



# 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., Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, John F. Scott, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter.**

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Tuesday, May 1, 2007

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

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#### SPECIAL MEETING

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1. **CALL TO ORDER**

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

2. **ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Scott and Councilor Streeter  
Members Absent: Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Sheets

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

3. **NEW BUSINESS**

**2006-0239**

**Animal Shelter**

**Discussed**

*Kathy Colson and Jeff Wands, representatives of the Humane Society, were present to discuss how a regional animal shelter would work; what level of commitment the Humane Society is looking for from towns to move forward; the Humane Society's level of interest in moving forward; and the cost to the Town.*

*Ms. Colson reviewed the history of the project. Discussions on a regional facility began a couple of years ago with a site in Waterford. At that time a feasibility study was started, and some of that information is included in the most recent report. One change from the early meetings is the idea of financial partnering with towns has been abandoned. The Humane Society has now offered to build a facility on their own property and lease spaces to towns, making it a more viable project. A committee of the Humane Society has met weekly for the last three months to talk about the many options for their property, including a regional shelter.*

*Councilor Sheets arrived at 6:10 p.m.*

**Roll Call:** Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Scott, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter  
Members Absent: Councilor Schmidt

**Discussed**

*Mr. Wands was approached by 10 towns about a regional facility, and the Humane Society subsequently funded the feasibility study. The concept is to build a regional facility and obtain five year agreements from 10 or more towns. The Humane Society would house, feed, and clean the animals. All other administrative duties would be continued by the Animal Control Officers. After the seven to nine day window where the animals are under the control of the towns, ownership of the animals would be transferred to the Humane Society and they would matriculate into the normal adoption system. The Humane Society currently matriculates approximately 9,000 to 10,000 animals a year in the system. The regional shelter would be a stand alone building with 24-hour access for the towns. There are medical facilities on the property and Humane Society staff would feed the animals and clean the facilities. Towns would pay a daily fee during the seven to nine day window. Once ownership of the animal is transferred, the town's obligation stops.*

*Mr. Wands explained that the Humane Society does accept cats, however they do not have the capacity to take cats under an existing agreement they have with South Windsor. When a municipal shelter is built, there will be space for cats. The Humane Society will also operate a catch and release program for feral cats. Of the 9,000 to 10,000 that go through the Humane Society system, 10% to 15% are euthanized. The Humane Society only euthanizes as a last resort for a medical or aggressive behavioral reason, never for a lack of space.*

*The Humane Society also operates a sanctuary house where animals go if they have cycled through the shelter for 90 days and where they are still adoptable. Ms. Colson noted this is a prototype operation spurred by legislation that allows for estates to provide for long-term care of animals after the death of their owner. There are two boards of directors involved in the operation, the Humane Society Board and the Fox Memorial Clinic Board. The Fox Memorial Clinic provides a lower level of care for animals who otherwise would not be cared for at all.*

*In response to a question, Mr. Wands stated that in case of a fire, the Humane Society has other buildings on their site that animals could be moved to, but there are also plans for a disaster recovery site for animals.*

*Councilor Bartinik questioned the Humane Society's ability to fund this project. Mr. Wands noted that in addition to the daily fees, towns would also fund medical treatments and share facility costs including general maintenance, utilities, etc. Those costs have not been identified on a per town basis, however, based on expected volumes and average matriculation rates, the Humane Society has identified housing fees and overall maintenance fees. Mr. Wands further noted that the Humane Society needs a volume of 1500 animals for this endeavor. The 10 towns that have expressed an interest in a regional facility represent just under 1600 animals. Groton and Norwich represent 80% of that volume. Mr. Wands acknowledged that there has been difficulty in the past getting commitments from other towns and that the timetable is an issue.*

*The municipal shelter would require 48 kennels, 18 cat cages, and 4 miscellaneous cages, although the Humane Society would probably build something bigger to accommodate future growth and additional towns. The Humane Society does not have a cost estimate for the municipal shelter portion of the overall development plan, which is estimated at \$7.5 million.*

*Mr. Wands stated the Humane Society is open to discussions with the towns. He noted that they are currently working with South Windsor and looking at expanding the program to an additional five or six towns. Mr. Wands suggested that the Humane Society could accommodate some dogs (not cats) at their existing facility and there are plans to renovate the existing facility. The Humane Society would be willing to consider a phased approach until the renovation.*

*Mr. Wands stated there is a huge volunteer base at the Humane Society and they walk the animals and help with daily needs.*

*At the regional facility, owners of impounded pets would be required to work with Animal Control Officers before their pets could be released. The Humane Society will also take pictures of pets and post them on a web site so that owners could search on line rather than driving to Waterford.*

*Mr. Wands indicated he has received a list of questions from Norwich that he will be responding to..*

*Chief of Police Kelly Fogg indicated he has a number of procedural questions. He questioned how the four to five animals per day would be transported to the facility in Waterford and whether or not an interim facility in the Town would be necessary. Mr. Wands suggested the Humane Society could work with towns to find an independent network of transportation at a cost, or the*

towns could work together. Chief Fogg noted that transportation of animals, especially after hours, and other operational issues are another level of discussion that may reveal additional cost.

Mr. Wands noted that an interim agreement involving placing Groton's animals in a renovated facility could be discussed. Animals could be moved to alternate locations if there were capacity issues in Waterford.

Mr. Wands clarified the Humane Society's request for a "commitment" from Groton. An interim commitment would be to start sheltering dogs now. Another option is to have a five year agreement signed, with the understanding that the contract would not be enforced for 12 to 18 months. The Humane Society is hesitant because Groton is going down the path of building its own shelter. The Humane Society is interested in working with area towns and helping more animals, but the towns need to work together to show a level of commitment and good faith in moving forward.

Mr. Wands noted that the overhead costs would be based on a pro-rata share. Based on historical numbers for Groton, that would equate to just over \$40,000 a year for housing fees and approximately \$10,000 a year for maintenance costs, not including medical expenses and Town personnel costs.

Mr. Wands reviewed the status of discussions with the other towns. He reiterated that the towns should come together with a unified commitment; the Humane Society needs a minimum of 1500 animals and a five year commitment from the towns to build a new shelter; if only interim agreements are in place, it would be a phased project starting with renovations to the existing facility. Mr. Wands noted that the Humane Society has the ability to accommodate farm animals in Newington. The Humane Society wants to move forward in a short time frame.

It was noted that quarantined animals (14 days and beyond) would be charged to the towns at the daily rate.

The Community Alliance Shelter LLC was set up under the Fox Memorial Clinic for this type of regional relationship and contract signing. The Town would have no leadership role in the Humane Society or Fox Memorial Clinic organizations.

Town Manager Oefinger noted the cost of this proposal is somewhat unknown. Transportation of the animals is one of the most important and difficult issues that needs to be dealt with. He emphasized that the Town of Groton needs a full-service facility because of the number of cats that the Town deals with. The daily fee costs for a regional shelter do not represent a "savings" to the Town because the Town does not spend that amount to operate its own shelter. The Town Manager suggested that the Council visit the Waterford and Newington sites, and perhaps initiate a discussion with Norwich.

#### 2007-0105

#### Community Swimming Pool

##### Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger stated he has had a follow-up discussion with the Town Attorney on this issue, but he has no definitive opinion from him yet. The Town Manager paraphrased preliminary comments noting that the successorship contingency should not be a daunting issue because it does not mean the Town has to operate the facility; it could be turned over to another nonprofit. The Town Attorney would like to see the entire application made to the IRS as there may be a need for clarification regarding programming versus the facility.

Ken Berg noted that his intent is to turn the building over to the Town. He added that his deadline for filing the paperwork is approaching and he suggested that his attorney and the Town Attorney

*confer. This item was tabled to the next meeting of the Committee of the Whole.*

**4. ADJOURNMENT**

*The meeting adjourned by consensus at 7:30 p.m.*