



Town of Groton, Connecticut

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Meeting Minutes

Representative Town Meeting

Moderator Scott L. Newsome, Representatives Karin Adams, Robert Bailey, Jeanne Baker, Joe Baril, Alicia T. Bauer, Rafael Burgos, Jr., Clarence Casper, Bobbi Jo Cini, Christine Conley, Lynn Crockett Hubbard, Susan Deane-Shinbrot, Jim Evans, Thomas A. Frickman, Bob Garcia, Nancy Gilly, Matthew G. Longino, Jim Loughlin, Emily Maher, Brandon Marley, Jackie Massett, Lisa McCabe, Bruce A. McDermott, Roscoe L. Merritt, Jim Nault, Kathy Neugent, Lian Obrey, Juliette M. Parker, Richard J. Pasqualini, Jr., Carolann Quinn, Dutcha Sliker-Hersant, Joan Steinfeld, Irma J. Streeter, James L. Streeter, Archie Swindell, Patricia Wagner, Lori A. Watrous, Gary Welles, Ivy R. Williams, and Jonathan Wilson.

Wednesday, July 13, 2016

7:30 PM

Groton Senior Center

REGULAR MEETING

Moderator Scott Newsome called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

A. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Moderator Newsome, Rep. Adams, Rep. Bailey, Rep. Baker, Rep. Burgos, Jr., Rep. Casper, Rep. Conley, Rep. Hubbard, Rep. Deane-Shinbrot, Rep. Evans, Rep. Frickman, Rep. Garcia, Rep. Sliker-Hersant, Rep. Longino, Rep. Loughlin, Rep. Massett, Rep. McCabe, Rep. McDermott, Rep. Merritt, Rep. Nault, Rep. Neugent, Rep. Obrey, Rep. Steinfeld, Rep. Watrous, Rep. Welles and Rep. Wilson
Members Absent: Rep. Baril, Rep. Bauer, Rep. Cini, Rep. Gilly, Rep. Maher, Rep. Marley, Rep. Parker, Rep. Pasqualini Jr., Rep. Quinn, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Swindell, Rep. Wagner and Rep. Williams

Moderator Newsome stated that 26 members were present and he declared a quorum.

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Town Mayor Bruce Flax, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Susan Austin, Board of Education Chairman Kim Shepardson Watson, Town Councilor Joe de la Cruz, members of the School Facilities Initiative Task Force, Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher and Town Clerk Office Assistant II Michael Thorpe.

B. MOMENT OF SILENCE AND SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The members observed a moment of silence followed by the Salute to the Flag.

Rep. Massett stated that due to the lengthy presentation that the School Facilities Initiative Task Force will be giving this evening, she has requested that the report for the Rules & Procedures committee meeting be postponed until the RTM regular meeting on September 14, 2016.

Moderator Newsome stated that the minutes are required for tonight's meeting for the Town Clerk and the report will be on the September 14, 2016 regular RTM meeting agenda.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF JUNE 8 2016

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Rep. Wilson, seconded by Rep. Garcia.

The vote on approval of the amended minutes carried 23 in favor, 3 abstentions. Abstaining: Reps. Casper, Obrey and Watrous.

D. CITIZENS' PETITIONS

Rosanne Kotowski, 24 Ann Ave, Mystic, discussed the recent budget deliberations and thanked the RTM members who supported the taxpayers by cutting the budget. She questioned the 2% raise for non-union employees in the FYE 2016 budget where there was a 4.1% tax increase. She also questioned if the RTM must approve all transfers over \$10,000, will the RTM have the opportunity to debate and vote on transferring money out of contingency for the non-union raises in FYE 2017 with a 3.7% tax increase.

Responding to Rep. Massett, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that accounts were increased in FYE 2016 and FYE 2017 to cover pay raises for union contracts that were not yet in place. The Town Council must approve all union and non-union pay raises and that any pay raises paid within the individuals department is not considered a transfer of funds.

Mayor Bruce Flax stated for clarification purposes that over the last 2 years there has been a 7.8% tax increase but 3 years ago there was a 1.9% decrease which averages to less than a 2% increase over the last 3 years.

E. RECEPTION OF COMMUNICATIONS

Moderator Newsome stated that Reps. Pasqualini, I. Streeter, J. Streeter, Wagner and Williams notified the Town Clerk of their absence.

Rep. Conley stated that Rep. Marley asked her to notify the Moderator of his absence.

Moderator Newsome notified the RTM of Luanne DeMatto's resignation from the RTM in District 6 and thanked her for her service.

Moderator Newsome read the Town Council referral 2016-0169 Adoption of Ordinance appropriating \$184,500,000 for the design and construction of the Groton 2020 Plan. He referred the matter to the Education and Finance Committee's to report to the full RTM with their recommendations at the August 10th, 2016 regular RTM meeting.

F. REPORT OF THE TOWN MANAGER

1. Financial report

Town Manager Mark Oefinger reported that the Fund Balance as of June 30, 2016 was approximately \$8.3 million. He reported that the General Contingency budget for FYE 2016 was appropriated at \$550,000 and has a zero balance as of June 30, 2016. The Capital Reserve Fund balance as of June 30, 2016 is estimated at \$710,587.

2. Monthly briefing

Town Manager Mark Oefinger highlighted items from the Town Manager's Monthly News report. He mentioned the CT Sub Trail fleet, a community art initiative that displays 21 painted submarines on display throughout Southeastern Connecticut from July through October. This public art event celebrates the region's 100 years as the Submarine Capital of the World. He stated that the State of Connecticut Department of Housing awarded the Town of Groton \$800,000 in Small Cities Competitive Funds to complete renovations and capital improvements at Pequot Village Elderly Housing. He announced that the Field of Greens for the Groton City Farmer's Market is being held on Tuesdays at Washington Park from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., July through October. He also referred to attachment 7 of the Town Manager's News which is a What's It Worth? event on July 16th from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The cost to have items appraised is \$5.00 per item with a two item limit.

G. REPORT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

None.

Rep. Parker arrived 27 members present.

H. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

A power point presentation on the Groton 2020 plan for the School Facilities Initiative Task force (SFITF) was given by Chairman Jon Heller, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Susan Austin and Mike Zuba, Consultant from Milone & Mac Broom, Inc.

Chairman Heller began the presentation with the objectives of the Groton 2020 Plan. He stated

that the proposed plan includes 1 High School, 1 Middle School and 6 Elementary Schools. Cutler and West Side Middle Schools would become intra-district magnet Elementary schools. He noted that many issues were addressed early in the process, such as the age of schools, code issues, substandard portables, and security and safety concerns etc. The plan also addresses state mandates and eliminates the need for racial balance redistricting. The consolidated new middle school is to be built on the Merritt Farm property, Cutler and West Side Middle schools would be renovated like new to intra-district magnet Elementary schools. He noted in 2012, the cost of doing nothing but necessary maintenance was over \$55 million and that this figure represents no modernization, just keeps the buildings standing.

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Susan Austin discussed the modernization of the facilities. She noted that it is currently costing Groton \$2.5 million a year for students to attend out of town magnet schools. This plan would possibly entice those students back to Groton and prevent others from leaving the district.

Consultant Mike Zuba stated that decades of repeated redistricting has resulted in short-term fixes and community fatigue. He continued to say that magnet programming is necessary for long term balance while providing gains in efficiencies.

Chairman Heller discussed the proposed time lines, from design and approvals to bidding and awarding contracts, and construction of the schools. He noted that the total estimated project costs were \$184,405,308. He stated that this figure includes the proposed Groton share of \$84,192,651 and the proposed State share of \$100,212,657. He mentioned the total potential annual cost avoidance from reducing the number of schools from 10 to 8 to be an estimate of \$1.47 million. He stated that a copy of this presentation will be sent to all RTM members for review. He opened the floor for comments or questions.

Responding to Rep. Conley, Mike Zuba stated that special legislation would be required to get the 80% diversity grant for building the middle school. He noted that the waiver is automatic if you meet the 25% diversity status.

Rep. Neugent asked if there would be any state grants for the \$55 million dollars required for repair and replacement costs if this plan is not approved.

Mike Zuba stated that their estimates are approximately a 20% - 25% reimbursement rate for repairs and replacement of existing schools.

Rep. Casper voiced his concerns about the traffic flow on Fort Hill Road at the proposed new middle school site. He specifically noted the steep grade and choke point that could be created by other traffic during winter weather.

Chairman Heller stated that middle school and high school traffic would be separated as well as bus drop-off and parent drop-off points. He added the Department of Transportation has no issue with the design, but the current design is not final.

Rep. Welles asked if the Task Force had visited any other schools for design ideas and if there was any discussion of selling the schools that are to be closed.

Mike Zuba stated that they had taken a tour of a middle school in Glastonbury which had 3 separate wings for 6th, 7th and 8th grades. He stated that members of the Task Force have been involved in similar projects. Chairman Heller clarified that the design point of the project would be forthcoming. He added that the schools to be closed are Town assets and suggested that a committee be formed to determine future use for them.

Rep. Parker voiced her concerns about the traffic flow around the proposed West Side Elementary School. She cited the current problems with residential, school, and Pfizer traffic.

Chairman Heller stated that additional access was being added to the school and that any safety concerns would be addressed. He added that it is not a final design.

Rep. Gilly reminded the RTM that the other schools not being closed or renovated require yearly maintenance as well.

Chairman Heller stated that those figures are in the summary of deferred costs by building, if this plan is not approved. He added that yearly Capital Improvement Programs help with maintenance. He mentioned that even some of the newer buildings need updates for required state mandates such as special needs, ADA compliance and security requirements.

Rep. McDermott requested actual current figures for the voter's point of view. The amount of \$55 million dollars is from 2012 and does not include any reimbursement amount from the state.

Mike Zuba stated that exact figures would not be available until after we were in the actual design phase of the project. When the design is submitted to the state they would compute their formula for reimbursement depending on what is being done.

Rep. Conley asked what are the educational benefits of relocating the elementary students.

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Susan Austin stated that Groton is losing students to magnet schools elsewhere. She noted that the designing and tailoring of schools for intra-district magnet schools will greatly enhance the educational process.

Rep. Conley asked about the open space issue and if a sight had been identified.

Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that they are in active discussions with DEEP on the Merritt property and two other properties that have been identified. He added that they were hoping for a sign-off from DEEP before the referendum takes place.

Rep. Conley asked if the other properties could be identified.

Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated he would consult with the Town attorney and report back at the next regular RTM meeting.

Rep. Conley asked if the \$184 million figure included money for cost overrun and requested actual cost figures to taxpayers before the next regular RTM meeting in August. These figures should include amounts the taxpayer will pay with and without any grants or reimbursements from the state.

Chairman Heller stated that funds for legal fees, traffic impact and environmental concerns were included in the \$184 million figure.

Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that if we do not get the 80% for the proposed middle school, we will probably not have a project. He added that he will have the taxpayer figures before the next regular RTM meeting in August.

Responding to Rep. Frickman, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that the amount the taxpayer pays will be reflected as per \$100,000 dollars as opposed to the average.

Jane Dauphinais, a Task Force member, stated that she wanted to clarify the \$55 million dollar

figure. She stated that the figure is old and only addresses code issues. She continued to say that the buildings in question are outdated educationally, contaminated and that they are money pits. She added that to invest in these old buildings would be the worst public investment the Town could make. She urged the RTM to support the Groton 2020 Plan.

Rep. Wilson expressed his concern over the air quality remarks and the inequity in the middle schools statement that was given in this presentation.

Mike Zuba stated that there are environmental concerns, leaking roofs, and possibly inadequate ventilation. He stated that the district has not being proactive to address the cause. He clarified that he meant racial inequity in the elementary schools.

Responding to another question from Rep. Wilson, Chairman Heller stated that the Groton 2020 Plan was presented to the State and if it is not approved, a new plan will have to come forward.

Responding to Rep. Garcia, Chairman Heller stated that survey findings were completed by 410 registered voters in Groton.

Responding to Rep. Deane-Shinbrot, Mike Zuba stated that adult education would remain at West Side School.

Town Councilor Joe de la Cruz stated that redistricting is why many families leave the Groton area. He urged the RTM to educate themselves and the community about this plan and support the Groton 2020 Plan.

Responding to Moderator Newsome, Mike Zuba stated that the buildings will be designed for flexibility and growth capacity. He added that Cutler and West Side Schools would be shelled and renovated like new to be used for elementary schools.

Responding to Moderator Newsome, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that the Town Council has the ability to stop the project at any time. He noted that there are many pre-conditions to this project such as voter approval, reimbursement rate, interest rates and the availability of the Merritt property.

Responding to Rep. Bailey, Town Manager Mark Oefinger stated that there is not a cost overrun plan currently in place. He noted that once the project is approved, a team will be put in place and adjustments will be made.

I. LIAISON REPORTS

None.

Rep. Loughlin departed, 26 members present.

A recess was called at 9:45 p.m. The meeting resumed at 9:55 p.m.

J. COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. FINANCE - Chairman Quinn

No meeting, no report.

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & SERVICES -Chairman Conley

No meeting, no report.

3. EDUCATION - Chairman Neugent

No meeting, no report.

4. RECREATION - Chairman Wilson

No meeting, no report.

5. PUBLIC SAFETY - Chairman McDermott

No meeting, no report.

6. PUBLIC WORKS - Chairman Deane-Shinbrot

No meeting, no report.

Rep. Baker and Obrey departed, 24 members present.

7. RULES & PROCEDURES - Chairman Massett

No report, minutes of the meeting will be forwarded to the Town Clerk and reported to the full RTM at it's regular meeting on September 14, 2016.

2016-0165 RTM Electronic Voting

RTM Electronic Voting

K. BUDGET DISCUSSIONS

None.

L. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

M. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Rep. Conley, seconded by Rep. Adams and so voted unanimously. Moderator Newsome adjourned the meeting at 9:58 p.m.

Attest:

*Betsy Moukawsher, Town Clerk
Clerk of the RTM*

Michael Thorpe, Town Clerk Office Assistant II