



Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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, December 4, 2012

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

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

2. **ROLL CALL**

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

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

3. **Calendar and Communications**

None.

4. **Approval of Minutes**

2012-0326 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 November 7, 2012 and November 20, 2012 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. **NEW BUSINESS**

2012-0134 Board of Education Contract Negotiations

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to enter executive session at 6:08 p.m. to discuss 2012-0134 Board of Education Contract Negotiations and to invite Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Superintendent of School John Ramos, Board of Education members Rita Volkmann and Bob Peruzzotti, Beth Horler, and Shira Sabo to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 6:56 p.m.

2012-0007 Meeting with State Legislators (2012 Standing Referral)

Discussed

State Senator Andy Maynard and State Representatives Elissa Wright and Ted Moukawsher were present. Topics of discussion were as follows:

Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) - Rep. Moukawsher noted that a report on reformulating the Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) grant is expected and an interest has been expressed in creating special taxing power for Boards of Education. MBR may be overwhelmed by some other educational issues.

Mayor Somers suggested that repealing MBR would give the Town more flexibility in budgeting.

Board of Education budgets have increased at a higher rate than ECS. The Town Manager pointed out MBR results in 60% to 65% of the budget being 'off limits.' MBR changes the dynamics of the budget process and stifles creative thought processes. In addition, the MBR does not address changes in student enrollments or the number of facilities.

Senator Maynard does not believe that eliminating MBR will result in significant savings. Rep. Wright feels that MBR is reasonable for towns where schools are not performing well.

It was noted that if the Board of Education asks for money for a special project, the Town is stuck with the higher budget figure going forward. Senator Maynard acknowledged the possibility of artificially spiking expenses and then not being able to reduce the budget amount.

The Town Manager acknowledged that there is less money available for everyone, so why not repeal the mandates that cost the towns and not the state money.

Rep. Moukawsher agreed that the Town has no budget leverage with the Board of Education under MBR.

It was noted that the per pupil Federal Impact Aid for Category A Students has stayed the same, but costs have gone up so net local expenditure has increased dramatically. The Town Manager suggested that if the Submarine Base is such an asset for the region and state, then perhaps the state should pay more to educate military children. Groton taxpayers are footing a disproportionate amount of the bill.

Other - Mayor Somers suggested legislation that would allow towns that are fiscally responsible to levy their own local taxes. Senator Maynard indicated that he would have no problem proposing such legislation, but there may be many unintended consequences. Mayor Somers also asked for additional funding for tourism, specifically parking.

Mystic Education Center - Councilor Watson asked about the transfer of a portion of the property to DEEP. Senator Maynard explained that state agencies are given first refusal rights on surplus state properties, which is a statutory provision. The Town has first refusal before developers. Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the system needs to be changed because that is a huge deterrent to potential developers trying to do their due diligence. If the state has an asset that may be worth something, there should be a long range plan developed. Discussion followed on the condition of the Mystic Education Center property.

On a different topic, Senator Maynard mentioned that it may be possible to bond for improvements to Noank School for the Noank Fire District.

Department of Agriculture Aquaculture Division Interaction with Shellfish Commission and Noank Hatchery - With respect to the issue of closed shellfish beds, Councilor Watson asked for a meeting at the Noank Hatchery with the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, members of the Shellfish Commission, and the Cooperative. Senator Maynard noted there is a problem in that the people who enforce the regulations also provide the permitting.

Rep. Wright asked the Town to quantify the cost of unfunded mandates and it was noted that Interim Superintendent Ramos is working on it.

Senator Maynard noted that the Race to the Top funds received by the State of Connecticut on its third try were made possible by major reforms in the education system.

Rep. Moukawsher relayed his findings on the case law that addresses racial imbalance, and his communication with the Department of Education and its staff attorney. Rep. Moukawsher feels

that Connecticut's statutes are out of date and what the state is doing is unconstitutional. He would like to submit legislation to address the issue. Rep. Wright and Senator Maynard suggested that the State Board of Education is not mandating redistricting and there are other alternatives such as magnet schools, charter schools, and classroom reconfiguration. Rep. Moukawsher feels that diversity cannot be based just on race.

Significant discussion followed on challenging the racial balancing requirements, perhaps by joining with other towns in the region, and how race is defined in today's society.

The legislative session begins around January 9th. Legislators indicated that they need issues from the Council in December.

A follow up meeting was scheduled for Monday, January 7th at 6:00 p.m.

2012-0321 Reallocation of CIP Funds to Fitch High School Roof Replacement

Not Discussed

6. OTHER ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Not discussed.

7. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor Morton, to adjourn the meeting at 8:29 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.