



Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Heather Sherman Bond, Kathryn M. Brown-Tracy, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter

Tuesday, November 25, 2008

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter
Members Absent: Councilor Bond and Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. Calendar and Communications

Councilor Sheets distributed copies of an e-mail from Frank Jannarone and a letter from Maggie Jones of the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center, regarding trails on the Mortimer Wright Preserve property. Both communications expressed support for the trail development.

4. Approval of Minutes

2008-0290 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, 2008 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. NEW BUSINESS

2008-0009 Legislative Policy (2008 Standing Referral)

Discussed

Representative Edward Moukawsher, Representative Elissa Wright, and State Senator Andy Maynard were present to address the Council.

Representative Moukawsher distributed information on exempt properties on the Town's Grand List, noting that the tax base of the Town has been eroded over the years by tax exemptions. Many tax exemptions were enacted to benefit certain uses and Representative Moukawsher feels that that legislature should look at restricting the amount of tax exempt property. Non-profits, for example, pay salaries, utilities, and everything but taxes. Decreasing exemptions could potentially eliminate state PILOT programs. It was noted that with decreased exemptions, the mill rate would be set by the towns on much larger grand lists. Discussion followed on the Pequot funds and Education Cost Sharing funds.

Representative Wright noted a swift and dramatic revenue collapse at the state level. Legislators attended a special session yesterday to attempt to mitigate the projected deficit.

Senator Maynard noted that as of yesterday, money that has been promised to the towns will not be cut. The governor asked legislators to meet a \$302 million goal. The legislature is expected to meet again before the end of the fiscal year.

Representative Moukawsher will emphasize that the legislature should make a commitment to towns as early as possible. Senator Maynard agreed that protecting towns is a priority, as well as job creation and economic growth. At this point, there has been no discussion of reducing state services that would impact the Town. The state is looking at significant, new ways of doing business. Senator Maynard noted that he would argue to use rainy day funds before cutting any municipal funding.

Representative Moukawsher added that he would like to see the leadership focus on bare essentials and avoid extraneous bills. He assured the Council that local legislators are sensitive to the property tax burden and are working to relieve it.

Councilor Kolnaski raised the idea of reinstating tolls. Senator Maynard noted that any tolls system would likely be a gateway system with EZ Pass technology, however there are federal hurdles regarding tolls because tolls alter the reimbursement level and would result in lower gas taxes.

It was noted that the governor proposed a ½% increase in income tax when there was a projected surplus.

Councilor Bond arrived at 7:05 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter
Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

Discussed

Mayor Watson questioned the legislators' thoughts on progressive taxes and the millionaire's tax. Representative Moukawsher feels that an income tax is a more equitable way to fund education. Levying higher taxes on higher earners creates instability and he supports equity in taxation. Representative Wright noted that in Connecticut, more revenue is generated by property tax than income and sales tax combined, when those three revenue sources should be more balanced. Discussion followed.

Representative Moukawsher expressed support for enhancing the naval experience locally, but not necessarily through infrastructure. Discussion followed on the BRAC process. Councilor Bond suggested that the legislature prepare a back up plan in case the base is closed including funding.

Senator Maynard solicited suggestions from the Council and stated that he would let the Town Manager know as soon as possible of the legislature's budget intentions.

The Council noted there are regional emergency communications opportunities and asked the legislators to encourage other towns to participate.

The Council took a five minute recess.

2008-0006 Property Acquisition/Sale (2008 Standing Referral)

Discussed

This item was postponed to the end of the meeting.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to enter executive session at 8:05 p.m. to discuss disposition of vacant school properties and to invite the Town Manager to attend. The motion carried unanimously

The executive session concluded at 8:55 p.m.

2008-0247 Budget Guidelines for FYE 2010

Discussed

The next work session is December 6th at 9:00 a.m. The Town Manager expects the Director of Finance to attend to review revenues with the Council.

2008-0293 Supplemental Agreement for Design of Mystic Streetscape Utility Relocation Project

Discussed

The Town Manager explained that the funds identified in the supplemental agreement are not Town dollars, and they are funds that were budgeted in the project.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2008-0291 RTM Reapportionment

Discussed

Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox noted that the number of representatives and the number in each district have remained the same, despite having an additional 3,000 voters.

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

The motion carried unanimously

2008-0289 2009 Prescription for Better Health and Wellness Award Application

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

The motion carried unanimously

2008-0012 Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2008 Standing Referral)

Discussed

The next joint meeting with the Board of Education will be held on December 1st. Additional items for discussion suggested by the Council were: charging for student parking at Fitch High School; the type of field proposed for the Merritt property; and the status of the Liaison Committee.

2008-0122 Joint Meeting with the Stonington Board of Selectmen

Discussed

There will be a joint meeting with the Stonington Board of Selectmen on December 10th. Additional items for discussion suggested by the Council were an update on Stonington's Task Force on Climate Change report and Stonington's budget contributions for shared services.

6. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.