



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road  
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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.**

Wednesday, November 17, 2004

6:00 PM

Administration Building, Flanders Road

#### SPECIAL MEETING - JOINT MEETING WITH BOARD OF EDUCATION (REVISED)

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER

*Meeting convened at 6:00 p.m., chaired by Elizabeth Gianacoplos, Chair, Groton Board of Education.*

#### 2. ROLL CALL

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

Members Absent: Councilor Bond, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent, Jim Mitchell (Superintendent of Schools), Wes Greenleaf (Board of Education Director of Facilities), Hugh Hunter (Board of Education Business Manager), Board of Education Chair Gianacoplos and Members Greenhalgh, Swindell, Volkmann, and Zzulka. Member Washington, Board Secretary, arrived at 6:18 p.m.*

#### 3. Calendar and Communications

*None.*

#### 4. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

*Items that had been jointly proposed for inclusion in the agenda were taken out of order, by mutual agreement.*

*- FYE 2006 Budget*

*Mayor Watson reported on the Town Council's assumptions and guidance that assumed an increase in Board of Education spending not to exceed 3.2%. It assumes a level amount of total state aid. Ms. Billing amplified on the assumptions and projections from the Finance Department that had been considered by the Town Council. Ms. Gianacoplos said she personally welcomed the growth allowed in the budget guidance. She and Ms. Billing discussed the Norwich proposal to seek a region-wide enhancement of education funding.*

*Mr. Oefinger said that he and Mayor Watson had learned at the COG legislative meeting that such a proposal could be dead on arrival at the General Assembly, but it might pass if it also reached other cities whose residents work at casinos. Casino employees are drawn from at least as far as the Hartford area. Mr. Oefinger said that the Board of Education might want to attend the planned Town Council meeting with legislators at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 7.*

*Mr. Zzulka said there is a grass roots organization that is seeking equity in state funding of education. Mr. Oefinger said he had been informed by Rep. Lenny Winkler that an ECS error was being corrected, and it would bring us \$140,000 more for the current account.*

*- Schools used as Polling Places*

*Ms. Gianacoplos said that the prime concern about using schools for elections is safety, and we*

are doing it for three buildings: Barnum, Butler, and West Side. For this year's Election Day as a school holiday, the Board of Education was able to achieve a professional development day for most faculty. Mayor Watson noted that three of the four weeks in November are broken, as far as class continuity is concerned: Elections, Veterans' Day and Thanksgiving. Discussion stated that a polling place must be located within the district that it serves. Mr. Skrmetti said that it would not be a good time to exclude the use of schools for such a major public purpose, stating that voters had just approved a very big deal for the schools, and so they understandably expect to make special use of buildings once a year. Ms. Gianacoplos said that the issue in the end must be considered and decided by the election registrars, who have statutory authority. O'Beirne noted that the turnout this year was unusually high, at approximately 73%. Most voters could not recall ever facing such long lines, even though polling places were fully staffed according to the Registrars' plans.

- Labor Negotiations

Mr. Swindell introduced the presented agreement with administrators and explained the negotiation process, in which a Board of Education committee participates directly. He said there is great jeopardy and lack of control, which makes it very desirable to avoid submitting the most far-reaching subjects to arbitration. Our administrators are paid a bit on the high side, and would normally have gotten 3.5 to 4.0%, so getting a settlement at a 3.25% increase is good. The statewide guidance is to use the average of three years of CPI change. Swindell added that the new \$5-\$15-\$25 co-pay schedule saves a significant amount of money.

Ms. Billing (recalling her former service on the Board of Education) and Mr. Swindell agreed that the latest collective bargaining has been less confrontational than in the past, and that better results for everyone, including students and taxpayers, is the valuable result.

The Town Council will take up the administrators' agreement at a forthcoming non-meeting (FOI exempt) or an executive session.

- Racial Imbalance

Dr. Mitchell told the meeting that Eastern Point just barely has entered the level covered by the policy on "racially imbalanced" school populations. This is because Eastern Point's minority percentage has come to more than 25% above the average for the whole district. Considerable documentation had to be submitted to the state as to how Groton would address the racial imbalance. A key element will be allowing children from other elementary districts to enroll in a new, full-day kindergarten at Eastern Point.

When the new school to replace Eastern Point at the King Property opens in 2007, our district will simultaneously be able to carry out enough changes in subdistrict boundaries to eliminate racial imbalance for a considerable time. The redistricting will take into account pupil populations and capacities at Groton Heights and Colonel Ledyard. Mitchell further said that completion of all phases of the new schools program would prevent racial imbalances indefinitely. Thus, Groton's overall, long-term cost for remediation of racial imbalances will be considerably less than some other communities have experienced.

- "No Child Left Behind"

Some councilors were particularly interested in the costs, and specifically the unfunded additional costs, of implementing No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Superintendent Mitchell told us that specific cost effects have not been segregated by any town that we know of. And because NCLB is deeply integrated into day-to-day educational practices, we cannot readily point to costs. However, it has had an effect on priorities, without question. It is likely that various required measurements of

achievement could force us to shift federal money to certain schools. Therefore, the only reasonable goal for us is to get all of our schools to where they are achieving very well.

- Capital Improvement Plan and Budget

This subject opened with a discussion of capital items of short term benefit, capital items of long term benefit, and ordinary maintenance - which, in itself, is such a large item due to the many years since most of our buildings were new. First example was the floor of the "small gym" at Fitch High School. Wes Greenleaf led the discussion by explaining that we could get more state reimbursement for a new floor, if we were to wait until the Phase 2 of rebuilding. However, the condition of the floor is dangerous and hinders reasonable daily use, and that argues against delay. Greenleaf said that he now has an extensive concept of what Phase 2 would involve. Also, West Side Middle School's needed changes will amount to a whole new gym.

Wes explained other needs for the next budget year, FY 2006. He said that the whole capital plan for FY 2006, affecting six school buildings, totals \$700,000, of which \$450,000 is for major new work at West Side Middle School that would be very long lasting.

Mr. O'Beirne said that some of the out-year capital items, such as Fitch Middle School at \$4.4 million each year, will be seen as incompatible with the long term schools plan that is now well known to the public. O'Beirne says that it all adds up to about \$90,000,000, versus about \$53,000,000 that was expected for Phase 2 and Phase 3. He said that such figures could be very dismaying to the public. Wes Greenleaf responded that he has to issue a current plan that embodies the assumption, which he holds as unfortunate, that no Phase 2 or Phase 3 would be approved, and that individual remedial projects for the physical plant will have to be sought. Ms. Greenhalgh added that most of the out-year dollar needs would disappear if Phase 2 is in fact undertaken in time.

- Other Matters

In view of the 2½ hours we had been meeting, Ms. Gianacoplos suggested that remaining items be deferred or bundled into brief remarks. She focused on shared services. The Board of Education gave out a report that showed some 23 kinds of work that are already jointly performed or shared between the Town staff and Board of Education. An additional 11 items were also listed for further study. This report was originally dated January, 2003. The Chair and Members of the Board of Education told us that some of them recently attended a CAFE workshop. The experts have found that savings from further consolidation or shared in a situation like ours will be minimal. Ms. Greenhalgh added that they realized that we are already ahead of the great majority of towns, because we have several years' experience of using a joint provider for health insurance.

5. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned by consensus at 8:21 p.m.