



**Town of Groton, Connecticut**  
**Town Council Committee of the Whole**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340

Town Manager: 860-441-6630

Town Clerk: 860-441-6640

*Mayor Patrice Granatosky, Councilor Portia Bordelon, Councilor Aundré Bumgardner, Councilor Rachael Franco,  
Councilor Conrad Heede, Councilor Juan Melendez Jr., Councilor Lian Obrey, Councilor Juliette Parker, and  
Councilor Joe Zeppieri*

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**Tuesday, March 09, 2021**

**6:30 PM**

**Virtual Meeting via Zoom**

Broadcasted Live on GMTV & YouTube

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**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Granatosky called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

- 2.a. All Councilors were present with the exception of Councilors Heede and Councilor Bumgardner.

Also in attendance were Town Manager John Burt, Director of Parks and Recreation Mark Berry, Golf Course Superintendent Eric Morrison, Golf Pro Todd Goodhue, Chief Fusaro, Director of Planning and Development Service Jon Reiner, Assistant Director of Planning and Development Services Deb Jones, Finance Director Cindy Landry and Assessor Mary Gardner.

(Councilor Bumgardner arrived at 6:33 p.m.; Councilor Heede arrived at 8:09 p.m.)

**3. CALENDAR AND COMMUNICATIONS**

- 3.a. Councilors spoke on the communications they received regarding blight issues and current economic development projects. It was noted that enforcement code issues and police oversight from the Town Council Public Safety Committee would be discussed in the near future.

Councilor Franco mentioned that the City of Groton Police Chief would be retiring in May. She thanked him and wished him well on his future endeavors.

Councilor Bumgardner thanked voters for voting at the Democratic Primary and thanked the Council regardless of the outcome.

Mayor Granatosky updated the Council on the joint meeting with the Town and City Councils/Board of Education/RTM.

Town Manager Burt provided a COVID rate and vaccine update for the Town. He mentioned that he was hopeful the Town offices would be opening at the end of the month if COVID rates continue to decline; the Senior Center opening would be at a later date once the Town receives the State's recommendations.

Town Manager Burt provided some background information on the Board of Education

(BOE) retiree COLAs noting that the BOE’s union contracts did not include language on COLAs. He mentioned there has not been a request since 1990 and needed consensus from the Council if they wish to pursue a study on this item. Town Manager Burt stated that this came about as a BOE retiree approached Councilor Zeppieri with their concern. He explained that there was no process included in the union contracts but that does not mean it is not allowed.

A brief discussion began amongst the Council if they would like to move forward with a study. Town Manager Burt provided that the study could be anywhere from \$5,000 to \$7,000 and he will research if Human Resources has funds in their budget to cover this cost.

After discussion, it was the consensus of the Council to further research this item and be brought back at a future Council meeting for a more depth discussion.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

4.a. 2021-163 February 23, 2021 Minutes

MOTION: To approve the Committee of the Whole meeting minutes of February 23, 2021.

Moved by: Bumgardner, André		Seconded by: Franco, Rachael		
Committee Members	YES	NO	ABSTAIN	RECUSE
Portia Bordelon	X			
Aundré Bumgardner	X			
Rachael Franco	X			
Patrice Granatosky	X			
Juan Melendez, Jr.	X			
Lian Obrey	X			
Juliette Parker			X	
Joe Zeppieri	X			
APPROVED				

5. NEW BUSINESS

5.a. 2021-18 - 1 2021 Shennecossett Rules/Regulations and Rates

Director of Parks and Recreation Mark Berry provided the background on this item. He explained that this is an item that is presented on an annual basis.

The Parks and Recreation Commission/Golf Advisory Board reviewed and recommended the rate changes and regulations. Mr. Berry explained that there was a 3% increase to rates for the Adult, Associate and Associate Plus season pass for 2021 to correct reduced rates from the past.

In response to Councilor Bordelon, Mr. Berry provided that the golf cart fees are in alignment with other area courses. He also provided that the Town has both options to pay in person and online.

To clarify, Mr. Berry explained that there is not a proposal to raise the daily fees.

MOTION: To recommend a resolution approving the proposed changes for the Shennecossett Golf Course 2021 Rates and Rules and Regulations.

Moved by: Parker, Juliette		Seconded by: Franco, Rachael		
Committee Members	YES	NO	ABSTAIN	RECUSE
Portia Bordelon	X			
Aundré Bumgardner	X			
Rachael Franco	X			
Patrice Granatosky	X			
Juan Melendez, Jr.	X			
Lian Obrey	X			
Juliette Parker	X			
Joe Zeppieri	X			
APPROVED				

5.b. 2021-102 SECT Regional Traffic Unit Mutual Police Assistance Compact

Chief Fusaro provided the background information on this item. He explained that this agreement allows for a regional approach to pursue motor vehicle accident investigation with trained officers among the Town of Groton, City of Groton, Stonington and Ledyard. Officers would be trained to survey the area of a serious injury or death scene to gain evidence for a prosecutable case. The Towns would leverage these officers in a collaborative effort when a case is being investigated. The Town of Groton already has four trained officers in this area. Chief Fusaro provided that it is cost effective to participate in this program. He explained that it is also more attractive when applying for grants to have a multi-agency response team.

In response to Councilor Obrey, Chief Fusaro provided that there is no additional cost other than paying the officer for their time if they are off the clock at the time of the investigation; this would include any overtime. He also shared that there could be costs for equipment if needed, but would look to the other towns to provide the equipment if they have it in their possession.

MOTION: To recommend a resolution authorizing the Town Manager John Burt to sign the Southeastern Connecticut Regional Traffic Unit Mutual Police Assistance Compact.

Moved by: Franco, Rachael		Seconded by: Bordelon, Portia		
Committee Members	YES	NO	ABSTAIN	RECUSE
Portia Bordelon	X			
Aundré Bumgardner	X			
Rachael Franco	X			
Patrice Granatosky	X			
Juan Melendez, Jr.	X			
Lian Obrey	X			
Juliette Parker	X			
Joe Zeppieri	X			
APPROVED				

5.c. 2020-41 - 4 Short Term Rental Discussion

Director of Planning Jon Reiner provided the Council with some questions to assist on how they would like to move forward with regulating Short Term Rentals (STRs). He explained that it is important to consider these questions when pursuing how to move forward so there

is a clear direction. Some of the items to consider were noise, traffic, registration of STRs, loss of housing to families, impact on economic development, property owners' rights, housing stock reinvestment and zoning districts.

Mayor Granatosky shared that the working group has had many discussions on this item and continues to receive concerns from residents.

Discussion began on ordinances and statutes already in place to protect residents from noise and parties; recognizing that STRs are a tool to bring tourists into the area and contribute to the Town; STRs not being at the expense of neighborhoods; allowing personal homes as opposed to a commercial owners; putting consistent rules in place that will apply whether someone is renting or owns the property and coordinating unified regulations with Noank, Groton Long Point and the City of Groton.

Councilors Franco and Melendez shared their concerns on an ordinance that infringes on the property owner's rights.

Discussion then began on a town fee to register the STRs, a housing tax, and the safety of the properties.

In response to Councilor Melendez, Chief Fusaro provided that officers respond currently to disturbances at STRs and there are a number of violations that could be pursued if needed; however, they try to mitigate the problem unless it is necessary to take further action. He shared that Town code violations would be beyond the scope of law enforcement unless an executive order is in place such as in COVID times with large groups congregating.

Councilor Melendez suggested fine for home owners be put in place for STRs when there are repeat offenders of noise and disturbances. Mr. Reiner asked the Council keep in mind that some of these properties are renting out for hundreds of dollars per night and to ensure that fines are adequate to encourage responsible renters.

Discussion continued with registration, not being too restrictive with an ordinance, the value of keeping family homes, health and safety inspections of properties on an annual basis, the need for part-time blight enforcement officer to manage STR issues on nights and weekends and hiring a company to handle the initial registration of STRs.

In response to Councilor Parker, Mr. Reiner provided that he would have to research to see if the Town/State collects a fee for Bed and Breakfast type establishments.

Mr. Reiner explained that many towns have started the process of establishing an ordinance but many have more questions than answers. He explained that he would rather pursue an STR ordinance because the current STR owners would have grandfathered rights under zoning enforcement. He agreed that a STR ordinance should apply across the entire Town.

Mayor Granatosky shared that it was ideal to have a town wide ordinance but cannot force the other entities. She provided that they be invited to future discussions.

In response to Councilor Bumgardner, Mayor Granatosky provided that information about the STR regulations in surrounding Towns was included in previous agenda packets that were provided to the Council.

Mr. Reiner shared that the Planning and Zoning Commission would not have a direct role in

the STR ordinance as ordinances are adopted by the Town Council. In response to Councilor Bumgardner, Mr. Reiner stated that requiring property owners be present when renting their property is too restrictive in our community.

Discussion began on the addition of an enforcement officer on nights and weekends. Mr. Reiner explained that this addition would be dependent upon on how restrictive the Council makes the ordinance.

Chief Fusaro cautioned the Council that police officers have had to deal with property owners' legal counsel when mitigating the concern of enforcement through executive orders due to COVID. He shared that the Town may deal with the same issue when enforcing an ordinance. Chief Fusaro encouraged the Council to use the laws already in place.

Mr. Reiner reviewed that the Council wants to move forward with a registration process, annual fee and a yearly safety inspection of the property.

Chief Fusaro pointed out that some of the safety concerns would fall under the Fire Marshall's purview.

Councilor Bordelon offered that the part-time enforcement officer would be able to address blight issues on the nights/weekend hours as well.

Mr. Reiner provided that he would compile a list of items to address through an ordinance and pursue a registration system. He offered that the Council can then look at other topics to be regulated in the future. Mr. Reiner reminded the Council that an ordinance can be changed at any time. He shared that once initial regulations are in place; staff will be able to identify any future concerns after some time has passed.

DISCUSSED

5.d. 2020-432 - 2 Tax Abatement for Seniors, Disabled, and Veterans

Town Manager John Burt provided that there was a matrix of tax abatement options provided in the agenda packet for the Council along with a list of the effect on lost revenue.

Councilor Zeppieri provided his reasoning behind requesting this item noting that disabled and senior residents are on a fixed income and gave the Council the example of one senior resident paying a third of her income in property taxes. He referenced the option under CGS § 124-12a in which the Town cannot abate taxes more than 8% of the property owner's income. The cost abated will be held as due from the property owner and a lien is then placed on the property until such time the property is sold. At that time, the Town will be reimbursed the abated taxes plus 6% interest. Councilor Zeppieri also mentioned the option under CGS § 12-129n, tax relief program for certain homeowners 65 years of age or older or permanently and totally disabled.

Director of Finance Cindy Landry provided that the CGS § 124-12a program was already in place with one resident taking advantage of the program. She shared with the Council that the CGS § 12-129n program has a requirement to appoint a Finance Committee of five tax payers in the Town of Groton to complete a study of impact of abatements in 60 days.

Councilor Heede arrived at the meeting at 8:09 p.m.

Councilor Franco suggested a group be formed to research all options and how it would

impact the Town. Councilor Obrey agreed with Councilor Franco's suggestion and explained that seniors need assistance to stay in their homes. She also suggested a possible tax freeze at a certain age and shared with the Council that seniors are applying for reverse mortgages and still cannot manage the taxes due on their homes.

Town Manager Burt provided that Assessor Mary Gardner would be willing to work with the group on this issue. He suggested that the Council be cautious when pursuing tax abatements for certain groups because it will raise the taxes of other residents including single parent households.

Mayor Granatosky clarified that the Council wanted to pursue a working group separate from the Finance Committee referenced in CGS § 12-129n.

Both Councilors Franco and Obrey wanted residents to be included in the group along with representation from the RTM.

Mayor Granatosky received confirmation from Councilors Zeppieri, Bumgardner and Obrey to be part of the working group who will invite others to be part of the discussion.

Councilor Bordelon shared her concern for placing the tax burden on other residents but was in support of the group to research further.

Discussion began on tax relief in subdivisions and fire districts. Town Manager Burt explained that the tax relief would only apply to Town taxes. Ms. Landry confirmed that CGS § 124-12a only applied to the Town as the fire districts are not a municipality.

Councilor Parker clarified that this tax relief only applies to real estate.

DISCUSSED

5.e. 2021-141 Discussion of Possible Land Acquisition - Potential Executive Session (Potential)

Town Manager Burt provided the back ground information on this item explaining that the Town applied for a grant in the amount of \$660,000 for the purchase of the parcel and received an award in the amount of \$352,000.

The Committee of the Whole recessed at 8:35 p.m.

The Committee of the Whole reconvened at 8:40 p.m.

Town Manager Burt asked that the property be referred to as the Wolfbrook LLC property.

Discussion began on the grant amount awarded being significantly lower than expected and the additional expense to the Town. It was provided that there is \$70,000 in the Land Acquisition Fund that could be applied toward the purchase.

Councilor Heede shared his concern of applying funds to this purchase, possibly increasing the tax rates and hindering projects that have been stalled from previous years that need attention. He questioned the urgency of this purchase.

In response, Mr. Reiner provided that there is a sense of urgency and a timeline if the Council wishes to move forward with grant funding.

Councilor Franco noted she would like the majority of this discussion in open session stating

that the Council needs to do their due diligence in seeing if this is the right purchase for the Town as there are other central properties. She shared that the Council should have a larger plan with goals and priorities.

It was the consensus of the Council to go into executive session to discuss further.

MOTION: I hereby move that the members of the Town Council, Town Manager John Burt, Planning Director Jon Reiner and Assistant Planning Director Deb Jones go into executive session pursuant to General Statute Section 1-200 (6)(d) discussion of the selection of a site or the lease, sale or purchase of real estate by the state or political subdivision of the state when publicity regarding such site lease, sale, purchase or construction would adversely impact the price of such site lease, sale, purchase or construction until such time as all the property has been acquired or all proceedings of transactions concerning same have been terminated or abandoned with said discussion being related to the potential purchase of the Watrous property which is referenced in the State of Connecticut Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program grant award letter.

Moved by: Granatosky, Patrice		Seconded by: Obrey, Lian		
Committee Members	YES	NO	ABSTAIN	RECUSE
Portia Bordelon	X			
Aundré Bumgardner	X			
Rachael Franco		X		
Patrice Granatosky	X			
Conrad Heede			X	
Juan Melendez, Jr.	X			
Lian Obrey	X			
Juliette Parker	X			
Joe Zeppieri	X			
APPROVED				

The executive session started at 8:53 p.m.

The executive session ended at 9:46 p.m.

Councilors Zeppieri and Parker left the meeting.

In response to Councilor Franco, Mayor Granatosky stated that this item will be discussed again at the next Committee of the Whole.

6. REVIEW OF AGENDA ITEMS

None.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

Councilor Bordelon requested a referral to the Rules Committee reviewing the time limit under Citizens’ Petitions. Councilors Franco and Heede supported the referral.

Chairman Obrey asked that the referral be sent to the Council via email to consider.

8. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:51 p.m.