She stated it is a good place to start to review one department at a time and see what will work.

Councilor Flax suggested a loose agreement to put together a committee to look at the budgets and see if there are is a possibility to make some changes. He suggested that the committee could consist of Board of Education members, Town Council members and RTM members.

Dr. Graner voiced his concern again that while the financial software may be the same within the payroll departments, education software is different and they need the support of the Information Technology Department to be educated in this area.

Mayor Schmidt questioned whether the Liaison Committee would be the right committee to

brainstorm on ways to cut costs.

Councilor de la Cruz asked if other Towns have joined departments and if it has worked to their advantage. Councilor Moravsk stated that he has seen it in West Hartford and it has worked for them.

Councilor Antipas questioned how the Town Council can be educated more about the Board of Education Budget. He noted that the Town Council is asked to make decisions and second guess the Board of Education's budget but wants to be more educated about it.

Board of Education Chair Watson asked if a proposed committee would be formed or if the Liaison Committee would review the budget and come up with suggestions.

Councilor Frink stated he was in favor of a separate new committee to focus on areas to cut costs. He then voiced his concern for employee wage increases when the Board of Education cannot afford it.

Councilor Flax stated that the Liaison Committee is a communication meeting. The committee to be used to analyze ways to cut costs would have to meet several times with a goal at hand. Councilor Flax stated he would put something together.

2015-0009

Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2015 Standing Referral)

Discussed

(See also discussion in 10/20/15 Committee of the Whole minutes under individual referrals.)

Other topics for discussion:

- School Facilities Initiative Update

Dr. Graner stated as a committee it was discussed the proposal of racial imbalance needs to be taken care of. The State should be giving 80% funding for the 3 schools would be cheaper than refurbishing the schools. 12th Nov have quorum. Then it will go to the legislative members Scott, Maynard, Bumgardner at the next meeting.

- Fitch Robotics Team

Dr. Graner stated he took a tour of Fitch High School where they were able to find a room that could house the Robotics Team in the metal shop. There will be a few changes made to the room and the Fire Marshall has approved use of the room.

- Internet Access In the Schools

Dr. Graner voiced that the access points are not allowing the chrome books proper connection to the internet. The IT Department is currently working on it. It has become a real problem.

Councilor Flax questioned what was prohibited or allowed for the students to view on the internet. He stated there needs to be a general rule.

Dr. Graner stated that it has been problematic. He will need to find more out about the filters and report back to the Council. He also stated that it is hard to keep up with the filters for the internet use.

- Interim Use of the Merritt House

Dr. Graner stated that it was discussed possibly to use the Merritt House for the Vocation

program. At this time they are trying to get costs under control and not sure if this will be something they will try to move forward with.

Mayor Schmidt stated that she was happy the Board of Education and Town Council are working together.

Board of Education Chair Kim Watson confirmed the next joint meeting on January 19th at 6:00 p.m.

4. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:34 p.m.