Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes - Draft

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Town Clerk 860-441-6640
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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 22, 2013 | **6:00 PM** | **Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

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

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

3. Calendar and Communications

- *Presentation by Groton Animal Foundation*

No one from the Groton Animal Foundation was present.

4. Approval of Minutes

2013-0236 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 September 24, 2013 and September 30, 2013 are hereby accepted and approved.

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

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 6 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Morton, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson
Abstain: 1 - Councilor Peruzzotti

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

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

6. NEW BUSINESS

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

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, and URS Consultant Jim Platosh were present to address the Council. Funds were allocated in FYE 2012 to look at replacement or rehabilitation of the bridge, which provides the only access into that area of the Town. At this point, no load limit has been placed on the bridge. The consultant looked at the structure and conducted two listening sessions with residents before identifying alternatives.

Mr. Platosh reviewed a PowerPoint presentation. He provided an overview of the public

participation part of the project. Areas of concern identified were the bridge, the causeway, and informing the public about the project. Specific concerns raised were classified as boater concerns, bridge user concerns, environmental concerns, and timing of the project. Mr. Platosh noted the study objectives.

The bridge was built in 1935 and has substandard rope guide rails, overhead utilities that serve Groton Long Point, and an underground feed to Fishers Island as well as a sanitary sewer force that crosses the bridge. The state conducted a bridge safety inspection in September 2012 and issued a detailed report where the rated the overall condition of the bridge, the deck, and the superstructure as poor. Hurricane Sandy on October 29, 2012 resulted in no damage to the bridge, but there was erosion of the causeway and wave action overtopped the roadway.

Rehabilitation alternatives were developed with consideration given to construction staging, durability, economics, pedestrian traffic, and reuse of structural elements. It was deemed impractical and uneconomical to rehabilitate the existing superstructure. Mr. Platosh reviewed details of the alternatives and showed renderings from aerial, roadway, and boater viewpoints. The consultant did not seek public input on what the bridge should look like. The aesthetics and vertical clearance are design elements that must be decided on during the design phase.

Bridge only costs (not including the causeway) range from $1.7 million to $5.4+ million. Causeway rehabilitation alternatives are stone armoring of the existing stone ($500,000) or installation of a pile supported retaining wall ($1 million).

Mr. Platosh reviewed preliminary engineering plans that were used for costing and provided an overview of the stages of bridge construction designed to maintain vehicular, pedestrian, and marine traffic flow. How to deal with pedestrians is a fundamental decision that affects costs. The construction schedule is driven by the permitting process and restrictions, but Mr. Platosh anticipates a two season project.

Mr. Platosh complimented the Town on being proactive in addressing the bridge and not waiting until it is a crisis.

In response to Councilor Flax, Mr. Platosh stated that based on the bridge classification, the project is eligible for federal funding and the consultant has identified some programs for the Town. Councilor Flax expressed concern with alternating one way traffic flow during the summer. Mr. Platosh suggested that the Town could build a temporary bridge next to the old bridge which would speed up the project, but it would be costly and require additional environmental permitting. Much of the work is temperature sensitive and it adds substantial cost to work in the winter.

In response to Councilor Watson, Mr. Platosh stated that Palmer's Cove Marina was approached about the project and the owner was clear about his concerns with vertical clearance. Mr. Schneider explained that to get a higher vertical clearance, the roadway approaching the bridge would have to be regarded which may affect existing properties. There must also be additional discussion about utilities, lighting, and pedestrian access.

The Council thanked Mr. Platosh for his report.

2013-0250 Noank School - Community Garden Proposal

Discussed

Timothy McDowell, Robert Palm, Clint Wright, Eric Larson, and John Knaff were present to address the Council. Mr. Palm reviewed a presentation that he prepared for the Council about a potential reuse of the Noank School site. During the Noank School Reuse Task Force proceedings, there was strong public sentiment that the 6.3 acres of the Noank School be preserved as a public

resource. Although there was a presumption that the building would be demolished and the land left as open space, there was no specific vision for the property. The Groton area is rich with protected open space and this site is dominated by the building and paving. As gardeners, Mr. Palm and his associates see an opportunity for a community garden.

The group envisions starting with a community vegetable garden, and expanding to an orchard, beehives, and a memorial garden. They would like authorization from the Council to bring the ideas to fruition. Mr. Larson will offer his expertise in strategic planning and many residents have responded to the idea positively.

Mr. Palm asked for a period of time to put the plans into action. He has talked to food banks and the senior center about donating food. The group's timeline is based on the season. They would like to harrow and disc the east field in November with assistance from Public Works. The group's efforts would be documented on video. In the spring, the orchard area would be marked out and the yew hedge would be trimmed. The group would provide a detailed plan to the Town Council at the end of winter.

Mr. McDowell noted that the plan includes an educational component with respect to sustainability, food production, health, etc. Mr. McDowell reviewed a slide show that addressed potential uses for the building, the portion of the building that would be demolished, and reuse of the brick in other elements such as walkways, landscaping, and a farm market stand. Mr. McDowell reviewed specific area of the property noting various uses including a barn, public event space, beekeeping, a sledding slope, plant processing, lease community garden plots, education classes, and a wetland pond and bridge. Mr. McDowell reviewed an overall layout rendering of the site.

Mr. Palm discussed a potential partnership with Fitch High School to teach kids about healthy eating and organic processes.

Mr. Wright suggested there is an evolving problem with food in this country. He feels that residents have a moral obligation to feed the Town of Groton and they can have fun doing it.

Mr. McDowell distributed copies of the presentation.

Councilor Flax noted that an issue with the Noank Fire District plan for the property was cost. He asked how the group would pay for demolition of the building or portions of it. Mr. Wright stated the gymnasium area would be mothballed the group is established. Other ideas include using the space as a storm shelter, conference center, and community space and heating it with leased solar panels. The group would like to keep the building in place for five years.

Mr. Palm reiterated that he is asking for the winter to answer some of these questions. The group would like to start with the community garden and orchard. The plan has not been formally reviewed with Noank, only mentioned in informal conversations. Mr. Larson stated he will be developing a time line and identifying required resources and funding considerations.

Councilors were supportive of the concept. Mayor Somers reminded the group that it is Town property and the Town Council has no intention to sell the property. She expressed support for the proposal and cited the benefits of community gardens.

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Watson, to give Mr. Palm six months to come back to the Town Council with a more formal plan for reuse of the Noank School property as community/public gardens.

Mr. Palm clarified what needs to be done with respect to plowing and planting rye and winter wheat. The Town Manager recommended that the group not be allowed to start work on the project before developing the details so as not to subject the Council or the group to criticism. There may also be

unknown Noank zoning implications. Councilor Peruzzotti clarified that her motion supports developing a plan only, and not beginning any work.

The motion carried unanimously

2013-0249 Parking Ticket Fees

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger explained that the Town's parking ticket fees, which are set by ordinance at $10, have not changed for many years. The Town would like to raise the fees and amend the ordinance in such a way that future fee changes do not require amending the ordinance. The Town Manager distributed a referral memo from the Chief of Police.

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

Councilor Antipas noted in the budget that parking tickets are not a big source of revenue for the Town. The Town Manager explained that higher fees may act as more of a deterrent for people who choose to park illegally. Councilor Flax feels that parking tickets are not a high priority for the Police Department so there is no need to raise the fees unless there is a concerted effort to write tickets. The Town Manager noted that the Town is trying to be user-friendly in Mystic as much as possible. People are consciously parking illegally knowing they only have to pay $10. Raising fees is not designed to raise revenue, but to encourage appropriate behavior without escalating to towing vehicles. Councilor Morton noted that No Parking areas are designated for safety reasons and the fines should be a deterrent; $10 is unreasonably low. Councilor Streeter noted that parking tickets are also issued for other violations and he was supportive of the increase. Councilor Antipas expressed support for amending the ordinance in such a way that the amount can be changed, but he does not support raising the fee because people will feel they are being hickel and dimed."

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 6 - Councilor Morton, Mayor Somers, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson
Opposed: 2 - Councilor Flax and Councilor Antipas

2013-0207 Registrars of Voters Compensation

Discussed

Councilors received registrar compensation information from other municipalities. Councilor Morton noted that the Groton registrars received about $30.00 per hour, which is significantly higher than other towns. Councilor Schmidt noted the position has a great deal of responsibility and the registrars receive no benefits. Discussion followed on the hourly rate of pay and asking the registrars to come before the Council to discuss compensation. Councilor Morton noted that the registrars chose 3% for their raise despite what other Town employees received for increases. She recommended freezing their wages for the current fiscal year and discussing compensation during the upcoming budget deliberations.

A motion was made by Councilor Morton, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to freeze the registrars' wages at the FYE 2013 rate. Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the Council talk to the registrars before taking action and he noted that an increase was already provided for July, August, and September. The motion and second were withdrawn. The Mayor asked that the registrars come to a future meeting for a discussion.

2007-0200 USS Groton Sail

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger recently spoke with the commander of the USS Nautilus about the USS Groton sail. There have been previous discussions about procuring the sail of the USS Groton and bringing to Groton. The submarine is currently on the west coast and is in the queue to be dismantled in 2014 or 2015. If the Town has any interest in bringing the sail back, the Council

should start thinking about it sooner rather than later. The Town Manager had hoped to have more information for this meeting, but the government shutdown stopped the flow of information. The first step would be to notify the Navy of the Town's interest. There may be the possibility of waiving the cost of cutting the sail, but transportation is the big cost. Options include looking for trucking companies that may be willing to subsidize the cost and conducting a fundraising campaign. The Town would also have to identify a location for the sail. Councilor Streeter suggested that the Town get more information on the cost and level of interest. This is a significant piece of history that should be considered for the community. Councilors Watson and Streeter indicated their willingness to work on the effort.

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

2013-0089 Plan to Reduce the Number of Voting Districts

Recommended for Deletion

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Councilor Schmidt cautioned viewers about a Medicare scam going around.

Councilor Antipas noted there is a municipal election on November 5th.

The Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce has rescheduled the Military Appreciation Breakfast to November 5th.

Councilor Streeter noted the Fitch Class of 1963 recently had its 50th reunion and the class decided to dedicate a plaque in memory of two members of the Class of 1963 who lost their lives in Vietnam. The simple ceremony has mushroomed into a bigger event that will include the Fitch choir, a color guard, the family members of those being memorialized, and a reading of the names of everyone from the area who lost their lives in Vietnam. The event will be held on Friday, November 8th at 1:30 p.m. at Fitch High School

The Town Manager provided an update on his efforts to schedule a meeting with the Zoning Commission and his communications with Chairperson Sue Sutherland. The Council stated that they want to meet with the Zoning Commission in November.

The Town Manager offered potential dates for the police study consultant to present the draft report to the Council. There will be no charge for the meeting. Although Councilor Antipas will be unavailable, the consensus was to hold the meeting on Thursday, November 7th.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Watson, to adjourn the meeting at 8:37 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.