

REGULAR MEETING
December 19, 2011

The Wethersfield Town Council held a meeting on Monday, December 19, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield.

Present: Councilors Hurley, Kotkin, Manousos, McAlister, Montinieri, Deputy Mayor Console and Chairperson Hemmann.

Absent: Councilors Drake and Roberts.

Also present: Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant Town Manager, Marlene Desjardins, Tax Collector and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk, led the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

Presentation by Scott W. Jellison, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Operations & Engineering, MDC for the Clean Water Project.

Councilor Kotkin asked about the cost per customer that was discussed and asked if the increase was going to be \$50/month, making it \$150/quarter.

Scott Jellison responded that the cost will increase gradually from the current \$12/month to \$50/month in 2024.

Councilor Kotkin commented that he did not understand the basis for the increase.

Scott Jellison responded that this would be correct and noted that with the Clean Water Project and the MDC rates, MDC water rates are half of what the water rates are for other utilities. And with the surcharge, MDC is doing \$2 billion worth of work to improve the system and \$100 million to improve the water system, MDC is the same price as the private water companies that supply just water and no one in the private water industry is improving their systems. He explained that the infrastructure is being improved rather than rates going up with nothing being done.

Councilor Kotkin asked if there was an issue with MDC's billing system.

Scott Jellison responded that MDC is presently upgrading their SAP system and did have issues with their SAP system.

Councilor Kotkin asked if some people have not yet received their quarterly bill.

Scott Jellison responded that this was correct and MDC was expecting to get the quarterly bills out by the first week of January.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Harry Lichtenbaum, 16 Town House Lane, commented that he was there, as Santa without the suit as well as to represent Dick Lasher, Honorary Mayor of Griswoldville. They both wanted to wish Councilors a Merry Christmas and a Happy Hanukah. He passed out Gelt and candy canes to the Councilors.

Gus Colantonio, 16 Morrison Avenue, expressed his feelings on the need for a stop sign on Morrison Avenue or to have the one in place on the next street over removed. He feels it would even the traffic flow and Morrison would not have as much traffic.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, commented that it has been a difficult year with finances, additional taxes and MDC's increase in its rates. He also spoke about the education system, the referendums that were voted against and the high school renovation project.

Martha Conneely, 12 Fairmont Street, spoke in favor of the high school referendum and commented that a PAC has been formed in support of the referendum. She highlighted some of the great improvements that would be made to the facility. The last renovation was for asbestos and not for improving the lab areas and to eliminate the wall of window air condition

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, commented that it has been a tough, busy year; the cost of the high school referendum; and the redistricting issue for voting. He did not want government to pull a fast one on citizens with people not knowing where to vote. He did not like the idea of the Primary and referendum to be held at the same time.

COUNCIL REPORTS

Councilor Kotkin reported that the Insurance Committee met last week and noted the Town employees and their families seem to be good health and the Town is currently under-spending healthcare compensation by \$500,000. CIRMA also reported at the meeting that it had reviewed the Town's workers' compensation and liability policies and it looked good.

Councilor Manousos reported for the Budget & Finance Committee. He noted the retirement of Norma Bielenda and Pam Rapacz of the Registrars' Office, the restructuring of that office and its future operation. The Quarterly Report was also reviewed. He stated there wasn't any expectation to have any major impacts on the budget at this time. The Committee also discussed the high school financing scenarios.

Chairperson Hemmann reported for the Public Works Committee. They will be bringing forward information on the trash disposal contract which is an item on the agenda to be discussed at tonight's meeting. She also reported that she attended the Shade Tree Commission, which is working hard to identify the trees that were damaged in the storms, and the Conservation Commission.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilor Manousos referenced the high school project and asked if it was possible to hold Council meetings at the high school to give people an opportunity to tour the high school and to see what the project entails.

Jeff Bridges suggested that perhaps Board of Education meetings could be scheduled there, as the Council meetings would not be able to be televised from the high school.

Councilor Manousos commented that he hopes that everyone will support this project and he felt that it does benefit the community of all ages. He noted also that it is not a \$76 million project, but a \$44 million project that will be absorbed by the Town taxpayers.

Councilor Hurley commented that he agreed with Councilor Manousos' comments and noted that he supports the high school project.

Councilor McAlister commented that there may be arguments back and forth about the economic benefits of the renovation, but there isn't any argument that families will stop moving into town if the accreditation of the high school is lost, but he fully supports the high school project.

Chairperson Hemmann noted her support for the high school project and noted that it is more than a renovation; it would be replacing outdated technology requirements, infrastructure and making it more economical to operate.

Councilor Montinieri noted his support of the high school project and noted that he has attended the PAC meetings and thanked Martha Conneely for heading the PAC.

Councilor Kotkin commented that he and Councilors Roberts as well as Mr. Montinieri authored a letter to the Wethersfield Life supporting the high school project. The project is more than just cosmetic issues.

Councilor McAlister commented that during the campaign, the feedback received from the public was that there was limited communication between the Board of Education and Council. He noted there should be a very specific plan in place that ensures Council and the Board of Education are talking consistently with each other. He suggesting having a standing agenda item added to the first meeting of each month that gives the update on discussions with the Board of Education.

Chairperson Hemmann commented that she thought that could be possible. She also asked Council for responses back to her note regarding Council Committees for their current terms.

Deputy Mayor Console thanked the Wethersfield Volunteer Fire Department for the invitation to their annual dinner. He noted that he and Chairperson Hemmann attended the Wing Site Holiday Party. He also attended the EDIC meeting and noted that it was a good turnout. He noted that he requested and received data from the Wethersfield Housing Authority and gave Council copies of the data. He will be reviewing the data and doing some research. He also requested from Marlene Desjardins, Tax Collector, who was present at the meeting, for a copy of Wethersfield Rentals' outstanding taxes due and asked Jeff Bridges if it was possible to get a agent list from the Tax Collector which reflects substantial outstanding taxes due. Deputy Mayor Console also suggested a meeting with AB Associates, who had done the renovations of the Stamford, Greenwich and Trumbull high schools and suggested that Council should meet with him to talk about his work. He commented also that he supports the high school project.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

Jeff Bridges reported that MDC will be working on the Murphy Pond Dam and noted that the Town has also received MDC's assessment which increases the Town's responsibility by \$62,000. He reported that the Food Bank received a \$5,000 check from Farmington Savings Bank. He also reported that the owners of the Mitchell on the Park would like to meet with the Public Works Committee to talk about the ground lease.

Chairperson Hemmann reported that a meeting was held last week with the Commissioner of Social Services at the State level with the Legislative delegation with regards to the Wethersfield Healthcare situation. It was to bring up issues important to the Town as they would impact the Town and our residents. She explained that there is a process that is followed which has just started, but there isn't a lot that can be done to impact the decision.

OTHER BUSINESS

Councilor Hurley moved **"TO TRANSFER THE UNCOLLECTED TAXES TO TAX SUSPENSE STATUS IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 12-165 OF THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL STATUTES AND THE ATTACHED LIST,"** seconded by Councilor Manousos.

Jeff Bridges reported that the total of the list is \$1,931.70 and is comprised of deceased and/or bankrupt individuals. He commented that Tax Collector Desjardins was present tonight to answer any questions. He also said even though these taxes are in suspense status the tax collector is still working on and trying to collect them.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 7-0-0.

Deputy Mayor Console moved **“TO AUTHORIZE THE TOWN MANAGER TO PARTICIPATE IN A JOINT GRANT APPLICATION TO THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT OFFICE OF POLICY AND MANAGEMENT, REGIONAL PERFORMANCE INCENTIVE GRANT PROGRAM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL DISPATCH CENTER IMPLEMENTATION PLAN”** seconded by Councilor Manousos.

Jeff Bridges reported that the Mid-State Towns have set this as one of their priorities. In addition, the State has made it clear that it will be looking to encourage either through funds or legislation the reduction of the number of Dispatch Centers (Public Safety Answering Points, PSAP) in Connecticut. Working collaboratively now, the Towns can determine their own fate rather than be forced to regionalize with other communities that may not be as advantageous as the Mid State communities. The Regional Communications Center Feasibility Study was provided to the Council in a previous packet. The Town of Rocky Hill will be developing the formal grant application. Estimated amount of the grant request is between \$50,000 and \$100,000. Jeff Bridges explained that this is a Planning Grant that is a follow up to the feasibility study and it is not a commitment to undertake the project, it's the next step of the planning process.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 7-0-0.

Councilor McAlister moved **“TO AUTHORIZE THE ELECTIONS REDISTRICTING PLAN AS PRESENTED”** seconded by Councilor Hurley.

Jeff Bridges reported that the Town Clerk Dolores Sassano and Registrar of Voters Pam Rapacz have provided the attached list of Senators and Representatives by district. The final determination of the exact population numbers, streets and polling places by district is not complete. Attached is a map of the proposed districts which will give you some idea of the streets in each area. Approval of this plan will reduce the cost of staging an election.

Pam Rapacz, Registrar of Voters, explained that with the new redistricting plan, this will cut down the number of ballots from four to three and there will be six districts, not 10, if approved with 3,000 to 4,000 voters per district.

Councilor Kotkin thanked Pam Rapacz for all her work with the Registrar's Office.

Pam Rapacz commented to George Ruhe that this is something that the Town always wanted to have done and it is done by streets.

Chairperson Hemmann asked Pam Rapacz to explain the ability to take the schools out of the mix.

Pam Rapacz responded that there aren't enough other places in Town that can accommodate the polling places.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 7-0-0.

BIDS

Councilor Manousos moved **“TO ACCEPT THE REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS PROCESS OF THE CENTRAL CONNECTICUT SOLID WASTE AUTHORITY AND THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE TO ENTER INTO A TIER 1 LONG TERM MUNICIPAL SERVICES AGREEMENT WITH THE CONNECTICUT RESOURCE AND RECOVERY AUTHORITY,”** seconded by Deputy Mayor Console.

Jeff Bridges reported the Town of Wethersfield, as a member of the Central Connecticut Solid Waste Authority (CCSWA), participated in a Request for Qualifications selections process for trash disposal services. Wethersfield, like most other Towns in the region has a current contract with the CRRA which expires next year. As a result, the Towns went through a process to selection processes for solid waste disposal services.

Councilor Montinieri inquired about the Tier 1 and Tier 2 issue and asked if the Murphy Road recycling facility is part of the same quasi organization.

Jeff Bridges responded that the Murphy Road recycling facility is a separate, private-for-profit company.

Councilor Montinieri commented that he did not understand why it was making it difficult to split it, if the Town is not taking the recycling to the State facility, the CRRA burn plant.

Jeff Bridges explained that Murphy Road has put a provision in its Master Contract with the CCSWA that it will not accept a split with any community that accepts a Tier 1 contract because it does not believe in the flow control aspect of the contract.

Councilor Montinieri asked RaeAnn Palmer if the tonnage reports used in the estimates are this year's numbers.

RaeAnn Palmer responded that this was correct.

Councilor Montinieri asked if these numbers have been increasing.

RaeAnn Palmer responded that the numbers continue to increase and solid waste has been decreasing except for the recent storm waste.

Councilor Kotkin asked if there has been any discussion about its upgrades with the facility to ensure the plant is in operation during the 15 years.

Jeff Bridges reported that the Municipality Advisory Committee reported that it has ritualized a winter preventive maintenance program. It is also going to modify the preparation process of the waste and it will be burning the residual ash so it doesn't have to be sent to a landfill. He explained that the current process will not be replaced with a mass burn process and if, for whatever reason the plant goes down, it is their problem to find a place for the waste.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 7-0-0.

Chairperson Hemmann excused herself from the following motion as her son is employed by People's Bank in another capacity.

Councilor McAlister moved **“TO AUTHORIZE THE TOWN MANAGER TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT WITH PEOPLE’S UNITED BANK FOR BANKING SERVICES,”** seconded by Councilor Hurley.

Jeff Bridges reported that the Finance Director has recommended People's Bank, with the lowest overall costs. The criteria for selection not only included finding a bank that is a qualified depository with excellent credit rating, but also the ability to provide all the services we currently receive plus positive pay, merchant services and lock box services that will integrate with the town's tax collection software (QDS), recreation software (Rec-Trak) and the Town's accounting system (MUNIS). Ease of on-line banking services, fraud protection, ACH, wire transfers and ability to research data were also important considerations.

Susan Smith commented that \$68,000 will be saved

All Councilors present voted AYE. The motion passed 6-0-1.

Assistant Town Manager RaeAnn Palmer introduced John Eichner. He is an independent communications contractor to oversee the upgrade on internet, phones and contracts for cell towers.

PUBLIC COMMENT

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, thinks his comments were misunderstood by the Registrar of Voters. He thinks it is a good idea to keep an open mind and that visiting another school site is a good idea. He thinks some elected officials underestimate the public comments, net worth of housing and the values going down.

Gus Colantonio, 16 Morrison Avenue, stated he is for educational improvement but he thinks they are spending too much money with too little accountability. His three children all graduated from Wethersfield school system.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road is disappointed that the government officials are interfering with the healthcare facility. They have a right to close and leave. Chairperson Hemmann and

Town Manager Bridges disagreed and stated that there are requirements they have to meet to operate both state and federal regulations. Also, bricks and mortar do not enhance student performance and the system is dragging the community down. There needs to be a Board of Education to put out a quality product. He was glad with the changes at the election with membership on the board but dissatisfied that they elected the old guard for leadership. He was expecting it to be newer and more adventurous. Just recently a previous school building committee owned and paid money back to the State, over \$682,000.

Jim Clynch, 903 Ridge Road, spoke to the health care facility. His wife was there for 91 days and caught pneumonia. When he heard they were closing was one of the happier days of his life.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:55 p.m., Deputy Mayor Console moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by McAlister.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 7-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk
Approved by vote of Council
January 3, 2012