



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Natalie Burfoot Billing, Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Paulann H. Sheets, Thomas J. Skrmetti, and Elissa T. Wright.

Tuesday, February 15, 2005

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting convened at 6:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets, Councilor Skrmetti and Councilor Wright

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent.

3. NEW BUSINESS

2002-0116

Efficiencies in Town Government (Fire Districts, DPW, GLP, and BOE)

Discussed

- Review of Golf Course Study

Notes from the 1/21/05 public meeting were in the hands of the Councilors. John Silsby gave some history beginning with the four-hole original course. After acquisition by the Town, it evolved that golf course operations would be separate from Town of Groton operations, but capital items would be in the Capital Improvement Program. In 2003, the golf course fell in the red by \$120,000.

The mission as stated in 1967 - affordable golf - remains valid and in effect. Golf courses are more competitive today than they were in 1967. Limited leisure time makes customers look to where they can play quick, efficient rounds. The consultants' survey showed a high degree of satisfaction with the course. Mr. Silsby mentioned options for increasing winter play and getting more of both groups and individual players. The Shennecossett Golf Course being open in winter is rare in New England.

Councilor Wright referred to conditions in the open space grant that let the Town purchase Shennecossett in 1967, requiring non-discrimination toward non-residents. She wants the Town to compare the funding covenants with current practices, and the Town Manager stated he would do that.

Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the threshold question is whether or to what extent the course should have to pay for itself, or if it should be considered in some part to be like any other Town recreational service supported by some appropriated funds. Historically, the course has done well in supporting itself. Also, the Town charges the course operations for all kinds of services, amounting to \$100,000 in the past fiscal year. The Town Manager believes it would be best to pull back from some of those charges if the charges by themselves would be likely to unduly influence decisions about the course.

Councilor Billing said that she agrees with some degree of support from the Town of Groton Operating Fund but wants a future report, say in four months, on options for privatizing.

Councilor Bartinik prefers having the course fully integrated into the Town operating budget, so

the course can be regularly evaluated as an economic unit. Town Manager Oefinger noted that integration would mean a joining of parks maintenance and the golf course crew.

Councilor Bond asked about whether there is a formal marketing budget. She was told that there is a line item for marketing and promotion in Shennecosett's budget. Councilor Wright has information on a course that was outsourced. Their fees have doubled and the general public has been largely excluded. Councilor Bartinik would like to start by seeing if we can get more control of the labor costs.

Councilor Skrmetti wants recommendations from the Parks and Recreation Commission. Mr. Skrmetti noted with regret the absence, again, of members of that Commission and added that he does not want to alienate them. Mr. Silsby responded that the golf course and the study have been on the commission's agenda for a long time. Councilor O'Beirne added that ups and downs in the course's budget don't affect taxes in most cases.

One member of the Parks and Recreation Commission, Scott Waring, was present and was recognized. He spoke briefly and stated that it is a golf course, not a social service. With schools taking 2/3rds of residents' taxes, he doesn't want to subsidize anything else.

4. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.