



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, Genevieve Cerf, Joe de la Cruz, Bruce S. Flax, Bob Frink, Rich Moravsik, Deborah L. Peruzzotti and Harry A. Watson

Monday, November 24, 2014

5:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 2

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:07 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Frink, Councilor Moravsik and Councilor Watson

Members Absent: Councilor Cerf, Councilor de la Cruz and Councilor Peruzzotti

(The Committee of the Whole met with the Board of Education on a number of items before continuing with the agenda.)

5. NEW BUSINESS

2014-0009 Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2014 Standing Referral)

Discussed

Board of Education members present were Rita Volkmann, Kim Watson, Mary Kelly, Andrea Ackerman, Beth Gianacoplos, Pat Doyle, and Katrina Fitzgerald.

See discussion in November 24, 2014 Committee of the Whole minutes under 2014-0312 School Facilities Initiative Update; 2014-0257 FYE 2016 Budget Discussion; and 2014-0012 Meeting with State Legislators (2014 Standing Referral).

2014-0312 School Facilities Initiative Update

Discussed

Superintendent of Schools Mike Graner provided an overview of where the School Facilities Initiative Task Force (SFITF) discussions stand. Dr. Graner views this plan as a restructuring of the district for the next 30 to 40 years that will create effective, equitable, and efficient schools. There are currently 422 students attending schools outside the district at a cost of \$2.4 million. The plan calls for a single middle school, which would address racial imbalance, and creation of elementary magnet schools that are reimbursed at a higher rate by the state. The plan would consolidate 10 schools into eight.

Dr. Graner showed a plan with a consolidated, three-story middle school of approximately 900 students on the Merritt property. There would be a pedestrian link to the high school. The plan includes four fields. The consultant has talked about having a small auditorium that could be split into two lecture halls providing synchrony with the high school. The fit of the school on the Merritt property is based on educational specifications.

Councilor Peruzzotti arrived at 5:20 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Frink, Councilor Moravsik, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson

Members Absent: Councilor Cerf and Councilor de la Cruz

Discussed

Dr. Graner surveyed middle school populations and noted those towns with middle schools close

to or over 900 students. If the school is programmed properly (in clusters), the larger population is not problematic.

Councilor de la Cruz arrived at 5:23 p.m.

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

Discussed

Dr. Graner explained that in order to use the Merritt property, the Town would have to offer up property of equal or greater value for open space.

The second part of the plan is renovating Cutler and West Side middle schools as magnet elementary schools, which would eliminate the need for redistricting. The third part of the plan would be the closure of Claude Chester, Pleasant Valley, and S. B. Butler elementary schools.

Discussion followed on posting Frequently Asked Questions about the project on line for the public and involving members of the community in the process. The Town Manager noted that the next SFITF meeting will be held on December 11th at 6:30 p.m. at the Town Hall Annex and the intent was to invite all stakeholders for a more in-depth discussion so that everyone can get on the same page.

2014-0257

FYE 2016 Budget Discussion

Discussed

Dr. Graner stated he is in the initial phase of running the personnel salaries. Budget drivers are salaries and health insurance. Under the Affordable Care Act, anyone who works for 30 hours or more is eligible for health insurance, including substitute teachers and employees who work for both the Board and the Town. Dr. Graner is working with the principals on supply budgets and will be talking to the Board about personnel adjustments. The Board should have the Anthem BC/BS projection in the next few weeks.

Councilor Peruzzotti stated her concern with the \$1.7 million shortfall from last year that had to be filled. Dr. Graner stated the shortfall was the result of a structural problem and there are currently no structural problems that need to be addressed. Councilor Peruzzotti suggested that the Minimum Budget Requirement pigeon-holes the Town Council. She suggested that the Board hold the budget line moving forward if there is going to be a referendum.

The Town Manager questioned the status of the administrators' contract and Dr. Graner indicated it has not yet been ratified by the bargaining unit.

The Town Manager then noted that everything has been identified as a priority by the Board in the FYE 2016 Capital Improvement Program. The vast majority of the money (\$2.4 million) is proposed for studies. He cautioned the Board that they run the risk of not getting any funding if true priorities are not identified.

Board member Volkmann asked about the possibility of establishing a fund for excess education dollars rather than turning them over to the Town. Dr. Graner noted that in Ledyard, there is a capital non-recurring fund earmarked for the Board, but they must seek permission from the Town Council to access the funds.

Board member Hoyt arrived at 5:50 p.m.

Dr. Graner noted that school budgets are volatile with respect to special education funding, so it is unknown at this time what the fund balance will be at the end of the fiscal year. Dr. Graner reviewed state impact aid issues.

Board member Kelly stated that even schools that are identified for closure need some investment. Town Manager Oefinger explained that his concern is that the Board's CIP requests are not defensible and the proposed work program is not manageable. Board member Hoyt stated that the Finance Committee's rationale was that the Board needs to put forward all of the work that needs to be done so that the public knows the extent of the work.

Discussion followed on the anticipated unexpended fund balance and the Superintendent's spend plan."

2014-0012 Meeting with State Legislators (2014 Standing Referral)

Discussed

Discussion followed on having a joint meeting of the Board of Education and Town Council with state legislators. The consensus was to identify a date in January.

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2014-0325 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 meeting of November 12, 2014 are hereby accepted and approved.

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

The motion carried unanimously

5. NEW BUSINESS - Continued

2014-0328 LEARN Lease of Fitch Middle School - Update

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger stated this item is on the agenda to have a discussion about where LEARN stands on the lease of Fitch Middle School.

Councilor Cerf arrived at 6:12 p.m.

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

Discussed

Eileen Howley of LEARN described how the situation has evolved. She is worried about LEARN's end game and not having a solid plan for relocating to New London due to recent developments there. LEARN prefers to go back to the drawing board to look at other options. A 1 ½ to 2 year lease will no longer meet LEARN's needs because they need a longer term interim or permanent solution. Ms. Howley expressed her desire to maintain a positive working relationship with Groton.

The Town Manager noted that the soonest a referendum could be held on Fitch Middle School would be November 2015, but practically, November 2016 is more likely. Under that scenario, LEARN would need to be out of the school by July/August 2017. It is anticipated the Town will have more information from the architect and LEARN will have more information on the New London situation in about a month so he suggested that LEARN return to the Town Council in two months for further discussions. The Council concurred.

2014-0258 Grove Avenue Subdivision/Mardie Lane - Update

A motion was made by Councilor Moravsik, seconded by Councilor de la Cruz, to enter executive

session at 6:25 p.m. to discuss #2014-0258 Grove Avenue Subdivision/Mardie Lane - Update, and to invite Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Town Attorney Mike Carey to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

The executive session ended at 7:07 p.m.

2014-0202 City Highway Budget Committee - Update

A motion was made by Councilor Moravsik, seconded by Councilor de la Cruz, to enter executive session at 7:08 p.m. to discuss #2014-0202 City Highway Budget Committee - Update, and to invite Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Town Attorney Matt Auger to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session ended at 7:50 p.m.

2014-0286 Implementation of Police Study Recommendations

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger received an e-mail from Tom Wilson of PERF. Mr. Wilson is willing to come back to Groton to make another presentation on the police study, but he is having difficulty finding a time. The estimated cost for Mr. Wilson's visit is \$3,600 and the only time he has available before the end of the year is December 22nd and 23rd. Discussion followed on the timing of the presentation relative to hiring a new police chief. Councilor Flax suggested another meeting with the City and Groton Long Point prior to the presentation. The consensus of the Council was to meet with the City and Groton Long Point in December, and Tom Wilson in January.

2014-0327 Noank School Demolition

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, explained that there were many bidders for the Noank School demolition project, but the bids were higher than what was budgeted. The project consists of installation of reconstruction fencing, asbestos abatement, removal of trees and brush, removal of concrete and parking near the building, removal of the underground fuel tank, and backfill of the site. The contractor will have three months to complete the project. Salvageable items will be separated and materials will be disposed of at appropriate sites. The Town Council and RTM approved \$480,000 in FYE 2015. Mr. Schneider described how the demolition cost estimate was originally determined. The current low bidder came in at \$539,000. If the Council approves a supplemental appropriation, Mr. Schneider will seek a formal extension of the bid. If the supplemental appropriation is not approved, the project will be put in the FYE 2016 CIP for Town Council and RTM consideration.

Discussion followed on the difficulties involved in salvaging a portion of the building and the fact that it would cost more than demolition. It was also noted that the cost of asbestos abatement will likely escalate.

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

A motion to amend the motion to appropriate \$60,000 instead of \$125,000 was made by Councilor Cerf. There was no second.

Mr. Schneider explained the need for the extra funding for contingency and abatement monitoring.

Councilor Watson suggested that Councilors attend the RTM meeting to support the supplemental appropriation.

Councilor Cerf voiced her objection to the motion because she feels that the Town should appropriate a lesser amount for the project.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 8 - Mayor Schmidt, Councilor Antipas, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Flax, Councilor Frink, Councilor Moravsik, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson
Opposed: 1 - Councilor Cerf

2014-0326 Transfer of Funds for Land Use Regulatory Review and Market Analysis and Review

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that responses to the Request for Qualifications are due on December 8th. This request will save time and make sure that the funds are available once a consultant is selected. Options are to transfer the entire amount (\$200,000) or only the funds for the two studies (\$125,000).

The Charter states that transfers can only occur in the fourth quarter, but this funding was specifically established to be transferred to other departments as projects are identified. The Town Manager will review the issue with the Town Attorney.

Councilor Frink expressed concern with similarities between the market analysis and the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). The Town Manager explained that the POCD describes what the Town should look like and the market analysis identifies markets for available resources (opportunity areas identified and not yet identified).

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to transfer \$200,000 from Legislative to Planning and Development Services.

Discussion followed on the estimated cost of the two studies, which is \$125,000. The motion and second were withdrawn. The consensus of the Committee was to transfer only \$125,000.

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

The motion carried unanimously

6. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Antipas, to adjourn the meeting at 8:32 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.