



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Town Manager  
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## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council

**Mayor Patrice Granatosky, Councilor David Atwater, Councilor Conrad F. Heede, Councilor Rachael Franco, Councilor Rich Moravsik, Councilor Lian Obrey, Councilor Juliette Parker, Councilor Rita Schmidt, and Councilor Joe Zeppieri**

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**Tuesday, February 27, 2018**

**6:00 PM**

**Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

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### **SPECIAL MEETING**

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*Mayor Granatosky called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.*

#### **I. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Granatosky, Councilor Atwater, Councilor Franco, Councilor Heede, Councilor Moravsik, Councilor Obrey, Councilor Parker, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Zeppieri

*Also present were Town Manager John Burt, Town Attorney Eileen Duggan, Director of OPDS Jon Reiner, and Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher.*

#### **II. PUBLIC HEARINGS**

*Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher read the display advertisement that had be placed in the Day newspaper on February 17, 2018.*

##### **2018-0048 Town of Groton Tax Increment Financing Policy**

*Director of OPDS Jon Reiner gave a brief presentation of the Tax Increment Financing policy (TIF).*

*Mayor Granatosky called on citizens to be heard:*

*Zell Stever, 81 Main Street, stated his support for this policy. He pointed out several concerns as being that the policy should be coupled with the Town Zoning, Planning and Economic Development Commissions' efforts to new regulations; the maximum duration of TIF program to be no more than twenty years; address conflict of interest issues; opinions from the Tax Assessor, Finance Director, and Town Attorney before a final decision is made; further review of Municipal Bond and Revenue Bond policy as it relates to TIF; define the purpose statement more clearly; consider annual fee for Town financial services; and include a Public Hearing for each Credit Enhancement Agreement Application. Mr. Stever's written statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Gary Welles, 5 Rt. 27, Old Mystic, stated that he represents district five on the RTM. Mr. Welles stated that the residents that live in the TIF districts should be considered when approving an application.*

*Chris Reagan, 20 Fenway, Stonington, stated that he is the owner of the Groton Shopping Plaza, and that his family has owned it since 1956. He stated that he is in favor of this policy and he supports mix use development for the downtown area. He mentioned adding a train stop in Groton.*

*Peggy Roberts, 11 Joy Avenue, Stonington, stated that she is the President of the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce. She read a statement of support of the TIF policy. Her statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Craig Melin, 17 Water Street, Mystic, stated that he is the Vice-Chair of the Groton Economic*

*Development Commission. He stated that this policy will be a unique tool to help bring business to Groton. He stated that this program is not available in other towns. His statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Bonnie Nault, 41 Pearl Street, Mystic, stated that she was on the past Town Council and was in support of the development of this concept.*

*Catherine Young, 14 Bushnell Street, stated that she is the Chair of the Groton Economic Development Commission. She read a statement of support on behalf of the Commission. Her statement is on file in the Clerk's office.*

*Bill Smith, 255 Neptune Drive, read a prepared statement in support for TIF policy. His statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Joe de la Cruz, Corey Road, stated that he is a past Town Councilor and is currently the State Representative of the 41st District. He stated his support for this TIF policy.*

*Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher mentioned a statement from town resident Gretchen Chipperini. Her statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Mayor Granatosky closed the Public Hearing at 6:36 pm.*

**2016-0256**

#### **Merritt Property Conversion**

*Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher read the call for the Public Hearing that was published in the Day newspaper on February 17th and February 21st 2018.*

*Mayor Granatosky welcomed citizens to come forward to be heard.*

*Catherine Pratt, 75 Front Street, Noank, read a prepared statement regarding the exchange of the 35 acre Merritt Property open-space land for the 20 acre Boulder Heights property in order to build the proposed middle school. She expressed her views and requested that the Town Council begin a new search for an appropriate unrestricted legal site for the school. Ms. Pratt's written statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Joan Smith, 37 Island Circle, read from a prepared statement. She stated that she is not opposed to the school project to be built on the Merritt property. She suggested that the Town Council take the time to find an equitable alternative property. Ms. Smith's statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Richard Dixon, 15 RT 27, Old Mystic, stated that he was involved in the effort to preserve open space in the Town. He urged the Town Council to not vote on this proposal until further investigation has been completed. He provided information to the Town Manager for alternative options.*

*Sue Sutherland, 32 Neptune Drive, stated that she serves as the Chair of the Zoning Commission, but that her comments are made as an individual. She read from a prepared statement and suggested that the Boulder Heights property be left for a development project that will add to the tax base. Her statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Eugenia Villagra, 76 Riverview Avenue, stated that she is the Co-Chair of Groton Conservation Advocates. She read from a prepared statement and suggested that the Council delay action so that a prompt and thorough search can begin for a better solution than the proposed swap. Her statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Jim Furlong, 57 Fishtown Lane, submitted a prepared statement from Elissa Wright, 52 Pearl*

*Street. Her statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Elizabeth Raisbeck, 841 Main Street, stated that she is the Co-Chair of the Groton Conservation Advocates. She read a prepared statement regarding her concern related to the land swap. Her statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Craig Koehler, 263 Brook Street, read a statement in favor of the land conversion between the Merritt and Boulder Height's properties. His prepared statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Richard Voyer, 112 Russell Street, Mystic, read from a prepared statement that depicts the assessed values of each property. He offered the King property as an alternative site to build the new middle school. Mr. Voyer's statement is on file in the Town Clerk's office.*

*Harry A. Watson, 175 Shennecossett Parkway, stated his support for the conversion of the two properties.*

*Bruce Avery, 55 Packer Lane, stated that the Merritt property was purchased by the taxpayers for conservation, recreation, or open space and the Merritt family sold additional properties at a reduced price to the Town. He stated that the swap is not equal and unacceptable.*

*Jon Heller, 19 Packer Lane, Mystic, stated that he served and chaired the School Facilities Initiative Task Force. He stated that the work of the Task Forces was open to the public. He stated that the proposed land swap was well published. He stated that many of the concerns raised this evening would have been welcomed two years ago. He stated that he would like to attract new families in to the community. He stated that it starts with an investment, whether it is with TIF or with the schools.*

*Mike Graner, 496 Noank Road, Mystic, stated that he serves as the Superintendent of Groton Public Schools. He gave a brief history of how the 2020 Plan was conceived and how it has proceeded. He stated the threat of redrawing the district if this plan fails.*

*Christine Conley, 90 Crown Knoll Court #144, stated that while the Council reviews this project, it should be aware of the time frame for breaking ground and that they are not putting over \$100 million of State matching funds at risk. She stated her hope that the people opposed to the transfer of properties work together to find a way to find appropriate sections of the parcel for open space and recreation. She urged the Council to continue with this transfer.*

*Joe de la Cruz 95 Corey Road, stated that he had served on the School Facilities Initiative Task Force. He stated that the money available through the State will not be available for any other plan. He stated that there isn't much land left to build in Groton. He mentioned open space properties. He stated that the Boulder Court property, left as open space, would act as a buffer between I-95 and the residents in that immediate area. He stated that the process involved in identifying the Merritt property and the Boulder Court swap was conducted in the open. He urged the Town Council to support this proposal.*

*Kim Shepardson Watson, 175 Shennecossett Parkway, stated that she is the Chair of the Groton Board of Education. She addressed the comment made by Chris Reagan during the TIF Public Hearing as getting Groton back on the map; she stated that going through with the 2020 Plan will put Groton on the map. She stated that Groton is an enviable place to live. She stated that if we don't continue with the plan, we will be left with aging buildings in need of repair. She stated that the repairs will be costly.*

*Robert Austin LaFrance, 18 Cottage Place, stated that he is Chairman of the Permanent School*

*Building Committee. He stated that what is being asked for is not a land swap; it is removing restrictions from one piece of land and moving them to another. He stated that if we don't do this, we will owe the State over \$1 million. He stated that we are already in the process of designing and building the new consolidated middle school. He stated that if we go backwards, we will not make the time limits for breaking ground. He stated that we will not have another change to get the \$100 million. He stated that the referendum clearly stated the proposed land swap, and it was supported by the voters overwhelmingly.*

*Mike Whitney, 112 Deerfield Ridge Drive, stated that he is a member of the RTM representing district 5, the Chairman of the Education Committee, and a school parent. He stated that he volunteers at the school and coaches teams on our Town fields. He spoke in favor of the land conversion and building the new middle school on the Merritt property. He mentioned the natural habitats that are maintained at the Boulder Court property and that their isn't much open space in that area. He stated that a delay to the 2020 Plan and construction of the middle school is starkly against the democratically expressed will our citizens communicated by way of the referendum that passed. He stated that we already have wonderful open space in this Town. He stated that our schools are still striving for excellence and to rise out of the Alliance District designation. He stated that the 2020 Plan is a transformative step toward that direction. He urged support of the land conversion so that this educational vision can be fulfilled. He stated that he would consider a vote against the land conversion as a vote against education.*

*Michael Doyle, 15 Elm Street, stated that he is a member of the Permanent School Building Committee. He stated that he is in favor of the release of the legal use restrictions for the Merritt property and the swap with the Boulder Heights, so that we can build and renovate schools that the Town needs for the education of our children. He stated that there is a lot of open space in the eastern part of Town. He stated that the open space at Boulder Heights will be an asset for the western part of Town. He stated that the Merritt property will be a great educational open space resource for the Groton consolidated middle school.*

*Bruce Flax, 632 Noank Road, Mystic, stated that he was a member of the prior Councils that initiated this process with the School 2020 Plan. He stated that he whole-heartedly supports the land swap. He stated that nothing was done under veil and business was conducted publicly. He agrees with Craig Kohler's statement, and he agrees with Joe de la Cruz that people in other parts of Town deserve open space. He stated that the restrictions to the property that have been talked about were approved by the State. He stated that people may not agree with what the State agreed to, but that the swap has been approved. He stated that the Boulder Heights property is perfect because it won't cost the taxpayers anything. He stated if we have to look for another property to swap for the Merritt property, it may cost the Town money. He identified all of the open space in the Town and stated that there is a lot of open space in Groton. He stated that this issue is really about education and not open space. He stated that the threats from pervious speakers are shameful. He stated that to threaten the Town Council with lawsuits at this point is the wrong way to proceed. He urged the Town Council to make the right decision and approved the property conversion.*

*Jim Mitchell, 47 Boulder Court, Mystic, stated that he is proud to say that he has worked and lived in the community for over 49 years. He stated that he has a bias and that he worked for the Board of Education for 38 plus years. He encouraged the Town Council to validate their commitment to protect and advance the most important asset in Groton, our children. He stated that when people are looking to move to a community they do not look for open space, they look for schools. He urged the Town Council to make the Merritt property the location for the new middle school. He stated that our future is not in open space, it is open minds and the investment in our children.*

*Andrew Mierta, 11 Carol Court, stated that as a parent of two children in the Groton Public Schools and as a taxpayer, he encouraged the Town Council to approve the land swap and go*

*forward with building the new middle school.*

*Heather Somers, 67 Ramsdell Street, address the Town Council as its State Senator and as a parent of a child in the Groton School system. She stated how difficult it was to get approval in Hartford for the funding. She explained how the State awarded a diversity grant for the 80% reimbursement for one of the middle school conversions. She stated that as a parent of a student in the Groton School system, updates to the school buildings are needed.*

*Mark Somers, 67 Ramsdell Street, stated that his daughter is a proud student at the S.B. Butler School. He stated that he is a proud graduate of public schools in Kettering, Ohio. He stated that he knows that open spaces are important and that we can have all the open spaces that we want on Thames Street where there are a lot of business that are not open. He urged the Town Council to put party politics aside and to do what is best for the children and our future in Groton.*

*Russ Beaulieu, 378 Hazelnut Hill Road, he stated that he is a youth baseball coach in Town and Vice-President of Groton Little League. He made an emotional plea and stated that he was raised in Groton. He stated that on his travels around the State, he notices the disparity between building that other town have and those of Groton. He asked the Town Council to approve the land swap and build the new Middle School.*

*Lynn Marshall, 118 Pearl Street, she stated that she heard a lot of people talk about why we need to have the new Middle School built next to the High School. She stated that the contention is whether the swap is of equal value and how important the timeline is. She stated that taking a couple of weeks to look at other options for a swap is not unreasonable.*

*Tina McLaughlin, 15 Cove Street, Noank, stated her support of the plan and to urge the Town Council to go forward with the land swap that was voted on and approved by the community. She stated that she and her husband relocated here from Boston to raise their children.*

*Mayor Granatosky closed the Public Hearing at 7:53 pm.*

## **II. ADJOURNMENT**

*Mayor Granatosky accepted the motion to adjourn from Councilor Schmidt, seconded by Councilor Moravsik and so taken at 7:53 pm.*

*Attest:*

*Betsy Moukawsher  
Groton Town Clerk  
Clerk of the Council*