A special meeting of the Groton Board of Education was held on January 7, 2013, in CR 1 of the Town Hall Annex, for the purpose of discussing redistricting.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Kirsten Hoyt, Chairperson of the Board, at 7:03 p.m.

PRESENT

Dr. Kirsten Hoyt, Chairperson
Mrs. Elizabeth Gianacoplos, Vice Chairperson
Mrs. Shelley Gardner
Mr. Robert Peruzzotti
Mrs. Kim Shepardson Watson
Mr. Chaz Zezulka

ABSENT

Mrs. Patricia Doyle
Mrs. Rita Volkmann
Mrs. Beverly Washington

Dr. John Ramos, Interim Superintendent of Schools
Mrs. Carolyn Dickey, Business Manager
Mrs. Denise Doolittle, Director of Pupil Personnel Services
Mr. Sean McKenna, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. William Robarge, Director of Buildings and Grounds
Mr. Michael Zuba, Milone and MacBroom

1. Redistricting

A motion was made by Mrs. Gianacoplos and seconded by Mrs. Watson that the Groton Board of Education adopts Redistricting Plan I as prepared and revised by Milone and MacBroom.

Mr. Peruzzotti stated that he was morally against the redistricting plan for a variety of reasons:

- This plan would cost approximately a half million dollars to implement due to the unfunded mandate from the state. He noted that if the state wants to send the district a half million dollars, it would be a little more welcoming. He did not think that the taxpayers of the Town of Groton can afford a half million dollars to move kids from one school to another based on race. He did not have a problem with moving students because of the crowded schools. He stated that he had made a lot of calls to the State and some of the answers that he got did not make sense. The State has no input into Groton’s redistricting plan but they do want to approve it. They are not telling us to redistrict and it sounded crazy to him because they said “you are violating a mandate.” Groton is not the same as Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, Stonington, Old Lyme, East Lyme, and Norwich. He stated that this is terrible what the State is forcing us to do.
• The State said that Groton was out of compliance. He asked them why is Groton out of Compliance. The State said because Groton has a school that has more than 25% over the percent of population of minorities in the district. And then he said he asked the State “why don’t we have imbalance at the high school.” The State said they didn’t really know. He noted that Groton didn’t have an imbalance at the high school because Groton only has one high school. So, Groton doesn’t have a problem with the district, Groton has a problem with the buildings.

• He did not feel the redistricting plan was in the best interest of the kids, the kids are getting hurt – the ones Groton is trying to protect. To further compound the problem, Social Services is putting an influx of more students down in the sections of Branford Manor and Mather Avenue and then the State is telling Groton to go fix it. Not only go fix it, but fix it on our dime.

Mrs. Gianacoplos stated that she agreed with many of Mr. Peruzzotti’s sentiments but she does support this plan. The Racial Imbalance is a State law. She believes that Groton should obey State laws. She noted she was not saying that Groton shouldn’t try to change the State law. She would support this effort but in the meantime, she feels it is her obligation to abide by State laws. She does feel think this is good for the kids and will alleviate overcrowding. She feels the diversity in the schools is a benefit for all our kids. She stated that the Board has been working eight months on this holding countless meetings. Mike Zuba has been very responsive to concerns of parents and to concerns of Board members. She stated that she expressed a concern at the last meeting and he was able to make a change as well as being able to do the same for parents and not affect the racial imbalance. She stated that he has gone out of his way to try to meet the concerns that have been expressed by the community. She thanked the parents who came out repeatedly – you did what you had to do and you made sure Mike Zuba heard your message and the Board heard your message and he was able to act on it.

Mrs. Gianacoplos fears that if the Board doesn’t act on this plan tonight, the Board will still have to do something because there is a huge overcrowding issue. So, it is kind of like starting all over. If we do that kids won’t know until June where they are going to be and the administration won’t know for months how to plan for it.

Mrs. Watson noted that Representative Moukawsher talked about the fact that he was going to move forward and work with the other districts that have similar issues i.e. Manchester, Enfield, Greenwich (there was another she could not recall). She stated he had not put forward a bill regarding a change to challenge redistricting and he has not put forward to receive any help from the other districts that are impacted by this State law. She noted that she is concerned not to move forward on this thinking that we will be able to combat the State. She stated she would like the Board to proceed with this plan. She does see the Board continuing to pursue the State to make this a more fair process and to look at some antiquated racial balances especially as the nation is facing new majorities.

Mrs. Gardner stated that she was against forced bussing for children and would be voting against this plan.
Mr. Zezulka stated that he does not embrace the plan wholeheartedly. However, he is supporting it from the perspective of the overcrowding. He noted that he disagrees with Mrs. Gardner; he doesn’t think this is forced bussing. There are some positives involved in this plan with the redistricting and moving some of the children to other schools. He noted he has heard from parents who support that their children are being moved to other schools, so it isn’t everybody out there saying they are against the plan.

Mr. Zezulka stated that he takes this on a personal level too. Many people know that he stated about 8 months ago, that his grandchildren are children of the world. They do not represent any race. All of his grandchildren are minority students. They’re African American, they’re Asian, and they’re Indian. He stated that he finds it abhorred that we would use children’s color of their skin to move them from Town to Town or school to school or bussing. So, that part of the plan bothers him. However, we have no other alternative to this plan and we must do something and we have been doing this, as Board member Gianacoplos said, for a long time and now we’re here. He noted that he cannot see going back to the planning board and making other decision that are still not going to get full support of the Board.

**VOTE ON MOTION:**

**YES – Hoyt, Gianacoplos, Watson, Zezulka**  
**NO – Gardner, Peruzzotti**

**PASSED**

A motion was made by Mr. Zezulka and seconded by Mrs. Gardner to adjourn at 7:15 p.m.

**PASSED - UNANIMOUSLY**