



# 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 Heather Sherman Bond, Kathryn M. Brown-Tracy, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter*

Tuesday, June 24, 2008

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

#### REGULAR MEETING

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

*Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m.*

2. **ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter

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

3. **Calendar and Communications**

*Councilor Brown-Tracy congratulated the Fitch 2008 Graduating Class.*

4. **Approval of Minutes**

**2008-0165 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)**

**RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meeting of June 10, 2008 are hereby accepted and approved.

**A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Brown-Tracy, to adopt.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

5. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

*None.*

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

**2008-0166 Meeting with Copp Board**

**Recommended for a Resolution**

*Dave Winkler, Chairman of the Copp Board noted that Belton Copp has resigned from the Board and has been replaced by Alan Copp. Mr. Winkler introduced Mr. Copp, Jim Sherrard, Neil Brown and Dom Venditti of the Board.*

*Town Manager Oefinger provided a brief background on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Copp Board and the Town Council and the conceptual plan developed by the Copp Board.*

*Mr. Winkler noted that the Copp Board has accomplished the things required of it under the terms of the Copp Property purchase agreement including creating a plan for use of the property. The Board assigned management of the property to the Parks and Recreation Department so that it would be managed in the same way as all other park land in the Town. The Board is looking for Council acceptance of the conceptual plan. Town Council acceptance is needed before major fundraising efforts can take place, which the Board is willing to do through the Groton Parks Foundation, a 501(c)3 entity. The concept plan has been developed using information from the*

current Plan of Conservation and Development reflecting the community's needs for recreation and open space. The Board has also been asked to accommodate the roller hockey rink which they are willing to do. The events field has been added for use by charitable and civic groups and will protect Poquonnock Plains Park.

Councilor O'Beirne expressed concern with building commercial establishments and interpreting it as allowable under the deed restrictions on commercial use of the land. Mr. Winkler noted the Copp Board is charged with interpreting the agreement. One of the original drafters of the agreement was on the Board at the time and agreed with the interpretation. The Board is not authorizing commercial buildings, just contracted entertainment services. Use of the events field would be contingent upon restoring the field to its original condition.

Councilor O'Beirne feels that if the Town Council blesses the conceptual plan, it is agreeing to specifics of the plan such as the community center and roller hockey rink. Councilor O'Beirne feels this is a good place for ball fields, but he can not agree to other things when they have not been studied or agreed to by the Council.

Mr. Winkler noted the Copp Property was purchased by the community for open space and recreation and it is the logical place to do what is proposed. The proposed permanent structures on the conceptual plan impact only 7% of the Copp Property acreage and only 22.4% of the property will be used for fields and other features. The Copp Board will monitor the Town's needs and alter the concept as necessary.

Councilor Bond thinks it is a great concept and likes the idea of having activities centrally located. She asked if endorsing a concept plan is setting it in stone. Town Manager Oefinger explained that he interprets a concept plan as just that, an endorsement of a general concept.

Councilor Sheets expressed concern with the site's proximity to a public drinking water supply. If the property was owned by Groton Utilities, the plan would have to be submitted to the State Department of Public Health to see if it complies with Class I and II watershed protection requirements. Councilor Sheets asked if the Council would be willing to require the plan to be submitted to the State Department of Public Health.

Mr. Winkler noted that the 250' setback that the Board adopted along the reservoir boundary came after a meeting with the Commissioner of the Department of Health Water Division. The Board also met with Groton Utilities and they have no problem with the concept plan.

Councilor O'Beirne feels it is appropriate that as funds come in, a discussion take place about what might actually be constructed. It is appropriate to have a concept plan, but Councilor O'Beirne objects to the Council putting a stamp of endorsement on the plan.

Councilor Streeter likes the conceptual plan and would like to see the word "suggested" added to it. He noted the costs will be much higher than projected.

Councilor Bond asked what benefit there is for the Town Council to endorse the plan, other than making the Board feel comfortable. Mr. Brown said it is important when seeking grants to assure that the group asking for money is well-recognized in the community. He noted that there has always been a certain tension associated with each of the parcels that was purchased as part of the open space bond package. One group is interested in recreational development; a second group wants the land retained in its natural form. In the early stages, some of the parcels purchased were identified for specific development and others were more likely to remain natural, however things change over time. The same "give and take" occurs among members of the Copp Board. Mr. Brown personally supports passive recreation and believes it is less expensive and more immediate. However, the Board has been approached numerous times over the years to

*provide recreational facilities.*

*Mr. Brown feels it is important for the Board to present conceptual plans to the Council from time to time to see what is most acceptable to the Council and most practical for the Board. At this point in time, the Board has money to move forward with trails. The Board would also like an open piece of land to do what Poquonnock Plains used to do when it was Burrows Field. Practically, the Board is a long way from constructing any buildings at this point so it is premature to argue about them.*

*Councilor Monteiro agreed with Councilor Bond. She can support the concept plan, but does not want to tie the hands of this Council or any future Council with respect to buildings. The property has been sitting for many years and the Town needs to do something with it along the lines of the original agreement. People are thrilled with the dog park and they would like to see other things on the property.*

*Councilor Sheets feels that leaving the property in its natural state also complies with the purposes that the Town had when it acquired the Copp property. She thanked Mr. Brown for acknowledging that there are two groups of people with different ideas for the property. Councilor Sheets feels that passive recreation is closest to open space, conservation, and protection of water resources and a trail system is appropriate. She could not support an events field and associated parking.*

*Councilor Kolnaski supports the concept plan and noted that whatever is developed has to follow the permitting process so it is not a big concern at this point.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to approve the Copp Park suggested conceptual plan as presented.**

**Councilor O'Beirne read the potential uses outlined in the deed for the property. Councilor Sheets noted that there was also referendum language that the voters approved. Councilor Bond asked for a guarantee that the Copp Board's plan will be approved by the Department of Health. Mr. Brown noted that there are no guarantees, but it has always been the Board's intention to protect water resources. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Votes:** In Favor: 6 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter  
Opposed: 3 - Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Sheets

**2007-0072**

**Citizen Committee on Property Tax Relief - Update**

**Recommended for a Resolution**

*Discussion followed on the definition of qualifying income. Councilor Monteiro noted that there are people who do not own property, but they retain life use, and the tax bills are in the name of the life use individual in care of the property owner. She was concerned that individuals could take advantage of the program without actually owning the property, but if eligibility is determined by the Assessor, the Assessor will know that the person is a life use tenant.*

*Discussion followed on individuals having to come before the Council with their personal information and it was noted that would only be in an appeal situation.*

*Councilor O'Beirne suggested adding a "means" test such as maximum net worth and discussion followed.*

*The Town Manager noted the Prime Interest Rate and discussion followed on tying the program's interest rate to the prime rate (+/-) to avoid modifying the ordinance in the future.*

*With respect to the residency requirement, the Town Attorney strongly recommends a residency*

requirement of something less than five years since the statute identifies a one year minimum. The Town Manager distributed an opinion on the issue from Mike Carey.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski to require a minimum residency of four years.

The motion carried with 8 in favor, 1 opposed (Councilor Sheets).

Discussion followed on the income limits and the Council asked that they be tied to household size. Councilor Bond asked that they NOT be tied to an index.

The Town Manager distributed an opinion from the Town Attorney on how the Council can modify the program on an as-needed basis without modifying the ordinance.

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Streeter, to calculate the interest rate as prime minus 1%.

The motion carried 7 in favor, 2 opposed (O'Beirne, Kolnaski).

Councilor O'Beirne wondered who would receive a greater benefit from this program than the 8% program. It was noted that an analysis was done and included in the Citizen Committee's report.

The consensus of the Committee of the Whole was to recommend a resolution to prepare the ordinance.

**2008-0012 Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2008 Standing Referral)**

**Discussed**

There is a joint meeting with the Board of Education on Wednesday, June 25th at 7:00 p.m. at the Catherine Kolnaski Magnet School cafetorium.

**2008-0088 Reconstruction of the Packer Road/Godfrey Road Intersection**

**Recommended for a Resolution**

The Town Manager noted that there were no comments received at the public hearing. This item is on the agenda for the Town Council's consideration. The consensus of the committee was to recommend this item for a resolution.

**2008-0093 Council Goalsetting**

**Discussed**

Councilors were asked again to forward their comments to the Mayor. A special meeting was scheduled for July 1st at 6:30 p.m. to talk about this issue.

**2008-0169 State Grant - Tercentennial Legacy Playground**

A motion was made by Councilor Monteiro, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

**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 Sheets, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to adjourn at 9:04 p.m.

*The motion carried unanimously.*