



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, November 10, 2015

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Schmidt called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

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

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

3. Calendar and Communications

Town Manager Oefinger noted that Town offices will be closed tomorrow, Veterans Day.

4. Approval of Minutes - None

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2015-0218 Board of Education Teachers Contract Negotiations

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Attorney Floyd Dugas, Board of Education Counsel; Susan Austin, Assistant Superintendent; Mary Kelly, Board of Education; and Laurie Lepine, Director of Human Resources were present to address the Council. Mr. Dugas distributed settlement information for the teachers' contract, which is negotiated one year ahead of time. The contract period is 9/1/16 to 8/31/19 and includes increases of 1.75%, 1.5% and 1.62% each year with step movements of 1.51%, 1.53%, and 1.59% respectively. Steps are 3%, but not everyone receives it. The contract eliminates the current PPO plan and transitions to a high deductible health plan with an HSA. 50% of the deductible will be covered by the Board of Education. The employee cost share is 16%, 17%, and 18%. The Board will continue to evaluate the state's health program. The contract includes a reopener in the event the Cadillac Tax is triggered. Mr. Dugas reviewed other minor language changes and provided information on teacher contract settlements in 2015. Groton's settlement is in line with other negotiated contracts with a total increase of 9.5% compared to the state average of 9.6%. The estimated savings from the HDHP/HSA is approximately \$1,000,000, which will pay for the first year of the contract. The contract becomes binding after 30 days from filing with the Town Clerk if not rejected by the Town Council.

Councilor Frink questioned the increases in light of the fiscal situation. He suggested that the next Council require that salary increases be absorbed in other areas of the Board of Education budget to result in a zero increase.

Mr. Dugas noted that the binding interest arbitration system requires that contracts be settled. Binding arbitration considers cost of living and trends in contracts. In response to Councilor Granatosky, Mr. Dugas noted that the Board reviews the state health plan once a year in the

spring.

Councilor Flax asked about teacher effectiveness. Mr. Dugas explained that effectiveness is addressed in evaluations, not the contract. Discussion followed on teachers' involvement in curriculum development, collaboration with other towns, steps, and retirement incentives. Ms. Lepine noted that 20 to 30 teachers retire each year.

Councilor Antipas praised the Board of Education for keeping the Town's interests in mind during negotiations.

Mayor Schmidt thanked the Board of Education for its efforts.

By consensus, the Town Council chose to take no action on the contract.

2014-0167

Airport Development Zone

Discussed

Economic/Community Development Manager Paige Bronk and Economic Development Coordinator Kristin Clarke were present to address the Council.

Mr. Bronk noted that the Airport Development Zone (ADZ) has been discussed for a couple of years. The topic of incentives is very important from an economic development standpoint. Groton is fortunate to have an airport and market analysis indicates it is important to move forward with incentive programs that match resources.

Ms. Clarke noted that staff is finalizing the application to be submitted to DECD. There is no longer a need to go through the Connecticut Airport Authority. Ms. Clarke described what an Airport Development Zone is and the incentive that can be offered to businesses within the zone. The zone includes properties within a two mile radius from the airport. Economic benefits do not supersede local land use regulations. The application will be submitted with a map and an analysis of expected economic benefits. Costs will be evaluated by DECD and if the results are positive, the application will be approved within 90 days.

In the spring, there was an attempt to introduce legislation to shift the boundaries of the zone, but it didn't make it out of committee. Another attempt will be made once the zone is approved.

Town Manager Oefinger explained the history of attempts to get water and sewer on Flanders Road and ultimately north of I-95.

Councilor Flax questioned the incentives associated with the ADZ. Ms. Clarke explained that most of the tax burden is borne by the municipality, but there is some benefit provided by the state. She described the program and noted that the exemption is based on the differential between existing and improved values.

Discussion followed on metrics to determine the level of success for incentives. Mr. Bronk noted that staff has discussed a survey mechanism to gauge existing business needs and to engage new businesses. Some inquiries have been received, but the zone is not in place yet. Discussion followed on the programs for which Electric Boat and Doncasters qualify. The ADZ provides incentives for a broader range of businesses than the Enterprise Zone.

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

It was noted that the ADZ's two mile radius from the airport is established by Connecticut General Statutes

The motion carried unanimously

2015-0270 Acceptance of Open Space in the Mystic Weigh Resubdivision**Discussed**

The Mystic Weigh Resubdivision was approved in 2004. The roads were recently finished and are ready for acceptance along with the open space that fronts on Noank-Ledyard Road.

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

Discussion followed on Town maintenance responsibilities and the desirability of the open space because it encompasses portions of Eccleston Brook.

The motion carried unanimously

2015-0271 Acceptance of Ensign Drive and Mariners Lane in the Mystic Weigh Resubdivision

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

Staff has certified that the development has been built according to the approved plans. Town Manager Oefinger recommended acceptance.

The motion carried unanimously

2015-0219 FYE 2017 Budget Discussion**Discussed**

Councilor Frink reviewed his previously submitted suggestions for the FYE 2017 budget and he suggested that some of the items could be accomplished now. Discussion turned to the difficulty in estimating revenues during budget preparation. Councilor Flax asked about syncing the Town's fiscal year with the State's and noted it would require Charter revision. Town Manager Oefinger explained that the Town's fiscal year would have to be a calendar year to be sure that revenue information is available from the state in time for budget preparation. Other impacts on revenue are Federal Impact Aid, which is not known for more than a year, and unpredictable state rescissions. The Town is already looking at ways to cut back to address revenue shortfalls in the current fiscal year, however Town operations represents only one-third of the budget and it cannot make up the total shortfall. The discussion must also take place with the Board of Education. The Town has historically been very conservative in estimating the budget and has been criticized for it.

A motion was made by Councilor Moravsik, seconded by Councilor Frink, to request that the new Town Council set FYE 2017 budget guidelines for the Town Manager as it sees fit.

Discussion followed on establishing guidelines and providing them to the Board of Education earlier rather during the budget process. The Town Manager noted that he receives input from the Town Council every day. A percentage decrease is not helpful. The type of input that would be more helpful would be for the Council to identify services to stop or to increase. The budget increase is not the issue, but the impact on the mill rate. The Town Manager noted the continuing increase in local funding of the budget.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 2 - Councilor Frink and Councilor Moravsik
Opposed: 6 - Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Antipas, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Flax, Councilor Watson and Granatosky

2015-0232 Sale of William Seely School Property**Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger explained that following the public hearing on the sale of the William Seely property and the special meeting with nearby residents, the next step is to send the referral to the RTM if approved by the Council.

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

necessary to develop the property commercially. Councilor Antipas suggested that the Council adopt a long term strategy for handling vacant properties.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 7 - Councilor Antipas, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Flax, Councilor Frink, Councilor Moravsik, Councilor Watson and Granatosky
Opposed: 1 - Mayor Schmidt

2015-0188 Distribution of PILOT Funds for State Owned Property

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

See discussion under #2015-0201 PILOT Funds for State and Town Owned Property - Methodology and Future Distributions in 11/10/15 Committee of the Whole minutes.

2015-0201 PILOT Funds for State and Town Owned Property - Methodology and Future Distributions

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Councilor Moravsik noted that his previous motion was distributed to Councilors for their review. Councilor Moravsik explained that the purpose of his proposal is to assist the Poquonnock Bridge Fire District (Pbfd) with financial aid, noting that he believes Poquonnock Bridge should receive a share of the PILOT that is more favorable for them. He explained the background of his proposal.

A motion was made by Councilor Moravsik, seconded by Councilor de la Cruz, to allocate to the fire districts 50% of the estimated PILOT funds to be received in the fiscal year.

Councilor Antipas explained how he calculated the breakdown based on current percentages, and the impact that the increase would have on the Pbfd mill rate (less than half a mill). The mill rate of the Town versus the fire districts is not a 50/50 split, so Councilor Antipas would want to explore the breakdown further to determine what is fair. Councilor Granatosky feels that it is fair to provide a greater percentage to the fire districts.

The Town Manager questions why any funds are distributed to the fire districts since they have taxing ability. The PILOT program is between the state and municipalities, not subdivisions and fire districts. He feels that the Town has been overly generous. The Town Council must recognize that if more money is provided to certain entities, then there will be consequences. Also, there are different levels of fire protection services provided to tax exempt properties (Bluff Point versus Avery Point, for example). The Town Manager could not justify giving 50% of PILOT to fire districts because fire protection services are much smaller in proportion to the other services provided by the Town. However, the Town Manager noted this is purely a policy discussion and decision. Discussion followed on the proposal.

A motion was made by Councilor Frink, seconded by Council Flax, to move the question.

The motion carried unanimously.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 4 - Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Frink, Councilor Moravsik and Granatosky
Opposed: 4 - Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax and Councilor Watson

2015-0194 Groton Utilities - Taxation without Representation?

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

Councilor Watson noted that after receipt of the information from the Town Attorney, he would support deleting this referral by consensus. All Councilors agreed.

2015-0073 Fitch Middle School Reuse Plan - Update

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted receipt of a number of proposals by Councilor Granatosky for reuse of Fitch Middle School, some of which the Town is already considering. Because the current Council does not see a way forward to use Fitch Middle School for a consolidated Town Hall, staff hopes to bring a proposal to the new Council in January with some options that will provide for

some use of the building. The Fitch Robotics program will be going to Fitch High School. The Town still needs a solution for groups using William Seely for storage. Councilor Frink suggested that the Council explore the sale option and determine the market value of the property. Councilor Granatosky suggested a piecemeal plan to rehabilitate the school.

2015-0264 Dime Bank Foundation Grant

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

The motion carried unanimously

2015-0272 Groton Housing Authority Redevelopment Plan

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger has had a series of discussions with representatives from the Groton Housing Authority about their current arrangement with the Town (10% of rents in exchange for the Town paying their sewer use charges). The Authority feels the need to increase the rents and they have a desire to improve and upgrade the units. Similar housing developments receive tax abatements, but the Authority doesn't pay taxes because they are part of the Town. The intent of a revised arrangement would be to free up funds so the Authority can get a mortgage to do remaining work at their complexes.

2014-0202 City Highway Budget Committee - Update

A motion was made by Councilor Frink, seconded by Councilor Antipas, to enter executive session at 8:30 p.m. to discuss #2014-0202 City Highway Budget Committee - Update and to invite the Town Manager to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 9:10 p.m.

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

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.