



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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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, October 14, 2008

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

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

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 a call from the Webers who own the parcel of land surrounded by the Mortimer Wright Preserve, indicating they are not interested in selling their property.

4. Approval of Minutes

2008-0244 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 September 30, 2008 are hereby accepted and approved.

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

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2008-0235 Mortimer Wright Preserve Trail Proposal

Discussed

Dr. Bernie French was present and provided a handout for the Council. He referenced a map of the Mortimer Wright Preserve showing existing and proposed trails. The proposed trail basically follows the location recommended in the 2004 Trails Master Plan. Although the Master Plan calls for a 10-12 foot wide multi-use trail, Dr. French proposes a narrower, three foot wide trail.

Councilor O'Beirne expressed concern with irresponsible bikers not following the trails. Dr. French noted that the northern third of the new trail is fairly rugged. There are a number of fallen trees which could be left behind to limit off-trail access. Topography also limits bike traffic. Councilor O'Beirne asked if the property owners on either side of the access have been contacted about this proposal. They have not, but Dr. French agreed that would be a good idea.

Councilor Streeter asked about the reference in Dr. French's letter to removal of "personal property". Dr. French explained that there is an outdoor "museum" or collection of items that

appears to be associated with 250 Groton Long Point Road that is located on the Mortimer Wright Preserve property.

Dr. French is also requesting help from the Town to clear a trail approximately 240 feet in length in an area of thick growth.

The Town Manager suggested that if the Town Council decides to support this proposal, there should be a resolution authorizing the work, outlining what help the Town will give, and addressing some of the issues raised by Dr. French.

Dr. French indicated he has approximately 15 volunteers and the work will involve the use of chain saws and string trimmers, with the exception of the area where Dr. French is asking for Town assistance.

Councilor Bond asked about the Town's liability for the volunteers if they are authorized to be out there with power equipment. The Town Manager indicated the Town can request a hold harmless agreement and the Town has insurance. Dr. French noted that he worked to install a new trail at Haley Farm and he was asked to sign a release form for the state.

Councilor Bond suggested that the resolution include the concurrence of the neighbors on either side of the access. The Town Manager indicated that the property owners should be notified of the work, and the Town can explain what is going to happen, but it is Town property. The Town can address the property owners' concerns, but it does not need their approval.

Councilor O'Beirne asked if the Planning Commission needs to be notified of this proposal. The Town Manager will notify the Planning Commission, but he noted that this is not a change of use, only an expansion of the existing trail system. Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the neighbors be approached and a draft resolution prepared for the Council's review. The Town will investigate the personal property on the site and the availability of Town equipment to help Dr. French.

Dr. French offered to tour the property with any interested Councilors.

2003-0177

Renovations & Additions to Groton School Facilities - Phase I

Discussed

Director of Public Works Gary Schneider provided a brief update on various issues at the schools including replacement of the playground material at the elementary schools, the wireless system and projectors, resolution of a heating issue, and minor punch list items.

At the high school, several areas remain to be completed including the west parking lot, the administration area, a ramp, the robotics area, and landscaping.

The Town is beginning the process to close out each individual construction contract. This includes working through change orders initially rejected by the state, closing out the paperwork, and obtaining as-builts. The budgets at all three schools are good.

Mr. Schneider addressed three specific issues at Fitch High School: gas in the chemistry labs; the greenhouse; and lack of hot water in a certain area. Mr. Schneider noted a significant history with the gas issue, but assured the Council that what was shown on the plans was what was installed. Those plans were approved by the Permanent School Building Committee and the Board of Education. The gas was not left out because of any budget issues; it was not installed because it wasn't on the plans. The engineer will be reviewing how to get gas to the student work stations without doing too much demolition to the new part of the school. Once the system is designed, the Town will get a price, and issue a change order. The materials will be ordered and

the work will take approximately two to three weeks. Mr. Schneider assured the Council that the Town has communicated with the Board of Education throughout this entire process and has offered up a number of solutions, but the Board of Education wanted an "all or nothing" solution. The new plan will be submitted to Groton Public Schools for their approval.

Mr. Schneider added that the Town will not spend any money above the appropriation for the school. If additional funds are needed, he will seek a supplemental appropriation.

Councilor Sheets expressed concern for current International Baccalaureate program students who are unable to take the classes that they need.

Councilor Bond noted that it is unfortunate that Groton Public Schools could not compromise on this issue.

With respect to the hot water issue, Mr. Schneider noted that although the system was designed to code, it is not functioning to provide hot water. The architect has looked at various options and will be installing a loop system to address the problem.

Mr. Schneider noted that he has recently received an e-mail from Wes Greenleaf concurring with the altered design for the greenhouse which will include a pitched floor, ventilated windows, an epoxy floor, and power to the workstations. The price is being estimated.

Mr. Schneider assured the Council that the Town is looking at all change orders for errors and omissions and possibilities for reimbursement.

2005-0209 Water Pollution Control Facility Expansion

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, noted the expansion of the plant is going very well and it should be fully operational in December of this year. The project is on budget.

2006-0102 Fort Hill Sewer Project Update

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, provided an update on this project. All of the sewer laterals have been completed with the exception of the properties where the owners did not want the laterals replaced. The lining of the sewers is approximately 70% complete and overall the project is going well.

2008-0243 Reuse of Colonel Ledyard School

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the disposition of some of the schools including Colonel Ledyard School has been delayed until an analysis can be done of Groton Public Schools storage needs. Some storage is currently taking place at Groton Heights School, William Seely, and the Administration Building.

An assessment is currently underway to determine if any schools are suitable long term to meet the storage needs of the Groton Public Schools.

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, noted that this analysis involves looking at the locations of the vacated schools, determining if warehouse storage is allowed in the zone; looking at building and fire codes requirements, determining the need for a freight elevator, examining the infrastructure available for sprinklers if required, and evaluating interior and exterior modifications.

The consensus of the Committee was to wait for the storage needs assessment and to discuss this

issue with the City of Groton at the October 27th joint meeting.

2008-0242 Hybrid Vehicle Grant

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, noted this is the third year of the state grant for hybrid vehicles. The Town is currently using the vehicles purchased with the first round of grants, and is in the process of purchasing the second round of vehicles. This grant would be used in FYE10 to purchase six vehicles to replace older SUVs. If the purchases are not approved as part of the budget, the Town will not expend the grant. Mr. Schneider noted that the switch will result in significant greenhouse gas reduction.

Councilor O'Beirne stated he will not support this request because of the low mileage on the vehicles proposed for replacement. He suggested pooling vehicles.

Town Manager Oefinger noted that although these vehicles may not have a lot of miles, they are not highway miles. Two are inspectors' vehicles. The Town has been criticized for having too many SUVs in its fleet and this will begin to address that concern. The Town has "stretched" the replacement schedule many times, but in this case these vehicles need to be replaced because they are costly to maintain and they are gas guzzlers. The Council can discuss the vehicle replacements at budget time, but this grant can be approved as a placeholder. Mr. Schneider noted that the mileages will be much higher in a year's time when the vehicles are scheduled for actual replacement.

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

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 7 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter
Opposed: 1 - Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

2008-0009 Legislative Policy (2008 Standing Referral)

Discussed

Two of the state legislators would prefer not to meet until after the election. However, on November 18th the legislature will be conducting a fiscal review so the Assistant to the Town Manager would like to invite the legislators to a meeting with the Committee of the Whole on November 25th. Any suggestions for discussion items should be forwarded to the Town Manager.

2008-0011 Joint Meeting with City of Groton (2008 Standing Referral)

Discussed

There will be a joint meeting with the City of Groton on October 27th at 6:00 p.m. at the City Municipal Building. In addition to subjects proposed by the Town Manager, Councilors suggested that the agenda include Charter Revision and an update on the Thames Street Rehabilitation project.

2008-0122 Joint Meeting with the Stonington Board of Selectmen

Discussed

The Town Manager noted that a meeting with the Stonington Board of Selectmen had been scheduled for November 12th, but that is actually a regular meeting night for the Groups and Committee of the Whole because November 11th is Veterans Day. The consensus of the Committee was to reschedule the meeting with the Stonington Board of Selectmen. Mayor Watson asked that Mystic transportation be placed on the agenda.

2008-0015 Water Use Restriction Ordinance

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted receipt of a request from Aquarion months ago to consider

adopting a water use restriction ordinance. The model ordinance that was being developed at that time has now been finalized by the state. The ordinance would put the Town in a position to be able to enforce water use restrictions during drought conditions. Councilor Sheets noted that all water companies currently have the ability to restrict water usage. Discussion of this item was tabled to a future meeting.

2008-0247 Budget Guidelines for FYE 2010

Discussed

Councilor O'Beirne requested this referral. He feels that if the Council chooses to provide guidance, it should be now and not later in the process. Councilor O'Beirne feels that as elected officials, the Council owes it to the Town Manager and Board of Education to give them guidance on the Council's expectations. Discussion followed on the history and purpose for providing guidance versus direction, and the nature of the guidance to be given. Councilor O'Beirne would also like to provide guidance to Groton Long Point and the City of Groton. The consensus of the Committee was to provide some type of budget guidance and to place this item on the next agenda for discussion.

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

Discussed

The Town Manager reminded the Council that the Conservation Commission recommended that the Town consider purchasing the Weber property. He feels it would still be worthwhile to go into executive session regarding what the Town Council would like to do, regardless of the communication from the Webers with Councilor Bond.

The Council asked staff to communicate with the Webers regarding the Town's potential interest in acquiring the property and based on the Webers' response, this item can be discussed again if necessary.

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

2008-0047 20th Anniversary of Mystic Pizza

Recommended for Deletion

2008-0105 Tercentennial Legacy Playground - Update

Recommended for Deletion

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Councilor Sheets distributed a document to the Council authored by the consultant for the land use regulation revision.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to adjourn the meeting at 8:47 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.