



City of Groton, Connecticut

City Municipal Building
295 Meridian Street
Groton, CT 06340

Committee of the Whole Minutes

Council Chambers

6:00 PM

Monday, January 27, 2020

Mayor Hedrick called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Mayor Keith Hedrick, Councilors Lisa McCabe, Reginald Stanford, Gwenevieve Depot, Minerva Ortiz, Rashaad Carter, Finance Director Ron Yuhas and City Clerk Debra Patrick.

Excused: Deputy Mayor Jamal Beckford.

II. REFERRALS:

REFERRAL ITEM #690 CITY BUDGET PRESENTATIONS FY21 POLICE BUDGET PRESENTATION

Chief Michael Spellman said there is a 2.8% increase overall and that includes all costs. Some costs are offset by grants, revenue and asset forfeiture. He said one of his goals when he became Chief was to upgrade the technology in the agency and they are accomplishing that through grants and a donation from a resident.

Councilor Depot asked if there was an event that caused the vehicle operations/maintenance request to go up while the bottom line is lower.

Chief Spellman said they want to maintain the vehicles as long as possible.

Councilor Depot asked if the sell back of sick/vacation time is because they aren't using it and if there is a cap to how much can be sold back. She asked what the longevity item is for.

Chief Spellman said it is an incentive for those who don't use the time, they get a redemptive day and that there is a cap. Longevity is for years of service.

Councilor Depot asked if the blight officer is in this budget.

Chief Spellman said that position is in the Building & Zoning budget and that Colonel Frishman gives far more than the part time hours he is paid for.

Councilor depot asked if there is an opening in dispatch.

Chief Spellman said they run into OT with dispatch and it is cheaper to pay the OT than to fill a opposition with benefits included.

Councilor depot asked about the training budget.

Chief Spellman said he is proponent of having a well educated force.

There was further discussion on the merits of the continuing education of the members of the agency.

Councilor Depot moved Councilor McCabe seconded a motion to move Referral Item # 690, the Police Budget, to the February 3, 2020 Mayor and Council meeting. Motion carried.

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FY21 HIGHWAY BUDGET PRESENTATION

Public Works Director Tim Umrysz said the operating budget is up 3.58%, stating benefits are a driver in the increase. The overall budget is up 16.8 % due to the Town of Groton road bonds for paving no longer being available.

Mayor Hedrick said he has spoken with Town Manager Burt and they are evaluating the paving index and are looking at the possibility of another road bond for late FY20 or FY21.

There was discussion on the truck that is being replaced under capital budget, it is 16 years old and will either be traded in or auctioned. Mayor Hedrick said while the 16.8% increase is a big jump the operating budget increase at 3.58% is in line with last year.

Councilor Carter asked if engineering is contractual or an employee.

Mr. Umrysz said it is an employee who does the storm water and project management.

Mayor Hedrick said the state requirements for storm water testing have increased significantly.

Councilor Depot asked about the budgeted amount for diesel fuel, why is it the same as last year if you go over.

Finance Director Yuhas said they left it the same with the hope that it would even out amongst the trucks.

Councilor Depot moved Councilor Stanford seconded a motion to move Referral Item #690, Highway Budget to the February 3, 2020 Mayor and council meeting. Motion carried.

CITY BUDGET FY20

Mr. Yuhas the City budget expenditures is in line through December 31st.

Councilor Depot asked about the Citizen Participation line item and what it is for.

Mr. Yuhas said that is for City Day.

Councilor Depot said it appears it went over budget.

Mr. Yuhas said previously Clerk Patrick had been in charge and now it is under Parks & Recreation. He said they brought in some new things for the event.

Councilor Depot asked what the Boards & Commissions line item is for.

Building Official Carlton Smith said it is for the 4 commissions under his purview.

Councilor Depot said they didn't use much this year to date.

Mr. Smith said they haven't had as much coming before them as they did last FY with the EB expansion.

**REFERRAL ITEM #550 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS/BONDS
TYLER HOUSE WINDOWS**

Mayor Hedrick said they are looking to repurpose bonds to work on these projects. He went over the meetings that would take place for this to happen.

Parks & Recreation Director Mary Hill said they replaced most of the windows 2 years ago most on the 1st and 2nd floor. She said they want to complete the remaining windows on all 3 floors and do some soffit/gable repairs as well. She said there won't be maintenance cost for painting the windows as they are all the same color as the house trim. The quote is \$94,966.65 and is the same company that did the work 2 years ago.

Mayor Hedrick said some of the work was done to prevent structural issues due to rain.

Councilor Depot asked where the funds are being repurposed from.

Mayor Hedrick said it was Colonel Ledyard School bond fund.

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Councilor McCabe asked if this is Phase 2, only a portion of the 1st floor was done in Phase 1.

Ms. Hill went over the windows that were replaced in Phase 1.

Councilor Ortiz why it is in such disrepair and asked how often this is done.

Ms. Hill said it was listed in the CIP in the past but didn't get done. It hadn't been done in a number of years.

Councilor Depot said she is glad we are getting the bigger projects done. We have already seen firsthand how not funding for maintenance has created buildings that were in terrible disrepair.

Mayor Hedrick said we will look at the Zbierski House in the future.

TYLER HOUSE BATHROOMS/ OFFICE/ HALLWAY

Ms. Hill said she got an estimate to refresh the bathrooms, hallway and office for \$27,000.00. She said they would remove the old rusty stalls, replace the bathroom doors, floor and install vinyl partitions. They removed the lockers from the hallway so they will paint there and in the office. She said she and Tim Umrysz will have to inspect the ceiling tiles in the office.

Mayor Hedrick said the exposure to the salt air caused much of the damage with the metal partitions and they wanted to replace with materials that are resistant to the elements.

Councilor Carter asked if the handicapped porta-potty if there because there isn't room in the bathrooms for a larger accessible stall.

Ms. Hill said the porta-potty is only there off season, September until December and March until June, when the bathroom facilities aren't open.

Councilor Depot asked if the cost is the reason they close them.

Ms. Hill said her staff comes off the road at 3:00 p.m. so it would be a challenge to lock prior to that time with the facilities being used.

MUNICIPAL BUILDING WINDOWS, DOORS AND LANDING

Mr. Umrysz said the front landing needs work and they would like to install heating element with 3 thermostats in the landing concrete.

Mayor Hedrick said the salt and other chemicals are corrosive to the concrete and eliminating them will help.

Mr. Umrysz said the windows and doors can be done at the same time.

Mayor Hedrick said some of this will have to be paid for through bonding.

Mr. Umrysz said many offices and the conference room in the building are very drafty.

Councilor Depot asked if the heated landing is in any other place that we can see.

Mr. Umrysz said the contractors are doing it more and more.

Councilor McCabe asked if this would be similar to heated driveways.

Mr. Umrysz said it is.

POLICE DIVE LOCKER ASBESTOS ABATEMENT

Building Official, Carlton Smith distributed photos of the room where they have the asbestos. He said this has been discussed for some time and since it is sprayed on it is costly to remove. There is computer/electronic equipment in the room that would have to be protected so IT staff would have to be included. He said it will cost about \$100,000.00 to do the removal, repair and coverage for IT.

Councilor Depot said with the space issues and safety issue she is glad it will be done.

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Councilor Carter asked how long this has been on the list to be done.

Mr. Smith said 5-6 years.

Councilor Carter asked if other rooms in the building need to be done.

Mr. Smith said 1 more.

There was discussion on any other areas with asbestos at the high end of the rating scale, areas that will be abated over the next several months on both sides of the building and an overview of the process to abate the asbestos in the floors.

Councilor McCabe asked if the critical computer systems could be moved out during the abatement rather than having IT staff suit up.

Mr. Smith said they can't move it for various reasons.

FIRE DEPARTMENT COMPANY ONE REPAVING

Chief Robert Tompkins said they have an estimate from last year with a breakdown. He went over the patching and repairs done in the past but due to the weight of the trucks there are grooves in the pavement as well. He went over the scope of the work they would like done.

Mayor Hedrick said there is damage to the thresholds and cracks in the lot.

POLICE LOCKER ROOMS

Chief Spellman said it is a facility management initiative and the locker rooms for the officer's have not been improved in 40 years. He said there is storage for officer's equipment that and they would like to control the environment they are stored in. He said the showers in both rooms should be matched up to provide equal facilities for both men and women officers, as required under Title 7. He said the facilities can also factor into recruiting.

Councilor Depot said she is glad to see improvements and asked if there are cost estimates.

Chief Spellman said he will have it when they are ready to proceed after the abatement has been completed.

Mayor Hedrick said they will have a breakdown of each project prior to the public hearing.

**REFERRAL ITEM #763 BEACH AND PARK COMMITTEE
EASTERN POINT BEACH CONCESSIONS**

Ms. Hill said she received a letter from Groton Public Schools Food Service Department stating they want to return to run the concession stand. This will be the 4th season for them. The rent has been incrementally raised over time beginning with the first year. The goal was to have funds set aside for equipment if needed. They have requested the rent be held at the same \$1,100.00 they paid the past 2 years. She said she is glad they want to return, they have done a great job providing healthy options and keeping the prices reasonable.

Councilor McCabe asked for clarification that they requested the rent freeze last year and you froze it.

Ms. Hill said yes but it isn't her call but in 2016 said of the 7 or so people she reached out to with an RFP only GPS.

Councilor Carter asked if it was her call what would she say.

Councilor Depot said last year they were given information on where the money went from any profits. Is it possible to get that information again to see how it benefits GPS.

Ms. Hill said she could ask again responded.

There was a discussion to request a breakdown, whether the GPS business manager was

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comfortable sharing the information, food costs being kept low with a great variety available and maybe find a way to meet in the middle.

Councilor Ortiz agrees that that an itemization would be helpful and to look at the rent and that another group might be interested. The planned increase was known to them.

Councilor Carter said he was on the Council when they brought GPS in and the people who ran it previously paid the same low rent for many years. He said with GPS we have a lot of students working there.

There was further discussion to try to meet in the middle, they are only looking for their operating budget/expenses for GPS running the concession and where the money is spent.

Councilor McCabe said that since the City provides the equipment should we take that into consideration the costs for repairs/replacement or insurance.

Ms. Hill said we do set funds aside for repairs/replacement and GPS pay the utilities and carry the insurance with the City named as a second insured.

2020 EASTERN POINT BEACH RULES & REGULATIONS

Mayor Hedrick noted an email received from Alan Shearer requesting that bikes be allowed to be ridden in the parking lot during the off season.

Ms. Hill said the Beach & Parks Committee began reviewing the Rules and Regulations in October 2019 and did speak with Mr. Shearer regarding the bike issue and decided they did not wish to make the change. The committee did add some language to #21 prohibiting skateboards, roller-blades, razor scooters or recreational motorized scooters on beach property. They debated the bike issue and wanted to leave it as it is.

Mayor Hedrick said the longer gate hours until 8:00 p.m. has been discussed.

Ms. Hill said they did a survey of beach patrons regarding the gate staying open until 8:00 p.m. versus 6:00 p.m. and only 3 people of the 65 or so who responded were against the 8:00 p.m. time. She said they distributed over 800 surveys.

Councilor Depot said a number of complaints she gets are about the later hours.

Ms. Hill said the later hours are in relation to the costs to keep the facilities open later so people can come to eat at the concession stand.

Councilor Depot feels it is prohibitive to those who can't afford a beach pass and would still like to enjoy the beach. She asked what the cost to the City is to keep the facilities open.

Ms. Hill said the committee looked at all of the variables and determined the 8:00 p.m. was working. She said the costs are for staff, and materials to keep the bathrooms open.

Councilor Carter said the other considerations is the cost to staff at the beach in order to keep the facilities open particularly with the minimum wage increases.

Mayor Hedrick said the budget would be coming to the Council soon and the wage issue is addressed in that budget. He has spoken with residents in the EPB neighborhood who have had concerns about people using Griswold Point instead.

Councilor McCabe asked if we have the same restrictions for bikes in our other recreation areas.

Ms. Hill said the configuration is different with vehicles coming and going in the parking lots of the beach versus the park.

There was a discussion on allowing dogs off season, that an ordinance governs that change not the rules and regulations, concerns of cars in the parking lot and the possibility of someone being hurt in the parking lot and the liability of the City.

Councilor Depot doesn't feel she was given a reasonable answer from the B&P Committee when

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she asked why they wouldn't make changes. They are there to serve everyone and she said she gets complaints that they are restrictive and don't listen.

Councilor Ortiz agrees and feels times are changing so rules can be changed. There are a lot of people who can't afford a beach pass and enjoy the beach with their families so the later gate hours keep them from going in. she would like to see bikes allowed in the off season at the beach.

Ms. Hill said the rules are reviewed each year and come back to the Council for approval. She can bring this back to the B&P Committee for the Council.

Councilor Carter said he has been the Council representative to the B&P Committee since 2017 and said many questions have been asked about these issues and for some of the issues there are liability concerns. The costs for programs have been kept low. He noted how the committee discussed possible liabilities to the City in determining their decisions. He said many don't distinguish the difference between rules and an ordinance.

Mayor Hedrick asked if there is a downside risk to rules only applying during the season.

Ms. Hill said the rules only apply 3rd week in June-Labor Day.

Councilor Depot said the B&P Committee said it is a liability issue so she would like to have our attorney and insurance carrier weigh in on it.

Ms. Hill said they changed the rules 6 years ago due to some near misses with someone on a bike being hit by vehicles so the rules are enforced year round. The committee has concerns about making some rules seasonal and some year round where do they stop. She said if the Council wants to make the changes she can bring it back to the B&P Committee, these are their recommendations. She said her job is to enforce the rules once they are in place.

Councilor Ortiz asked if they can be reviewed.

Ms. Hill said they have been reviewed by the B&P Committee October-January, but they can be brought back to them if the Council wants that.

There was discussion on whether there is documentation of the near misses, the liability to the City regardless of signage prohibiting something at all times, that the beach is a great place that should be utilized for the public enjoyment year round, costs for the gate closure at 6:00 p.m.

There was further discussion when the bike rule changed 6 years ago.

Ms. Hill said she would bring it back to the B&P Committee if that is what the Council wants.

Councilor Depot said she would like to see more information on costs, liabilities or why we can't change the rules for 1 years and review again for the next year.

Councilor Carter said he hasn't had an influx of residents asking to ride bikes at the beach off season.

Mayor Hedrick said each of the Councilors may have a different sphere of residents who might reach out to them.

There was discussion on the numbers of people who may have asked about riding bikes and the increased liabilities for larger numbers of people riding in the parking lot, how it is enforced in the off season, that the members of the B&P Committee are generous for offering their time to serve, that near misses of riders by vehicles have only happened during the season, whether it is a rule or a law

Ms. Hill asked if they wished to make language changes that would allow for biking and that she visits the beach twice a day in the off season and has staff there at various points in the day so they can then revisit the language change in a year.

Councilor Depot said trying it for a year would be acceptable and reasonable.

Ms. Hill asked if they wanted to change the language on page 5 and bring it to the B& P Committee

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to make that change.

Mayor Hedrick asked if they want it be changed on page 1, A. to All Rules Apply During The Season 3rd week of June through Labor Day.

Discussion that changing the language on page 1 A. might increase liability, they would prefer changing the language on page 5, #25.

There was discussion on the having the gate open until 8:00 when there are no lifeguards after 6:00, that the beach pass is a parking permit it is up to the individual what they choose to use the beach or the concession stand, costs of staff is going up yearly and that the longer gate fees are meant to help with that, that there are families that can't afford a beach pass so they don't get to enjoy the beach beginning at 6:00, what the costs might be to staff the beach until 8:00 and that the fees only cover about 58% of the costs.

It was agreed that this would go back to the B&P Committee to discuss changing the language on page 5, #25 and changing the gate hours from 8:00 to 6:00.

Councilor Carter said the Councilors and the public are welcome to attend the B&P Committee meeting the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

Councilor Depot said there is a vacancy on the committee if anyone is interested in serving.

2020 RECREATION DEPARTMENT USER FEES

Ms. Hill said there will be an increase for the Summer Playground program for residents and non-residents for full and half day participants in part due to the minimum wage increase.

Councilor Ortiz said that the fees are prohibitive to some families.

Ms. Hill said there are scholarships through Groton Human Services that are based on income.

There was discussion on the reasonable rates and the assistance available to families from Groton Human Services

Ms. Hill said the pavilion rentals went to hourly rates last year and it wasn't successful. Previously rentals were done in 4 hour increments so they want to go back to that. They recommended a small increase in the fees with the 4 hour increments.

Councilor Depot agreed with the 4 hour increments.

Ms. Hill said beach passes will remain at the same cost as last year.

Councilor Depot moved Councilor Stanford seconded a motion to move Referral Item #763, Recreation Department User Fees, to the February 3, 2020 Mayor and Council meeting. Motion carried.

REFERRAL ITEM #561 GROTON UTILITIES FINANCIALS

Mr. Yuhas went over the revenues, operating expenses and net earnings for electric, water and sewer for the month of December 2019.

REFERRAL ITEM #748 DONATIONS

TVCCA

Mayor Hedrick said this would not be acted upon as Groton Utilities will be making a donation to TVCCA.

Councilor Depot asked what amount GU would be donating.

Mayor Hedrick wasn't certain of the amount but felt it was more than the City would donate.

**REFERRAL ITEM #742 GROTON UTILITIES
ELECTRIC CABLE PURCHASE REQUEST**

Groton Utilities Director Ron Gaudet said they have to replace failed cable under Thomas Road. It was bid out and they are going with the lowest acceptable bidder.

Councilor Depot asked if the age of the cable is the cause for failure.

Director Gaudet said it is near the bridge on Thomas Road.

Councilor Depot asked if it was budgeted.

Director Gaudet said it was the intention to budget it for the FY20/21 but the failure occurred sooner.

Councilor Depot moved Councilor McCabe seconded a motion to move Referral Item #742, Electric Cable Purchase Request, to the February 3, 2020 Mayor and Council meeting. Motion carried.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Councilor Depot moved Councilor Stanford seconded a motion to enter into Executive Session pursuant to CT General Statutes Section 1-200(6)(e), 1-210(10) to discuss legal strategy to include the Council and Groton Utilities Director Ron Gaudet.

Motion carried.

Executive Session commenced in C8 at 8:31 p.m.

Executive Session ended at 8:49 p.m.

ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERS

Councilor Depot moved Councilor McCabe seconded a motion to move Referral Item #742, Environmental Partners, to the February 3, 2020 Mayor and Council meeting. Motion carried.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Councilor McCabe moved Councilor Stanford seconded a motion to adjourn. Motion carried.

Mayor Hedrick adjourned the meeting at 8:51 p.m.

ATTEST:

APPROVED:

**Debra Patrick
City Clerk**