



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 Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, December 20, 2011

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson

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

3. NEW BUSINESS

2011-0232

Contract Agreement Between the Groton Board of Education and the Association of Groton School Administrators

Discussed

Carolyn Dickey, Business Manager, provided a handout from the Board of Education answering specific questions that were asked by the Council regarding the Contract Agreement between the Groton Board of Education and the Association of Groton School Administrators. Ms. Dickey identified the specific positions covered by the contract. She addressed the cost of arbitration, which would be borne by the Board of Education, and the timeframe. Ms. Dickey offered the cost of the contract to the Town by year and the total cost of longevity. Non-union administrators are not receiving the same benefits as union administrators.

Councilor O'Beirne questioned the service fee cited in the contract for non-union administrators. Ms. Dickey clarified that the provision applies to positions that choose not to be in the union. Discussion followed on positions that either no longer exist or are now covered by other contracts. Kirsten Hoyt, Chairman of the Board of Education, noted there is no union for the central office staff.

Councilor Antipas added up the salaries and arrived at a different figure for total cost than presented by the Board. Ms. Dickey suggested possible reasons including retirements, a school physician position, and longevity payments. Councilor Antipas noted that his question about total cost would include health benefits. Ms. Dickey estimated the cost of benefits for an individual versus a family and noted the total would be a theoretical number. The contract has redesigned co-pays.

Town Attorney Eileen Duggan noted that Board of Education arbitration is a choice between each side's last best offers.

Councilor Flax expressed concern that arbitration may result in a higher cost to the Town. Councilor Johnson asked if alternate health plans were considered. Attorney Duggan noted that this is a highly managed, almost commercial type plan. No Health Savings Account plan was considered.

Councilor O'Beirne asked if arbitrators make comparisons regarding types of administrators and

administrators in similar towns when looking at the salaries. Ms. Duggan stated yes, and noted that they also consider a community's ability to pay. Higher percentage increases are being paid by poorer communities.

Ms. Volkmann noted that Groton's administrator salaries are on the high end when compared to similar districts, but not significantly higher. Ms. Dickey suggested that there has been a paradigm shift with this contract negotiation. Mr. Peruzzotti noted that additional workdays were added with this contract and that should not be taken lightly.

Councilor Flax noted that his quick estimate of the cost differential based on the contract is in the tens of thousands, not a million so he is less concerned.

Ms. Dickey noted that there will be two less administrators with the closure of a middle school.

Mayor Somers noted that she has received comments from the public regarding the levels of these salaries. At this level, professionals should be peer reviewed or at will employees. There is no public support for any raises and the public does not consider this contract a good deal. Mayor Somers suggested that councilors sit in on negotiations in the future.

The Town Manager noted that in the past, the Council has not been made aware when the Board of Education starts negotiations. There should be formal communication from the Board of Education.

Councilor O'Beirne finds the statement that additional workdays for no additional pay is misleading since the additional days are added in the years where there is a salary increase.

Councilor Streeter does not feel that arbitration is the course to take.

Attorney Duggan clarified that the Town Council only reviews contracts for certified professionals. Other contracts are under the scope of the Board of Education only.

A motion was made by Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., seconded by Councilor Antipas, to reject the Contract Agreement between the Groton Board of Education and the Association of Groton School Administrators.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 3 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas and Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.
Opposed: 6 - Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to not reject the Contract Agreement between the Groton Board of Education and the Association of Groton School Administrators.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 6 - Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson
Opposed: 3 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas and Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

Recommended for Deletion

2011-0231

Town Council Orientation

Discussed

- Goal Setting

Town Manager Oefinger reviewed various goal setting processes used in the past. He noted that Town staff has been working with a consultant on performance measures. Although the initiative is not done yet, staff has worked hard to identify meaningful performance measures. The

consultant is familiar with upper management in the Town organization and would be available to facilitate a goal setting session with the Council.

Councilor O'Beirne expressed support for the method used by the last Council. He supports a simple effort looking at broad goals, identifying two to four achievable goals by each Councilor, and deciding on final goals as a group. Councilor Flax agreed with Councilor O'Beirne and supported a Saturday workshop. Councilor Peruzzotti agreed and recommended January 14th. Councilor Streeter agreed and noted that it opened up the lines of communication. Councilor Antipas feels the goals should be "do-able." Mayor Somers noted that her previous experience was different. She does not agree that goals must be accomplished in two years. She cited examples of broad goals and specific identified tasks to accomplish the goals. She feels the Council needs a longer, broader perspective.

Councilor Watson suggested that Councilors forward their ideas to the Town Manager's office staff.

A goal setting session was tentatively scheduled for January 21st at 9:00 a.m. at Town Hall Annex, depending on Councilor O'Beirne's availability.

- Town Attorney Appointment

The Town Council must appoint the Town Attorney within 120 days of the election (November 8th). The Town Manager distributed a handout from the current Town Attorney. Their hourly rate has not changed since 2005, but they would be proposing a modest increase on January 1, 2012. The Town Attorney has indicated that she is available to meet any time, if the Council desires.

Mayor Somers noted that the hourly rate is very good. She asked the Town Manager if he is happy with their service. He stated he is very happy with the firm and he reviewed his history with the firm and the current attorneys. The Town Manager noted that Suisman Shapiro is a large firm with a broad range of expertise and he would strongly recommend their reappointment. He is happy with the billing and the hours being billed.

The Town Manager noted that the Town Attorney recommends the Board of Education attorney based on the recommendation of the Board of Education.

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to appoint Eileen Duggan of Suisman, Shapiro, Wool, Brennan, Gray and Greenberg P.C. as the Town Attorney.

The motion carried unanimously.

4. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Watson, to adjourn the meeting at 7:22 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.