



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

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## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

**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.**

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Tuesday, March 9, 2004

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

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#### REGULAR MEETING

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#### 1. CALL TO ORDER

*Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.*

#### 2. ROLL CALL

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

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

#### 3. Calendar and Communications

*Councilor Bond received numerous communications about the discontinuation of pump out service at Mouse Island. Other Councilors noted receipt of e-mails on the subject. Mayor Watson noted that he just returned from Washington D.C. on a flight from Baltimore into Groton. He requested a referral to the Committee of the Whole to talk about what is going on at the airport. Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright met with the Town Manager, Gary Schneider, Wes Greenleaf, and the Vice President of Fuss & O'Neill who drafted the information for the Phase I Environmental Study of the King property.*

*- Esker Point Beach Waterfront Park/Briefing*

*Director of Public Works Gary Schneider described the proposal for a small parklet off the large Esker Point parking lot behind the Fisherman Restaurant. The estimated cost is \$44,000. The project will provide a stone dust path for pedestrians to access Palmers Cove, a boat launch for small watercraft, and a 19-car parking area as well as a port-o-let, benches, and trees. Public Works and Parks Maintenance will work together to create the park. The Town is requesting a six-month extension for the grant, and if approved, construction will be completed by the end of the summer.*

*Councilor Skrmetti stressed that this work is being done with a grant. Mr. Schneider noted that crews are aware of the need to work expeditiously.*

#### 4. Approval of Minutes

##### 2004-0097 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 of February 3, 2004, February 24, 2004, and March 2, 2004 are hereby accepted and approved.

**A motion was made by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., seconded by Councilor Skrmetti, to adopt.**

**The motion carried unanimously.**

#### 5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

## 6. NEW BUSINESS

### 2004-0016 Pleasant Valley Road South Reconstruction - Update

#### Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted this project was approved by the voters a few years ago, and calls for the complete reconstruction of Pleasant Valley Road South. The southern portion of Pleasant Valley Road South from Walker Hill Road to Route 12 will not be reconstructed. Mayor Watson stated that he has spoken with the principal at Pleasant Valley School who noted that they bus children from less than a mile away because of safety concerns with this road.

Greg Hanover, Town Engineer, stated this is a 4100 linear foot road that has been identified in the pavement management system as one of the worst roads in Town. The voters approved a reconstruction project in 2001. The final design is for a 28' wide road with a 10' wide multi-purpose path on the west side of the road.

Gary Fontanella from Tectonic Engineering further explained that there will be a 6' wide grass berm area between the path and pavement. The Town will maintain a 50' to 60' right-of-way. Mr. Fontanella noted details of the project including a closed drainage system, retaining walls, and use of a traffic-calming device (mid-block divider) in the area of the school. Walker Hill Road will be improved from Pleasant Valley Road South to Route 12, including a right-turn only lane and signal improvements. The project also includes improvements to the school parking lot that will separate bus traffic from parking and provide 77 parking spaces plus an additional 6 handicapped spaces. The project will impact two wetlands areas, which will require a wetlands permit. The Town will have to acquire some property and permanent drainage easements for the project. The estimated construction cost is \$2.23 million, not counting acquisitions and utility relocation. It is anticipated that the project will be completed next year. Mr. Fontanella described the drainage system and discharge points in more detail. He noted that construction in the area of the school would be done in the summer.

Councilor Sheets asked if the project is driven by the fact that the school is located on the road. She noted that there are plans to close the school within ten years. Mr. Hanover stated that the project is driven by the condition of the road and existing drainage problems. The road also serves residences and commercial establishments.

Mr. Fontanella estimated utility relocation costs at approximately \$200,000, and Mr. Hanover estimated right-of-way acquisition costs of approximately \$10,000. There are also engineering costs in addition to the construction cost.

### 2004-0098 Public Hearing Date on FYE 2005 Proposed Budget

#### PUBLIC HEARING DATE ON FYE 2005 PROPOSED BUDGET

A motion was made by Councilor Skrmetti, seconded by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., to recommend a resolution scheduling the public hearing on the FYE 2005 Proposed Budget for Monday, March 29 at 7:00 p.m., at the Senior Center.

The motion carried unanimously.

#### Discussed

- Budget Review Schedule

The Town Manager expects to deliver the budget to the Council at the special meeting of the Committee of the Whole on March 16th, and to provide a brief overview of the document. The Town Manager and Council reviewed potential meeting dates for budget reviews and work sessions. The Council must act on the budget no later than April 29th.

*Councilor Skrmetti suggested that three meetings be held with the Board of Education, and Councilor Sheets supported meeting with them earlier, rather than later.*

*It was decided that the Town Manager would provide a budget overview for the Council on March 24th; if the Board of Education is available that evening, the Council would also like an overview of their budget. Saturday work sessions were scheduled for April 17th and tentatively April 24th. The Town Manager polled the Council on their availability to meet on other dates.*

*Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox cautioned the Council to approve the budget well before the April 29th date since the RTM has set a tentative public hearing date the following Monday, May 3rd.*

**2003-0288 Town Council Goal Setting**

**Discussed**

*Mayor Watson received a number of goals from Councilors that were compiled by staff. Mayor Watson expressed support for Councilor Bond's suggestion that the Council come up with a set of doable goals that are short, to the point, and obtainable. Councilors discussed the need to review the goals, eliminate those that the Town Council is already working on, streamline and prioritize them. The consensus of the Committee was to work on goals after the budget process is finished.*

**2004-0096 Future Polling Locations**

**Discussed**

*Alan Palmer and Vicki Rossman, Registrars of Voters, noted a number of concerns with the proposal to stop using the schools for elections. They do not feel it is appropriate to change the polling place before the largest election the Town faces. Mr. Palmer noted that the change would displace about 48% of registered voters. To try to notify everyone before the election would be difficult and would result in reduced voter turnout. The biggest question is where elections could be held.*

*Town Manager Oefinger noted this item is on the agenda to provide background information for the Council. The Town Manager is concerned with the use of the Annex for voting in light of the fact that the schools are specifically closed on Election Day.*

*Mr. Palmer noted that about 80% of polling places in Connecticut are schools. Other facilities (halls, clubs, etc.) charge fees, which would affect the Registrar's budget. Another problem is finding suitable locations within the voting districts.*

*Councilor Bond asked if voting could be done while school is in session. Dr. Mitchell is concerned with the disruption to the schedule (unavailability of cafeterias and gyms), as well as traffic flow and conflicts with bus traffic. Councilor Bond suggested that the school schedule be revised, and that the issue be considered after the presidential election. Mr. Palmer noted that Dr. Mitchell has raised this issue for two years, and the registrars have looked for alternative locations. Dr. Mitchell suggested firehouses, but they have been discouraged by the firehouses because of the amount of traffic, limited parking, and potential conflicts with emergency vehicles.*

*The Committee decided to ask the Board of Education to come in to discuss the issue. It was felt that the registrars should be allowed to move forward for the presidential election using the schools. Councilor O'Beirne believes that the Board voted on the school calendar last night and a meeting should be held right away.*

*The consensus of the Committee was for the Mayor to send a letter to the Board of Education stating that the Town Council does not agree with the Board of Education's actions, and requesting a meeting with the Board.*

**2003-0198 Public Water & Sewer on Flanders Road/Industrial area**

**Discussed**

Mayor Watson noted this was one of the items he spoke to legislators about this morning. Senator Lieberman's office suggested a grant application to the Economic Development Administration, and provided the name of a contact person to help with the process.

Councilor Kolnaski asked for a cost estimate from Groton Utilities and suggested that a public hearing be held for the residents since they will have to pay.

The Town Manager stated it should be a conscious decision by the Council to pursue this project and to decide that they are willing to pay for the project. He is concerned with getting people's hopes up that sewer and water will be extended, especially in light of the failure of the connector road project.

Councilor Bond feels it is very important that this project be pursued. It is important to the tax base. Councilor Skrmetti agreed. Councilor Sheets is struck by the difference in the cost estimates presented by the Town and the manufacturers. She favors water extension from Route 1 to Route 184, and sewer from Poheganut Drive.

Councilor O'Beirne disagreed noting numerous areas in Town that do not have water and sewer. The Town has not specifically looked at this area or prioritized it for water and sewer. The Council is focusing on one road and a few businesses that have spoken before the Council. He suggested that the Council should look at the big picture and decide where best to spend the money.

**A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Bond, to recommend a resolution that the Town Council commit to delivering water and sewer up Flanders Road to serve the existing manufacturing facilities and residences that are there subsequent to a choice of exact routes and further information from City of Groton Utilities, within the sewerable areas as delineated by the Town's sewer plan.**

**Councilor Kolnaski feels more discussion is necessary. Councilor Bartinik expressed support. Councilor Wright feels development should be directed to areas with existing infrastructure. Councilor Skrmetti expressed support.**

**The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Votes:** In Favor: 5 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Skrmetti

Opposed: 3 - Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Wright

Councilor Skrmetti asked if a referral would be desirable. He expressed a willingness to look at other priorities. Councilor O'Beirne is concerned that the Council, with this motion, has already set a priority. The Town doesn't have the resources to pursue multiple priorities.

Town Manager Oefinger explained his understanding that the resolution means that the Town should explore the option. Councilors must still decide how much of a public investment they are willing to make. The Committee asked that the issue be placed on a future Committee of the Whole agenda, and that the City of Groton Utilities, concerned citizens, and Public Works staff be invited to attend to talk about the cost estimates. The Town Manager is not sure if the Town is eligible for an EDA grant.

**2004-0100****Preparation of Town Council Minutes****Discussed**

Councilor Sheets distributed a document showing proposed new text and deleted text.

Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox noted that she listened to the tape of the February 17th Town Council meeting; corrected minutes were included in the agenda packets. The Town Clerk explained that

*she had prepared a transcript, and adjusted the minutes so that they are briefer, but capture a sense of what was said.*

*Councilor Sheets objected to the statement that her letter was about Electric Boat, stating it was about an environmental evaluation proposal by Fuss & O'Neill. She asked that the reference be deleted from the minutes and the Town Clerk agreed.*

*The Town Clerk distributed a memo regarding preparation of the minutes.*

*Councilor Skrmetti expressed support for Alternative #1 (brief minutes) since Committee of the Whole meetings are now being televised. There is no sense in doubling staff's workload. Councilor O'Beirne disagreed noting that the record is designed to serve an historical purpose as well. He expressed support for the current practice. Councilor Wright agreed with Councilor O'Beirne, noting that the minutes are a permanent public record.*

*Councilor Kolnaski suggested that Councilors make shorter remarks and be more explicit.*

*Mayor Watson stated that the Town Clerk's staff does an excellent job on the minutes. Typographical errors can be phoned into Barbara. The Town Clerk emphasized that contact should be through the Town Clerk or Town Manager, rather than staff.*

*Councilor Wright expressed support for continuing the current practice which is very satisfactory. She asked about the chain of command for the staff that takes minutes for the Committee of the Whole. The Town Clerk explained the working relationship between the two offices.*

**7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List**

*Councilor Bond feels that the Council may not have had all of the background information on Mouse Island. It appears that the alternatives require electricity and Mouse Island homes do not have electricity. The Town Manager noted that residents of Mouse Island will be at next week's Council meeting. He asked the Committee to consider that not everyone receives the same level of service in Town. There are many services people would like to have that the Town is not in the business of providing. The issue was re-referred to the Committee of the Whole.*

**8. OTHER BUSINESS**

*None.*

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

*A motion was made by Councilor Bartinik, seconded by Councilor Skrmetti, to adjourn at 9:31 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*