

Minutes
Groton Democratic Town Committee
Thursday, June 28, 2023

Call to Order and Welcoming Remarks

The meeting was called to order at 7:09 p.m. by Chair, Natalie Billing. Guests were welcomed and introduced. Paul Fox is a potential RTM candidate from D6. Adrian Johnson is a potential BOE candidate. Sandra Fetters is a potential RTM candidate, D2. They each said a few words about themselves and were greeted warmly.

Members present were: Adam Puccino, Sr., Matthew Shulman, Janice Kimball, Bev Washington, Doris Pulaski, Edward Jacome, Richard Paul-Norris, Conrad Heede, Liz Duarte, Paul Duarte, Autumn Hanscom, Ian Thomas, Portia Bordelon, Chris Conley, Shawn Powers, Kristen Powers, Meredith Key, Anne-Marie Foster, Gary Welles, Juan Melendez, Carole McCarthy, Katrina Fitzgerald, Peter Roper, Natalie Billing, Al Fritsche, Joanne Wayland-Doyen, J. Bruce Jones, Mary von Dorster, John Wirzbicki, and Alex Koumanelis.

Guests present were: Betsy Ritter, Paul Fox, Adrian Johnson, Christine Johnson, Sandra Fetters, and Joe Baril.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made to accept the May 2023 Minutes by Peter Roper, seconded by Shaw, Powers. The motion passed unanimously, with two corrections: that the spelling of Richard Semeraro's name be corrected, and that the person who seconded the motion to accept the April minutes was corrected to Mary von Doster.

TREASURER'S REPORT

John Wirzbicki, Treasurer, reported that at the time of the meeting, the committee had, after donations and expenses, \$9,960.61 on hand. \$1,400.00 in additional new donations were reported by Natalie tonight, giving the committee a total of \$11,360.61. The report is accepted with no action necessary. Our thanks to Treasurer Wirzbicki. Natalie mentioned that running an effective campaign costs \$15,000 for mailers, and postage and Headquarters and lawn signs and walk cards. It's hoped there will be several thousand in reserve for the start of next years Presidential election, so, she urged all members to continue making donations and paying dues.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- A. Juliette Parker, committee secretary, has asked to step down. Doris Pulaski has agreed to serve as secretary. Members expressed gratitude and appreciation to Juliette for her dedicated service these many years.
- B. Paperwork sent to all candidates included an error in the date of the July endorsement meeting. The paperwork said the meeting would occur on Thursday, July 22. The meeting is Thursday, July 20, at 6:00 p.m. at the Thrive 55 Center. We need a quorum for this meeting, so it is especially important to spread the word and make every effort to attend.
- C. So far, only a few candidates have returned their paperwork. Two candidates included generous donations! Thank you!!! Early, generous donations relieve pressure on fund raising and allow us to plan the best campaign possible. There is still time to return the forms, but the sooner the better. We do not want any candidate fined for failing to file the B forms on time.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The nominating committee report was given by Natalie Billing in the absence of Dan Gaiewski. The committee has been meeting regularly. They expect to have a full slate of candidates for Board of Education. We may possibly need one more candidate for Town Council, so keep asking people to run. The full slate of candidates for RTM includes members who are also running for Town Council. We

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still need one RTM candidate for district 3, as well as replacements for any successful Council candidates. You are all members of the nominating committee, so please keep asking folks to run.

VI. FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE

The Fundraising Committee report was given by Mary von Dorster. The committee has been meeting regularly. A fall picnic is planned for Sunday, September 15, 4-6 p.m. at Sutton Park. Suggested donation is \$20.00. Come for fun, camaraderie, and team building. Help us support the Democratic ticket! Food will be provided, but “pot luck” food donations will also be welcomed and encouraged.

VII. JULY 4TH PARADE

We do not have enough participants to proceed at this time. Matthew Shulman has offered to drive his truck in the parade. Doris Pulaski and Janice Kimball have offered to ride in the truck. Janice purchased candy to throw to spectators, but throwing candy from the truck is not permitted. The Town Council, Chris Conley, and Aundre Baumgardner will be walking as a group at the front of the parade. They will be able to throw the candy to spectators. Shawn Powers will ride his bike. If more people don't volunteer, we may have to cancel. If others do volunteer, they may assemble at Matthew Shulman's home on the evening of July 3rd to decorate the truck. The parade runs from Grasso Tech to Drozdyk Drive, about 1.5 miles. (UPDATE post meeting: our participation was cancelled due to lack of walkers. We'll try again next year).

VIII. REPORT OF STATE REPRESENTATIVES CHRIS CONLEY (40th district) AND AUNDRE BAUMGARDNER (41st district)

- A. Chris Conley gave the report.
- B. Groton received \$4.1 million dollars in full reimbursement for school construction. New London received \$4.6 million dollar in partial reimbursement for school construction.
- C. Early voting is approved, starting 01/01/2024. Early voting for City Council and Groton Long Point voting will also be available this next election.
- D. Child marriage is now banned in CT.
- E. Mental and Physical health facilities were approved for UConn at Avery Point, and for the other three branches.
- F. New Gun Laws which require gun locks to be sold with all guns, safe storage, and which closed loop holes in the red flag laws were passed.
- G. The state is exploring actions to provide debt free college and student loan forgiveness
- H. The John Lewis Voting Rights Act was codified in state law.
- I. More power was given to utility regulators.
- J. Opioid settlement fund money must go to appropriate organizations, not individuals.
- K. Vending machines for condoms, Plan B medications, and contraceptives, will be available on college campuses.
- L. Pharmacists in CT may no longer refuse to fill prescriptions that they do not agree with.
- M. Colleges must post correct info for students about where to obtain abortion information and services.
- N. If the college has surgery capability, it must have arrangements to assist students seeking to terminate unwanted pregnancies.
- O. CVS is authorized to hand out contraceptives without prescription provided they have the ability to screen applicants.
- P. HUSKY funding has been extended to undocumented immigrants with disabilities up to age 15.

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IX. TOWN COUNCIL REPORT BY MAYOR JUAN MELENDEZ WAS GIVEN.

Juan reviewed many recent actions of the Council and welcomed members to speak to Councilors individually to provide input/feedback on issues.

X. BOARD OF EDUCATION REPORT BY BEV WASHINGTON AND MATT SCHULMAN

- A. The high school principal and the business manager have both resigned to take new jobs elsewhere.
- B. A summer meals program has been started for children.
- C. The town has received a \$200,000 grant for climate action. Several smaller grants have also been received.
- D. We now have 73 Mentors, but need more, especially diverse mentors.
- E. It will now take 27 credits to graduate from high school. The required number of credits may rise to 28 in a later year. Requirements for Civics were increased, and an added Financial Education is being discussed in committee.
- F. There is discussion about whether it is a good idea to put solar panels on the Middle School and Mystic River School, as attaching the panels to the roof may damage the roof and make it prone to leaks. Individuals were asked to speak to Board members about concerns.

XI. GUEST SPEAKER BETSY RITTER

Betsy stressed the importance of local elections and finding new people to run for municipal office. That this is how candidates for higher office are developed. New people are where we grow our future state and federal Democratic candidates. A good place to look for new people is among those who are committed to an issue in town. She noted it seems the Groton Dems are doing well, and she and others recognize how difficult it is to engage new people, and congratulate us on our success.

XII. ADJOURNMENT AND NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, July 20th, 6:00 p.m. to endorse candidates for Town Council, Board of Education and RTM.

A motion was made at 8:08 to adjourn by Edward Jacome, seconded by Peter Roper. The motion passed unanimously.