



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

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

**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.**

Tuesday, September 13, 2005

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

#### REGULAR MEETING

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER

*Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.*

#### 2. ROLL CALL

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

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

#### 3. Calendar and Communications

*Councilor Kolnaski took a count of Councilors planning to attend Citizenship Day and she asked invitees to RSVP to the Town Clerk as soon as possible.*

*Councilor Billing volunteered at the Armory as part of the Hurricane Katrina relief effort and she noted the generosity of the people of southeastern Connecticut. She noted there is a truck at Holiday Bowl that is still accepting donations. Councilor Billing reminded the Council of the public forum being conducted by the State Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities on September 14th from 3:00-5:00 p.m. and 6:00-8:00 p.m. at the Library. She also acknowledged Parks and Recreation's award for inclusion services.*

*Councilor Skrmetti received a call from a resident on Sandy Hollow Road asking about plans to repave Sandy Hollow Road. The Town Manager will follow up with the resident. Councilor Skrmetti also received a call from a citizen expressing concern that she could not park at Poquonnock Plains for Family Day. The Town Manager will check with Parks and Recreation on how parking was managed that day.*

*Councilor Kolnaski expressed her pleasure with the benches being installed at Poquonnock Plains. Mayor Watson noted that West Side Middle School has named its gym after Councilor Kolnaski's husband, Edward Kolnaski.*

#### 4. Approval of Minutes

*None.*

#### 5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

*None.*

#### 6. NEW BUSINESS

##### 2002-0116 Efficiencies in Town Government (Fire Districts, DPW, GLP, and BOE) Discussed

*The Town Manager explained that the Fleet Study is one of a number of management studies undertaken in the last year. Some preliminary recommendations from the study were used to*

formulate the FYE06 Budget. Director of Public Works Gary Schneider explained that the Fleet Program was started in the mid-90s. Mercury Associates was hired to look at the program and determine if it is on the right track. Their review included an organizational review, and analysis of fleet issues and Best Management Practices.

Mr. Paul Lauria of Mercury Associates reviewed a PowerPoint presentation on the key findings and recommendations of the Fleet Study. The four major tasks of the study were: 1) develop new charge-back rates; 2) evaluate the need for selected light-duty vehicles; 3) develop a replacement plan and determine annual costs; and 4) evaluate consolidation of the fleet maintenance functions between Public Works and Parks and Recreation. Mr. Lauria described the approach used, provided an overview of the Town's fleet, and reviewed the distribution of vehicles by model year. He noted that erratic purchases present fiscal challenges and can lead to a large backlog of replacement needs. Annual fleet related expenditures (operating costs, not capital costs) were presented.

Mr. Lauria reviewed the objectives of a charge-back system and Mercury's rate recommendations. Councilor Bartinik asked how charge-back rates are recalculated. Mr. Lauria noted that the rates should be updated every year using a model that has been provided to the Fleet Division. Councilor Wright asked how other indirect costs (finance, human resources, etc.) not included here would affect the rate. Mr. Lauria explained the industry standard is 5-8% of the operating budget of Fleet. Mr. Lauria explained how the labor rate was calculated and noted it is related to actual cost. Discussed followed on the importance of matching rates to costs and the surcharges applied to outside agencies. Town Manager Oefinger noted there was a conscientious decision by previous Councils to reach out to other entities. Fleet Supervisor Bob Charette noted that the Town does do markups for vehicles not owned by the Town.

Mr. Lauria explained the approach used to analyze light duty vehicle utilization. Of 55 vehicles included in the review, there were 12 units found to have below-average usage and Mercury is recommending elimination of 8 units along with increased use of pooled vehicles.

Councilor Wright questioned if the fleet fund has had any effect on the size of the fleet. Mr. Schneider stated yes, however the closure of the landfill and elimination of the bulky waste pickup combined with transfer of Inspection Services vehicles would require a detailed analysis to determine the effect.

Mr. Lauria explained the principles of effective fleet replacement (replacement at optimal life-cycle cost). Given the average age of the Town's fleet (6.25 years), the replacement cycle is approximately 12.5 years. The industry standard is 9 years, which means the average age should be 4.5 years. Mercury developed a replacement plan by establishing parameters and "smoothing" the plan to meet reasonable spending levels for the Town resulting in the deferral of a number of replacements. The Town of Groton does not have a huge backlog of replacements; however the smoothed replacement plan shows that the Town needs to spend more money on replacement than has been spent in the past.

Mr. Lauria reviewed three ways that organizations use to finance fleet replacement purchases. Mercury recommends that the Town: 1) adopt a long term plan and increase funding levels; 2) continue to use the reserve fund approach; and 3) give the Fleet Division authority to replace assets in accordance with the plan. The plan is a guideline, but the Fleet Manager must still use his expertise in evaluating assets.

Councilor Skrmetti questioned the appropriate level for a fund balance. Mr. Lauria noted that Mercury uses a 20-year plan, which also models the fund balance over 20 years. The report includes information showing that the fund balance acts as a shock absorber for the fund. Although expenditures from fund balance vary greatly from year to year, the Town's level of

*funding stays consistent. Organizations get into trouble with this type of fund when they start to reduce the fund balance. The 20-year plan shows that the balance may be needed for purchase spikes in following years. Mr. Lauria would recommend maintaining a buffer of 10% of projected expenditures if the fund is funded appropriately every year. The reserve fund also provides flexibility to take advantage of opportunities.*

*Councilor Wright questioned the value of leasing. Mr. Lauria explained that leasing also smoothes the volatility of replacement. There are initially big budget savings when converting from a cash appropriation approach to leasing. The down side of leasing is potentially choosing a lease term that exceeds the service life of the vehicle.*

*Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the advantages of leasing depend on the type of vehicle. He asked how lease costs compare over the life of the vehicle. He noted that leasing would encourage better discipline with the fund. Mr. Lauria noted that everything is leasable and his experience is leasing is cheaper in the long run. He agreed that a third party does impose a greater degree of discipline on the organization to stick to the plan.*

*In the study, Mercury also looked at fleet maintenance consolidation opportunities. Mr. Lauria reviewed potential benefits and drawbacks. Mercury found that consolidation of this function given the current facility constraints would not result in service delivery improvements, so they would recommend no changes at this time. He further noted that the competitive service cost numbers suggest that the Town has the appropriate number of mechanics. If the Town had too many mechanics, it would be reflected in a higher service cost.*

*Mr. Schneider reviewed concerns that he has with some of Mercury's recommendations and how they would be implemented in the Town of Groton.*

*Councilor Sheets expressed support for leasing and investigating that option.*

**2005-0238****State Grant for Purchase of Hybrid Vehicles****Recommended for a Resolution**

*Assistant Director of Public Works John Carrington explained the state grant program for purchase of hybrid vehicles. The Town has been approved to receive \$4,500 grants for each of three vehicles. Mr. Carrington reviewed the miles per gallon figures for three existing vehicles versus the Fort Escape hybrid. Potential fuel savings total \$2667 per year for the three vehicles. Fuel savings will cover the cost of one of the vehicles over the life of the vehicles. Public Works is requesting a transfer of funds from the Fleet Reserve Fund to purchase the vehicles. The Town Manager suggested that the requested figure be increased to \$45,000 to address potentially lower trade-in values.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Billing, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to recommend for resolution a transfer from the Fleet Reserve Fund in the amount of \$45,000 and to authorize the Town Manager to sign the grant to purchase three hybrid vehicles.**

**Councilor Skrmetti questioned the need for the Town to purchase SUVs. Mr. Carrington explained that 4x4s are needed in Public Works due to the nature of the job (snow, dirt roads, etc.). The Town Manager noted that there is more utility for the Town in an Escape than in a hybrid passenger car.**

**The motion carried unanimously.**

**2005-0250****Fund Transfer - Military Highway Retaining Walls****Recommended for a Resolution**

*Town Manager Oefinger explained that bids for this project came in higher than what was budgeted. As a result, the project has been scaled back, but Public Works would like to complete it as originally planned, which will require a fund transfer. Director of Public Works Gary Schneider noted the contractor will hold his bid prices to the end of the season. An additional*

*\$15,000 will allow the next section to be done after the existing work while the contractor is still in the area and the public is sensitized to the construction and traffic impact.*

A motion was made by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., seconded by Councilor Billing, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously.

2005-0248

**Merritt Property - Construction of Temporary Parking**

Recommended for a Resolution

*Town Manager Oefinger stated his desire to seek Council approval to use a portion of the Merritt property for 100 temporary parking spaces during the reconstruction/ renovation of Fitch High School. The Town has asked the State DEP to look at this issue. When the school project is completed, the parking will be removed and the area reseeded or turned into an athletic field.*

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Billing, to recommend a resolution approving the use of the Merritt property for temporary parking during the reconstruction/renovation of Fitch High School.

Councilor Sheets suggested that the problem with the resolution regarding the open space purchased by the 1988 referendum was fueled by the recognition by Town officials that the school renovation project would encroach on the Merritt property. She expressed disappointment that the information was not revealed, if the Town Manager or other Councilors knew that. Councilor Sheets does not feel that temporary parking is one of the purposes specified in the referendum. She called Dave Styger from DEP and looked at a copy of the deed and dedication agreement. Councilor Sheets relayed her conversation with Mr. Styger. She stated she would like to see alternatives presented by the architect.

Town Manager Oefinger explained that the process with DEP will begin once the Town Council indicates they support the temporary use of the property. He offered to review the final design with the Council if they so desired, but added that time is of the essence. The design must be approved by the Planning Commission as part of site plan approval, but the plans are not there yet in terms of detail.

Councilor Wright stated she would also like a presentation on alternatives. She expressed concern with using the property in a way that conflicts with the original dedication.

Mr. Schneider explained that for the consultant to find no possible alternatives, he would have to look at the Fitch property as well as the rest of the Town or a defined area. Shuttling from Esker Point was not considered feasible. Another option would be restricting students from driving.

Councilor Skrmetti stated this is the consultant's recommendation and the Council can not add any value by analyzing the recommendation. Councilor Bartinik stated his support for the proposal since it requires DEP approval. He noted that other uses must have been contemplated for the property since an exception clause is included in the agreement.

Councilor Billing stated her integrity has been impugned by Councilors Sheets and Wright. She stated that she did not know about the temporary parking on the Merritt property until the meeting where the proposal was presented by the architect. She finds it offensive that Councilors would publicly impugn another Councilor's integrity without speaking to that person first and checking the facts.

A motion was made by Councilor Bartinik, seconded by Councilor Skrmetti, to move the question.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**In Favor:** Councilor Bartinik, Councilor Billing, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Skrmetti, Mayor Watson.

**Opposed:** Councilor Sheets, Councilor Wright.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Votes:** In Favor: 5 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Kolnaski and Councilor Skrmetti

Opposed: 2 - Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright

**Discussed**

*Councilor Sheets stated she did not attack a fellow Councilor and asked if she would have a chance to respond. She felt that moving the question deprived her of the opportunity to comment on a direct attack. It was noted that further discussion could take place under "Other Business".*

**2005-0249 Central Hall Building Project - Status Update****Not Discussed****2005-0007 Legislative Policy (2005 Standing Referral)****Discussed**

*Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent stated he will be submitting legislative issues to CCM tomorrow. Primarily, he will suggest that Groton and CCM support aligning the municipal arbitration process with the state's arbitration process. Councilor Billing submitted a list of suggestions in accordance with the Town Manager's request of Councilors.*

**2003-0016 BRAC-2005/Update****Discussed**

*Town Manager Oefinger reported on a number of events honoring Team Connecticut and the SUBASE Realignment Coalition. A community celebration of the decision to keep the Submarine Base open has been tentatively scheduled for October 2nd.*

**2005-0241 Homeland Security Large City Stipend****Not Discussed****2005-0252 Designation of a Railroad Quiet Zone - School Street****Not Discussed****2005-0251 Release of State Land - Route 117/Candlewood Road****Not Discussed****2005-0166 Great Brook Subdivision Environmental Covenants****Discussed**

*The Town Attorney and Director of Planning and Development Mike Murphy are preparing background information on this issue.*

*Councilor Bartinik recognized Attorney Tim Bates for an overview of the issue and to answer questions. Attorney Bates, representing Downes-Patterson Corporation, reviewed the derivation of the proposed covenants noting the effect of residential development on drinking water quality. Enforcement will be the responsibility of the homeowners' association. Under Section 47-42a of the statutes, municipalities can also accept the covenants and enforcement responsibility. The City of Groton will be accepting a portion of the open space and a role in enforcement of the covenants. Town planning staff has expressed skepticism because the statutory authority is unclear and they do not want to be in the middle of a neighborhood war. There is a provision in the City's agreement that they have the right, but not the obligation to enforce the covenants. Attorney Bates feels the Town has a legitimate interest in protecting the environment. He added that there will be regulation changes in the future to address stormwater runoff concerns.*

*Attorney Skrmetti asked how the City can enforce covenants on Town-owned land, and Attorney Bates suggested that as a property owner and a municipality with easement rights over the uplands to protect water supply, the City can enforce the covenants. Councilor Kolnaski asked if the Council would have to adopt ordinances to address this issue. Attorney Bates stated not yet, but changes in stormwater management are coming that will require regulation changes.*

*Councilor Billing expressed concern with the ramifications to the Town and would like input from*

the Town Attorney and Planning staff. If the Town declines to participate, the covenants will remain in place and enforcement will be done by the homeowners' association and/or City of Groton.

Councilors Bartinik and Wright expressed support for the covenants and the Town entering into enforcement.

Councilor Kolnaski asked to postpone further discussion of this item until the staff reports are received.

Discussion followed on a document from Attorney Casey that was distributed by Councilor Sheets to the Town Council. The Town Manager noted that he had received the document, but this referral was only on the agenda for an update. The document will be distributed when the reports from the Town Attorney and Planning staff are available.

Councilor Sheets left the meeting at 10:10 p.m.

**Roll Call:** Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Skrmetti and Councilor Wright  
Members Absent: Councilor Bond, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Sheets

**2005-0253 Hurricane Katrina - Groton's Response**

**Discussed**

Mayor Watson noted that an article in *The Day* newspaper indicated that Stonington is paying employees to go down for the hurricane relief effort. Other discussions have included "adopting" Biloxi, Mississippi. Mayor Watson has tried to contact the Mayor, but with phone lines down, he has been unsuccessful. Another possibility discussed was working with the Navy on the provision of housing to evacuees.

Councilor Skrmetti, whose family is from the Biloxi area, explained his proposal to adopt a neighborhood. Residents are receiving immediate relief, but this will be a long-term, multi-year rebuilding effort. Councilor Skrmetti suggested sponsoring an area of 300 to 500 families, with a longer-term commitment of three to five years to focus support and energies on a specific area. The effort would require the Town to work closely with the Mayor from Biloxi to help address their needs. Councilor Billing expressed support for the idea and suggested that the neighborhood not be connected with Councilor Skrmetti's family to avoid a potential conflict. The two areas Councilor Skrmetti is considering are Main Street or The Point. Councilor Skrmetti and Mayor Watson will work together to make the necessary contacts.

Councilor Kolnaski expressed the opinion that employees that join the relief effort should be paid. The Town Manager explained that only two Town employees have volunteered and neither employee has asked for consideration from the Town. He stated he would like to research the issue and legal ramifications if the Town Council would like to pursue this issue.

Town Manager Oefinger explained that he would support a more comprehensive approach to volunteerism, although that is difficult as a public entity. Given the enormity of this disaster, it is fair for the Council to consider a policy for volunteers. Councilor Bartinik suggested encouraging volunteerism, but he expressed opposition to cash payments. The Town Manager added that any policy would require approval by the employee's supervisor/ department head.

Mayor Watson polled the Council on the issue of paying employees who volunteer. He and Councilor Kolnaski expressed their support, Councilor Bartinik expressed his opposition, and Councilor Billing indicated she does not have strong feelings on the issue.

The Town Manager mentioned a recent meeting to discuss the use of Navy housing. It appears

*there may be approximately 100 individuals relocating to this area. There does appear to be some synergy between the work opportunities here and the work force from the south. This group will continue to meet.*

*Councilor Bartnik suggested that Groton take the lead in coordinating a Sister City program for other towns throughout the country or in southeastern Connecticut to adopt neighborhoods in Biloxi.*

*The Council decided to postpone discussion on this item for two weeks to get additional information.*

**2004-0328 Bus Ordinance - Update**

**Not Discussed**

**2004-0308 Alcohol Possession By Minors**

**Not Discussed**

**2005-0199 Town Manager Annual Evaluation**

**Not Discussed**

**7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List**

*None.*

**8. OTHER BUSINESS**

*None.*

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

*A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Skrmetti, to adjourn at 10:50 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*