



# 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., Natalie Burfoot Billing, Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Paulann H. Sheets, Thomas J. Skrmetti, and Elissa T. Wright.**

Tuesday, February 22, 2005

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

#### REGULAR MEETING - REVISED

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER

*Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.*

#### 2. ROLL CALL

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

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Administrative Secretary Susan Wells*

#### 3. Calendar and Communications

*Councilor Paulann Sheets reported:*

- *Rosemary Palmer reported her support for the Groton Public Library and their budget.*
- *Ed Johnson sent an e-mail regarding continued vandalism in Noank. He has offered rewards and suggested a Neighborhood Watch. He is looking for a report at some point on how it can be addressed.*
- *Ed Ettinger is unhappy about communication from the Mayor to citizens about the appointment of the School Project Manager.*

*Councilor Wright reported:*

- *Letter from Attorney Richard Dickson to Councilor Wright re: open space*

*Councilor Sheets reported:*

- *Copy of letter from Will Langdon concerning the retaining wall on Route 1 across from the Chipperini property. His concern is that there is the possibility of serious collapse. Secondly, he raises concerns about the water level and underground utilities relative to the Mystic Streetscape Project. He is concerned that this is way over budget.*

#### 4. Approval of the Minutes

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2005-0047

#### Approval of the Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

#### RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole of January 25, 2005 and February 8, 2005 are hereby accepted and approved.

**A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., to adopt.**

**The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Votes:** In Favor: 7 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright  
Abstain: 1 - Councilor Billing

#### 5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

*None.*

**6. NEW BUSINESS****2004-0312 FYE 2006 Budget**

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to recommend a resolution scheduling the Public Hearing on the proposed FYE 2006 Budget on March 29, 2005, 7:00 p.m. at the Groton Senior Center.

The motion carried unanimously.

Discussed

*Town Manager Oefinger reported that we have not been able to get good dates from the Board of Education to meet. Town Manager Oefinger suggested that they identify a couple of dates and have one meeting before the public hearing on the proposed budget meeting. Town Manger Oefinger stated that he hoped to have a tentative budget meeting schedule at the next Committee of the Whole Meeting.*

*Councilor Billing read the attached statement (Attachment 1) concerning the FYE 2006 Budget.*

**2004-0048 Groton Code of Ethics**

Discussed

*Assistant to the Town Manager Vincent discussed the Code of Ethics from the City of Santa Clara, California. Mr. Vincent asked the Council if he should continue with this broad approach. Councilor O'Beirne stated that he found these findings to be practically useless and that Groton is as top notch as we get, and he felt that there was no real value to the general statements in the City of Santa Clara Code of Ethics report. He also reported that this was a "feel-good" statement, but it does not answer some of the big questions. Assistant to the Town Manager Vincent stated that he only raised this as a preamble. Councilor Wright also felt that this did not address the core and essence of the State Code of Ethics. Councilor Wright reported that she obtained and downloaded from the State their OLR Research Report. Councilor Wright proposed that the Town use this model as a draft, add a strong revolving door provision, and consider what would be necessary by way of discouraging complaints that have no basis. She also thought this was a good working document and it would address the central issue of financial conflicts. Councilor Billing stated that she would be glad to work with that as one sample, but she would like to look at something broader. Mayor Watson asked Councilor Wright to put together her samples of codes of ethics and give them to Mr. Vincent. Councilor Kolnaski stated that she liked the Santa Clara Code of Ethics and that she liked the positive approach.*

**2005-0007 Legislative Policy (2005 Standing Referral)**

Discussed

*Mayor Watson reported that he would be attending the National League of Cities Conference (NLC) in March and he suggested that it would not be a bad idea if the Council sat down with the Town's three State legislators and discuss how important the SUBASE Realignment is to the entire state of Connecticut. Councilor O'Beirne reported that they have been trying to make that happen and have been looking at this as an opportunity to talk to our State legislators one at a time. Mayor Watson was looking for authorization to have Town Councilors send letters supporting barriers for the north side of I-95. Town Manger Oefinger reported that he was not a big advocate of sound barriers, but sound is influenced by site location. For instance Riverview Avenue, which backs right up to the bridge, would be one short stretch where barriers could be effective.*

**2003-0198 Public Water & Sewer on Flanders Road/Industrial area**

Discussed

*Town Manager Oefinger reported briefly that within the next couple of months a consultant will be on board and working on this item in earnest. He continued that judgment had to be made on which route the Council wants to pursue.*

**2005-0019 Status of Mystic Educational Center****Discussed**

*John Silsby, Parks and Recreation Director and Jerry Lokken, Parks and Recreation Supervisor were present to discuss the impact the condition of the Mystic Educational Center facility has on Town Parks and Recreation programming. Director Silsby reported that the Pratt Building was having its roof replaced and taking longer than usual because of winter weather. He stated that this building is used heavily by Parks and Recreation programs and they were forced to go elsewhere while this repair was being made. He reported that Parks and Recreation uses the pool, gymnasium, racquetball court and the locker rooms. He reported that the Town pays to use this facility and spends approximately \$38,000 a year for use of the Pratt Building. Town Manager Oefinger explained that the Town doesn't have an alternative. Councilor Billing asked who would be responsible for maintaining the facility. Town Manager Oefinger indicated, the State Department of Public Works and Director Silsby stated also the Department of Mental Retardation. Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the Department of Mental Retardation and the State Department of Public Works are leasing space at the facility. Town Manager Oefinger suggested that the discussion is not about buying the facility, but doing routine maintenance to keep it up. Mayor Watson thought another avenue would be to talk to Catherine Marx, Director of the Governor's Office of Eastern Connecticut. Councilor Bond reported that LEARN was going into the Mystic Educational Center soon. Mayor Watson suggested we should write to the State and ask what was going on there. Director Silsby reported that the pool area is where we have most of our programs and offered to give tours of the Mystic Education Center to Town Councilors. Councilor Kolnaski thought we should write directly to the Governor; prepare a letter for an update and find out what is going on in all the buildings. Town Manager Oefinger reported that there is potentially some interest on the part of the Town to have greater control of the use of the facility, but no decision has been made by the Council.*

**2005-0040 Fitch Chamber Choir Carnegie Hall Trip - Donation Request****Recommended for a Resolution**

*Kayla Lyons, a member of the Chamber Choir at Fitch Senior High School approached the Town Council on this issue asking for support for the Fitch Chamber Choir Carnegie Hall Trip. She reported that the choir had raised \$400+ and would be very happy with any donation from Town of Groton. Councilor Bartinik questioned if the Town was going to give money to every group that came before the Town Council. Town Manager Oefinger stated that he thought that they could find \$500.*

**A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to recommend a resolution donating \$500.00 to the Fitch Chamber Choir for their trip to Carnegie Hall, and to direct Town Manager Oefinger to find out if there is a policy regarding donations.**

**A brief discussion followed. Councilor O'Beirne asked Ms. Lyons if they had gone to the Board of Education for funding and she answered no. Councilor Bond agrees with Councilor O'Beirne, but she said it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that the choir was invited to Carnegie Hall, and also said she would write a personal check if this did not go through. Councilor Billing expressed concern that the Council could be opening a flood gate and she had concerns with this grant request. She suggested that the Board of Education must have a policy when things come up with funding and stated she was reluctant to provide Council support, but could certainly write a personal check to support the choir. Councilor Wright stated that this raised a broader issue and asked whether or not there is a policy. Councilor Sheets stated that she supports sending the choir to Carnegie Hall. Councilor O'Beirne stated that the choir should ask the Board of Education for a similar amount.**

**The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Votes:** In Favor: 5 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright  
Opposed: 3 - Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing and Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

**2005-0039 Doolittle Raiders 63rd Reunion - Donation Request****Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger reported that the Town was asked to make a contribution to underwrite a portion of the cost of a convention. He reported that funds are not readily available for these types of requests, but last year the Town set aside \$30,000 in the Manager's budget for contingency. Mayor Watson stated that there was mention of the City supporting this and he wanted to know if it was the City or Groton Utilities. Town Manager Oefinger said it was the City. Councilor Bartinik stated he thought that Councilors give their own dollars for this cause. Councilor O'Beirne commented that there is a committee that does a lot of work with Outside Agencies. The Council must be careful that small amounts here and there and "out of the blue" donation requests not directly impact the taxpayers. Councilor Billing stated that she too was having trouble reaching out and funding other things, no matter how wonderful they are as a cause. She stated she was not in favor of the request and that the materials presented do not really ask for funding. Councilor Sheets reported that this was an achievement to bring these veterans to the Town. Councilor Kolnaski asked if we could refer this item to our Outside Agency Committee and have someone come back from the Doolittle Raiders 63rd Reunion committee and speak to the Council.

The Committee of the Whole recessed from 8:25 p.m. to 8:35 p.m.

2005-0045

#### **Meals on Wheels Provider for Senior Center**

##### **Recommended for a Resolution**

Director John Silsby, Director of Parks and Recreation reported on the Meals on Wheels program services. The Senior Center serves 77 homebound seniors through an agreement with TVCCA. Whereby TVCCA provides food and the Senior Center prepares and delivers it. 140 meals per day are delivered, and there is a waiting list for the program. Director Silsby continued to discuss the following issues. Sometimes seniors receive so much food they hoard it or waste it. There is a fee collected by the Town that goes back to TVCCA. TVCCA administers the program inconsistently from one town to the next and cannot accommodate the waiting list of seniors. Mr. Silsby is suggesting outsourcing to an outside vendor. This vendor would do the preparation, packaging and delivery and Parks and Recreation would administer the program. To contract it out would cost \$100,000, of which \$75,000 is for preparation and delivery. The Senior Center could remove two of the vans from their fleet and reduce the number of driver hours. Town Manager Oefinger stated that the proposal to contract with CW Resources would appear in the FYE 2006 Proposed Budget. It is a fairly large change and a sizable increase in the Parks and Recreation Senior Center budget. Town Manager Oefinger reported that it cost us \$75,000 right now, and under the new budget will cost us \$111,000. However, net cost to the Town would go down to \$69,000. Staff feels it would be a much better product for seniors that need this service.

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Billing, to recommend a resolution to contract with CW Resources for the Meals on Wheels program.

Councilor Sheets stated that TVCCA is funded through federal guidelines and takes donations. Mary Jo Riley, Supervisor of the Senior Center explained that the cost is \$1.83 now, and it will be \$2.50 for the new program. Councilor Sheets asked if this would adjust the waiting list, and Ms. Riley stated it would. Also, by going with CW Resources, it would be five meals, Monday through Friday. Councilor Sheets asked how the avoidance of the use of vans and drivers will be reflected in the budget. Mary Jo Riley answered that they would reduce hours by 45 hours and would reduce their vans by two. Councilor Sheets asked if the Senior Center would be monitoring meal deliveries and Ms. Riley replied, yes, they would be contacting them on weekends about deliveries. Councilor Bartinik asked what if 77 people say they do not like the new program. Ms. Riley stated that the agreement is for one year. Councilor Billing suggested that the net savings considering the reduction in vans and drivers and increase in the cost of food would be \$5,000. Ms. Riley noted that CW Resources delivers cold meals that have to be microwaved. She reported that the Town has clients that use CW Resources in Groton and they have done research and compared services from New Britain, New Haven, Hartford and all have been very satisfied with CW Resources. Councilor Bond asked if they had ever eaten the food and Ms. Riley replied that CW Resources gave them a month's supply of food to try. Councilor Bond asked how the Town collects if someone is not paying. Ms. Riley stated that fees are collected ahead of time so there is no problem with people paying.

The motion carried unanimously.

2001-0072

### Review of Ambulance Response and Responsibilities

#### Recommended for Deletion

*Mr. Joe Sastre, Manager of Emergency Communications, was present to discuss and review the Groton Ambulance and Mystic River Ambulance response and responsibilities. Town Manager Oefinger stated that we hired Fitch & Associates, LLC to do an Emergency Medical Services Review. Fitch and Mr. Sastre reached out to both ambulances services to get data. Mr. Sastre stated that it was a fairly concise report, and Fitch did discover a couple of interesting services, and that some inefficiencies were identified. The report recommended that the Town stabilize the funding and that we establish agreements with both services. He commented that paramedics are in a vulnerable state, that they are provided to us by Lawrence and Memorial Hospital and we should keep in mind that in the future the Town might have to supply paramedics. Mr. Sastre reported that two services were not viable or self supporting and could not survive without Town contributions. Their level of training is good. Fitch & Associates made a recommendation to appoint someone to the Ambulance Board.*

*Councilor Bond asked what the next step would be. Mr. Sastre answered that they would like to come in and discuss the report with the Town Council. Town Manager Oefinger stated unless otherwise directed, he will use the figures suggested by the consultant in building his budget for the ambulance associations this year Mystic would receive \$40,000/Groton \$70,000. Mr. Sastre reported that the consultants are saying that while the call volume could be served by one ambulance company, at the present time it would probably increase costs to attempt this. Because Mystic River Ambulance has a large volunteer base. Because of the different cultures of the two companies, if combined, it would probably result in fewer volunteers, and the hiring of more staff. Councilor Billing agreed it's fine for the Town Manager to use the \$40,000 and \$70,000 numbers for planning the budget, as long as we stay open to adjustments, since they represent a larger percent increase for Mystic than for Groton. Councilor Billing added that the biggest thing she took out of the report was the scenario that it would not be more cost effective to run our own ambulance. Mr. Sastre confirmed that the consultants ran some numbers, and that if we started off with a Town operated ambulance it would in fact cost more than the Town is paying right now. He stated that ambulance services are not cheap and that the cost, under the present system, can only go one way. It comes down to how much the Town is willing to subsidize. Councilor Billing questioned response time. She stated that the discussion was confusing in the report. In one place it was between eight to nine minutes. Then it said between fourteen and sixteen minutes in another place. Mr. Sastre replied that both ambulance services have eight and nine minutes for emergencies and fourteen to sixteen minutes 90% of the time, which includes non-emergency. He further explained that it takes between fourteen and sixteen minutes when you have to call in a volunteer. He added that high performance ambulances take between eight and nine minutes 90% of the time. The bottom line was that their response time on average was good for the type of organization they are. Councilor Bond asked if Medicaid pays for ambulance services. Mr. Sastre responded that the ambulance loses in that case and that both services lose a couple of dollars every time they roll. He concluded that ambulances do not get paid unless they transport and that Groton has more dry runs than Mystic. Mr. Sastre has set up the service agreements with the two ambulance services.*

2005-0046

### Burrows/Copp Property - Potential Acquisition

#### Discussed

*Town Manager Oefinger reported that \$5.5 million will be made available by the state for open space programs and the deadline for submitting grant applications to DEP may be moved up from May to April. Town Manager Oefinger reported that he met with Ms. Betty, Project Manager for the Trust for Public Land, and that he had a hand out of information from Alicia Betty. She wanted to know if the Town is sincerely interested in the property. Mr. Oefinger explained that the role of the Trust would be to enter into a contract with the property owner and the Trust would be*

putting applications together. Ms. Betty felt it would be worth a shot to go after the NOAA money. She reported that we needed to let its congressional delegation know and that the Town needs to get an application at no cost to the Town. Mr. Oefinger spoke about what the Trust brings to the table. The Council should have reports back from the Planning and Conservation Commissions within the next four weeks. Town Manager Oefinger recommends the Town request the assistance of the Trust. He reported that the Trust has worked with 40 communities in the State of Connecticut providing a bridge function between private property owners.

**A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Bartnik, Jr., to recommend a resolution to use the Trust for Public Lands to prepare grant applications and to advise/assist the Town on other related matters.**

**The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Votes:** In Favor: 7 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartnik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright  
Abstain: 1 - Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

**2005-0021 Contributing Real Estate Conveyance Tax Revenue to Open Space Fund**

Not Discussed

**2005-0043 Jabez Smith House Property Expansion**

Not Discussed

**2005-0044 Restrictions in the Deeds of Town-Owned Properties**

Not Discussed

**2005-0042 Councilor Communications**

Discussed

*There was a brief discussion on Calendar and Communications. Councilor O'Beirne reported that on the Committee of the Whole agenda, the Calendar and Communications section was for the Mayor to talk about meetings that the Mayor went to and about meetings coming up. Mayor Watson stated that he meets with the Town Manager every Monday and that he lets people know about events coming up. Councilor Billing stated that it was her understanding that the formal Town Council meetings are the time for Councilors to mention communications that were not received by all Councilors or an issue for which a referral was going to be requested. Councilor Billing further stated "however, some Councilors seem to be using the "Communications" section of the meeting to state their opinions on issues, and she would like some clarification, because, if that is the purpose, she will start using it for that as well".*

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

*None.*

**8. OTHER BUSINESS**

*Councilor Wright requested a referral on Burnett's Corner. A brief discussion followed. The Burnett's Corner Committee came in front of the Council. The Council turned the building over to them with the deed. Subsequently we used a fair amount internally to stabilize the building.*

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

*A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Sheets, to adjourn at 10:08 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*