



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 Christine Conley, Representatives Karin Adams, Jean-Claude Ambroise, Joseph Baril, Alicia Bauer, Jordan Brayman, Antonio D. Burley, Bobbi Jo Cini, Susan Deane-Shinbrot, Luanne E. DeMatto, John A. Espada, Robert M. Garcia, Conrad F. Heede, Lynn Crockett Hubbard, Rosanne Kotowski, Matthew G. Longino, Jim Loughlin, Lisa M. Luck, Brandon Marley, Jackie Massett, Bruce A. McDermott, Roscoe Merritt, Scott Meyer, Douglas Monaghan, Karen Morton, Kathy Neugent, Scott Newsome, Lian Obrey, Juliette M. Parker, Richard J. Pasqualini, Jr., Shawn Powers, Richard Semeraro, Bill Smith, Judith Strode, Mark Svencer, Archie C. Swindell, Fred Turnbull, Patricia Wagner, Lori A. Watrous, Ivy R. Williams and Jonathan E. Wilson

Wednesday, September 9, 2015

7:30 PM

Groton Senior Center

REGULAR MEETING

A. ROLL CALL

*Moderator Conley called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.
29 members were present and a quorum was declared.*

Members Present: Moderator Conley, Rep. Adams, Rep. Ambroise, Rep. Bauer, Rep. Burley, Rep. Cini, Rep. DeMatto, Rep. Espada, Rep. Garcia, Rep. Hubbard, Rep. Longino, Rep. Kotowski, Rep. Loughlin, Rep. Massett, Rep. McDermott, Rep. Meyer, Rep. Monaghan, Rep. Neugent, Rep. Newsome, Rep. Obrey, Rep. Parker, Rep. Pasqualini Jr., Rep. Powers, Rep. Semeraro, Rep. Smith, Rep. Strode, Rep. Swindell, Rep. Turnbull and Rep. Watrous

Members Absent: Rep. Brayman, Rep. Baril, Rep. Deane-Shinbrot, Rep. Heede, Rep. Luck, Rep. Marley, Rep. Merritt, Rep. Morton, Rep. Svencer, Rep. Wagner, Rep. Williams and Rep. Wilson

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Michael Graner, Groton Town Mayor Rita Schmidt, Groton Town Councilors and members of the Groton Board of Education, members of the School Facilities Initiative Task Force (SFITF), 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.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF AUGUST 12, 2015

A motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Rep. Parker, seconded by Rep. Ambroise. The vote on approval of the amended minutes carried 27 in favor, 2 abstentions. Abstaining: Reps Obrey and Turnbull.

D. CITIZENS' PETITIONS

None.

E. RECEPTION OF COMMUNICATIONS

Reps. Heede, Morton, Wagner, Williams and Wilson notified the Town Clerk that they were unable to attend tonight's meeting.

F. REPORT OF THE TOWN MANAGER

1. Financial report

Mr. Oefinger reported that the Fund Balance as of August 31, 2015 (unaudited, not updated until after audit is completed) is approximately \$9.2 million which is 7.3% of the FYE 2016 General Fund Adopted Budget.. The General Contingency amount for FYE 2016 was appropriated at \$550,000 and no transfers are pending approval. The Capital Reserve Fund balance as of August 31, 2015 is estimated at \$979,839 (unaudited).

2. Monthly briefing

The Town Manager highlighted various items from the Town Manager News including the selection of Officer Heather McClelland as the Groton Town Police Department Officer of the Year. Officer McClelland will be honored along with other area officers at Law Enforcement Night presented by the Groton Lodge of Elks on September 26th at 6 p.m. He mentioned an update on Groton Economic Development projects from the Office of Planning and Development and a invitation from the Groton Police Department to attend the appointment ceremony of Louis J. Fusaro, Jr. on September 15th at 3 p.m. at the Groton Senior Center. He added that the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship Trust Fund Annual Scholarship Dinner will be held on Thursday, October 15th at the Mystic Marriot Hotel & Spa at 6 p.m.

G. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

A power point presentation for the School Facilities Initiative Task Force (SFITF) was given by Chairman Jon Heller, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mike Graner, Director of Buildings & Grounds Sam Kilpatrick and Mike Zuba, Consultant from Milone & MacBroom, Inc.

Chairman Heller began the presentation with the resolution establishing the (SFITF). The process which began in February 2013 is currently in the Community Outreach Phase, Summer 2015 through Summer 2016. He noted that many issues were addressed early in the planning process, such as age of schools, code issues, substandard portables, security and safety concerns, etc.

Dr. Graner addressed Groton's educational needs. He discussed the modernization of facilities, providing for 21st century learning environments. He discussed Groton's interest in Magnet Schools and eliminating the need for redistricting for racial balancing. He stated this initiative will expand opportunities and be part of a long term plan to consolidate schools, equalize class size and improve efficiency. He added that reducing the number of buildings from 10 schools to 8 schools is cost effective. Total potential annual cost avoidance: \$1.47 million.

Sam Kilpatrick discussed the needs of the elementary and middle schools. He stated that a conservative estimate to address critical school issues only is approximately \$55 million. That figure represents no modernization, just keeps the buildings standing. He added that if Groton were to bond \$55 million in improvements, the average annual cost to a median homeowner would be approximately \$150 over the life of the bond.

Mike Zuba addressed Planning and Design considerations. He discussed the Groton 2020 Plan which includes 1 new middle school and 2 new elementary schools. The new middle school will be built in close proximity to Fitch High School to encourage and take advantage of multiple interface activities. The 2 new elementary schools would be built on existing middle schools sites. He stated that this is the best use of existing Town owned assets and maintains the historical presence of schools.

Chairman Heller closed the presentation with a cost summary and the implications for taxpayers. He stated the total cost for this project is \$191.7 million with a net cost to Groton taxpayers of \$94.8 million. The cost to taxpayers would be an average of \$152. per \$100,000 of assessed value for an average annual cost to a median homeowner of \$252. He believes the Groton 2020 Plan is the right thing to do for the education of all Groton's children. He opened the floor for comments or questions.

Rep Pasqualini asked if there would be a reduction in next year's school budget due to the \$1.47 million in annual cost avoidance by going from 10 to 8 schools.

Dr. Graner stated that there would be savings, but annual budgets reflect increases in union salaries, health care costs, etc.

Rep. Smith read data from the FYE 2016 Adopted Budget showing projected increases for FYE 2017 & 2018. He stated those increases in addition to the cost of the Groton 2020 Plan could become a burden for taxpayers.

Chairman Heller acknowledged that tax increases are unfortunate but necessary at times. He stated that the longer we wait, the more expensive school construction will get.

Rep. McDermott asked how the educational process would be enhanced by building new schools. He continued to say that the numbers have been stagnant for a long time.

Dr. Graner stated that by combining the two middle schools and implementing an International Baccalaureate School would greatly enhance the educational process.

Rep. McDermott added that real estate websites such as zillo.com have ranked Groton schools lower compared to other school districts locally and asked how that could be fixed.

Dr. Graner replied that due to the present moratorium on magnet schools we are unable to compete at this time.

Rep. Cini asked if the \$94 million price tag included financing.

Mr. Oefinger confirmed that it did not. He suggested that now was the time to borrow due to the current low interest rates.

Rep. Watrous asked if the referendum scheduled for November 2016 will include both the middle school and the 2 elementary schools or if they would be separate.

Chairman Heller stated that they would be combined all together as the Groton 2020 Plan.

Rep. Garcia departed at 9:10 p.m. 28 members present.

Councilor Flax expressed his displeasure with the disparity between education opportunities within the schools, and asked that the problem be fixed.

Rep. Cini departed at 9:15 p.m. 27 members present.

Councilor Antipas expressed his concern of having over 950 students in one middle school.

Dr. Graner stated that students would be separated by different programs and that 25% of the middle schools in the state have that many students or more and that they are working well.

Rep. Kotowski read an article from the Day newspaper that offered another solution that would not include building new schools, therefore saving millions of dollars.

In response to Rep. Kotowski's statements, Chairman Heller noted that the Task Force looked at this proposal along with another fifteen. He added that the Groton 2020 Plan was the best option to present to the Town of Groton. He continued to say that the voters will make their decision in November 2016.

Rep. Loughlin departed at 9:28 p.m. 26 members present.

Rep. Newsome asked if the Task Force had contacted any neighboring towns that have had similar projects done for lessons learned.

Mike Zuba stated that members of this Task Force have been involved in numerous similar projects and are working for the best interests for the people and Town of Groton.

H. LIAISON REPORTS

No reports.

I. COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. FINANCE - Chairman DeMatto

No meeting, no report.

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & SERVICES -Chairman Semeraro

No meeting, no report.

3. EDUCATION - Chairman Swindell

No meeting, no report.

4. RECREATION - Chairman Svencer

No meeting, no report.

5. PUBLIC SAFETY - Chairman Pasqualini

No meeting, no report.

6. PUBLIC WORKS - Chairman Heede

No meeting, no report.

A recess was called at 9:50 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 10:01 p.m.

7. RULES & PROCEDURES - Chairman Ambroise

Chairman Ambroise read the minutes for the meeting on August 31, 2015. The minutes are on file in the Town Clerk's office.

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Chairman Ambroise, seconded by Rep. Meyer. The vote on approval of the minutes carried 25 in favor, 1 abstention. Abstaining: Rep. Powers.

A motion to amend the RTM rules, pursuant to RTM 6.4.4, was made by Chairman Ambroise and seconded by Rep. Meyer. Rule 9.4 Power of Initiative will now reference 4.5 of the current Town Charter and Rule 9.5 will now reference 4.6 of the current Town Charter. The motion to edit the RTM rules passed unanimously.

2015-0215 Resolution to Establish a Charter Revision Commission

RESOLUTION TO ESTABLISH A CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

Chairman Ambroise made a motion, seconded by Rep. Meyer, to request the RTM write a letter to the Town Council to consider including an advisory question on the November 3, 2015 ballot to state, "Would you support a charter revision in order to establish a town wide budget referendum?"

Town Clerk Moukawsher confirmed that the deadline for the Town Council to approve a question on the November 3, 2015 ballot was September 3, 2015.

Motion to amend was made by Rep. Obrey, seconded by Rep. Meyer. The amendment was to send a letter to request the Town Council bring to the forefront their own list of referrals, one being the establishment of a Charter Revision Commission.

A motion for a second amendment was made by Rep. Kotowski, seconded by Rep. Pasqualini, to write a letter to the Town Council to consider including an advisory question on the November 2016 ballot to state, "Would you support a charter revision in order to establish a town wide budget referendum?"

The vote on the second amendment failed, 12 in favor, 12 oppose, 2 abstentions. Opposed: Reps. Bauer, DeMatto, Hubbard, Meyer, Monaghan, Neugent, Newsome, Obrey, Parker, Powers, Semeraro and Watrous. Abstained: Reps. Burley and Conley.

The vote on the first amended motion carried 15 in favor, 10 opposed, 1 abstention. Opposed: Reps. Bauer, Burley, Hubbard, Monaghan, Newsome, Parker, Powers, Semeraro, Swindell and Watrous. Abstaining : Rep. Conley.

2015-0222

Referral to Rules and Procedures Committee to add an Economic Development Report to the RTM Agenda

RESOLUTION TO ADD AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT TO THE RTM AGENDA

Adopted

A motion was made by Chairman Ambroise, seconded by Rep. Meyer to amend Section 5 of the RTM Rules pursuant to RTM rule 6.4.4. The motion was to add the new item (G) Report on Economic Development and to enumerate G-L as H-M. The motion passed unanimously.

J. BUDGET DISCUSSIONS

No discussions.

K. OTHER BUSINESS

Rep. Smith voiced his concern over the projected big budget increases planned for the next couple of years. He asked the Town Manager if any steps were being taken to cut expenses at this time.

Mr. Oefinger acknowledged that there are difficult years ahead of us, but also reminded the RTM that compared to the other 168 Towns and Cities in Connecticut, Groton is in a very enviable position. He added that if the tax burden is unacceptable, some Town services would need to be cut.

Rep. Kotowski stated that she would like to have budget discussions start as soon as possible.

L. ADJOURNMENT

Rep. Monaghan made a motion to adjourn the meeting and the Moderator adjourned the meeting at 10:58 p.m.

Attest:

Betsy Moukawsher, Town Clerk, Clerk of the RTM

Michael Thorpe, Town Clerk Office Assistant II