

Unapproved
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 4, 2010

The Wethersfield Town Council held a meeting on Monday, January 4, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield.

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

Also present: Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, presented the following report:

WELCOME!

- 933 Silas Deane Highway – 180 Nutrition – Sports Supplement and Smoothie Bar.
- 123 Progress Drive – CREC School – A final CO has now been issued for this expansion and renovation project.
- Goff Brook Shoppes – The former Giovanni’s Pizza is under new ownership and has been renamed Sofia’s Brick Oven Pizza.

RECENT APPROVALS

- 840 Silas Deane Highway – Former Manny’s Auto – interior improvements are under way for the Centerpoint Community church to renovate and occupy this space.
- 322 Silas Deane Highway – Lifeline Financial – Construction is underway for interior and exterior improvements to convert this building for office use.
- 1290 Silas Deane Highway – A building permit has been filed for interior remodeling of the first floor (20,000 s.f.) to accommodate ITT Technical School.
- Wethersfield Shopping Center – A building permit has been filed to renovate and expand space to accommodate the relocation of Once Upon A Child.
- The former Koto Steakhouse at 2138 Berlin Turnpike is being remodeled under new ownership and will reopen as Yuan Asian Bistro.
- Goff Brook Shops – The Farm Fresh produce Market recently closed.

DEVELOPER/PROPERTY OWNER/REALTOR CONTACT

- Preliminary plans have been submitted to the PZC by a developer interested in developing property on the Berlin Turnpike for a 150 unit apartment complex.
- Consulted with new owner of former Ritz Camera building – 526 Silas Deane Highway and he has submitted an application for a façade improvement loan for this property.
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- A façade improvement application has been filed by the owner of the property at 318 Silas Deane Highway and the building that houses Hair Innovators Beauty Salon.

OTHER NEWS AND INITIATIVES

Economic Development and Improvement Commission

- On January 7 Town Staff attended a meeting with the Metro Hartford Alliance to discuss renewing our membership services with this organization.
- On January 8 a closing was held for a Façade improvement loan for the renovations to the building that includes Mila Fabric and New England Patio and Hearth.
- The new Town Guide and Business Directory has been distributed to all residents in Town via the December issue of Wethersfield Life. This year's edition includes a more comprehensive business directory than ever before.
- This year's Salute To Business was held on Tuesday December 8 at 5:30 pm at the Country Club. The EDIC recognized 38 businesses this year including new businesses, businesses that have been in Town for 35-40 years and those that have had significant accomplishments over the past year. Attendance at this year's event was the largest we have had and nearly 150 people helped us celebrate these business accomplishments.
- On Wednesday morning January 13 at 8am in the Council Chambers in Town Hall the EDIC will be hosting a breakfast meeting with the business community to discuss the creation of a Shop Wethersfield program. Over 50 local businesses expressed an interest in participating in these meetings. All are welcome.
- The Chamber of Commerce will be hosting the Annual State of the Town Breakfast at the Community Center on January 21 at 7:30 am.

Tourism/ Preserve America

- Preliminary design concepts have been submitted and are being reviewed for the wayfinding signage program. Final design specifications are on hold pending an upcoming meeting with the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

Councilor Drake said that he would like to make sure that a financial impact study is done with the proposed 150 unit apartment building. It could have a big impact on the Town.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said that the Planning and Zoning Commission has requested several reports and one is an economic analysis. It is proposed to be a \$15,000,000 project. Industry standards can be used for some statistical numbers.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the former Manny's Auto Store will be leased to the church group.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said that it will be leased. It will remain on the tax roll.

Councilor Kotkin asked about the façade grant. He said that a business who receives a grant has the money forgiven overtime if the business stays open. He asked if any of the businesses have closed.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said no business has closed yet. It is a 10 year amortization program. If the business closes in the first three years, the entire loan amount must be repaid. The program has only been established for three years.

Councilor Roberts said that façade improvements on the Mila Fabric building are great. It is very eye catching.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said that it is the largest investment to date with the program. The property owner put a lot of money into the building.

Chairperson Hemmann said that now that one parcel on Progress Drive has been settled is there any talk on developing the lot.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said that that Planning and Zoning Commission approved a 20,000 foot medical building, but he has not heard back from the owner on details. The tax issues were resolved and Town staff is working on getting Progress Drive approved as a Town road.

Deputy Mayor Console asked if the Town has gotten involved in foreclosures of buildings.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said that there is no official notification process. Businesses contact the Secretary of the States Office. The Town hears about a foreclosure after the processes is already underway.

REPORT OF THE TOWN HALL/LIBRARY BUILDING COMMITTEE

Joe Coombs, Chairperson of the Town Hall/Library Building Committee, said that he is at the meeting with Mike Turner, Director of Public Works, and Peter Wells of the firm Tucker and Wells to answer questions. He said that the project is almost at the end. The punch list items are being done slower than expected. It is a common occurrence to have a punch list. It is for touch ups and cosmetic stuff and small electrical items. He said that he got a legal opinion from the Town Attorney on a few items and the Town has the leverage to sue it if the work doesn't get done. He thinks that the work will get done.

Councilor Drake asked if Kronenberger is fighting the Town on the work.

Joe Coombs said that he is hopeful that they will come in and get the work done.

Chairperson Hemmann asked if the Town was using the target date of January 31st for project completion.

Joe Coombs said that is the target date. If the work is not completed by then a first notice will be sent. After a third notice, the Town will have the work done itself and will bill the contractor. He said that the business is slowing down and Kronenberger has probably cut back on its staff.

Chairperson Hemmann asked about the contingency numbers in the memo.

Joe Coombs said that if the Town took all of the suggested items in the memo it would come in at \$29,545. The Committee will look at the projects and prioritize items.

Councilor Roberts said that the parking lot is dark. The lighting is not sufficient for the area.

Mike Turner, Director of Public Works, said that the parking lot is a Capital Improvement Project and not part of the building renovation. The Town has ordered additional aerial lighting from CL&P to be installed on the back poles of the parking lot facing away from the homes on Church Place. He said that he also asked for a light to be installed on the pole in the street near the exit driveway. CL&P has only one crew on street lighting in the winter.

Councilor Montinieri asked if the punch list items have been quantified in value.

Mike Turner said that it has not been quantified yet, but 5 percent of the project is being held. It is well over \$100,000 and the punch list is around \$20,000.

Councilor Kotkin led the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk, took attendance.

HEARINGS

None

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Gus Colantonio, 16 Morrison Avenue, said that months ago he complained about the poor lighting on Morrison Avenue. He said that every year taxes go up and services go down. He said that the Town hasn't removed the snow on Morrison Avenue. The road is narrow and the snow needs to be removed. He said that the contractor for the Police Department should pay for the replacement of the windows. The Town shouldn't have to pay for them. He said that the parking lot lighting is bad. The curbing in the parking lot is bad, too. He said that the engineering department doesn't do any project work now. All projects are going to consultants instead. He

asked if there was any accountability for the people who work in the Town. He asked what percent of people who work in Town live in Town.

Howard "Buzz" Willard, 141 Main Street, congratulated the new Town Manager and Town Council. He said that he and his wife are raising their granddaughter in Wethersfield and hopes that the Town will be as well preserved for her as it is for him. The Democratic Council disregarded holding the property taxes and shut down citizen input and that helped them lose the election. The previous administration did not care about preserving what the Town has in Old Wethersfield. He said that there are places in Town where commercial development is welcome but it makes no sense to destroy the Historic District for a few tax dollars. He is pleased that there is a new Town Manager and Town Council and hopes that the new administration will put a stop to the threats of preservation of Old Wethersfield and the unbridled escalation of property taxes.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, said that this is a new year with the same old problems. He agrees with the comments of Mr. Willard about Old Wethersfield. The economy is forcing people to lose properties. The taxes have gone up over the past 6 years. Many states are asking for Federal bailouts. He said that he doesn't know where the money is going to come from. Something needs to be done about this. He said that he e-mailed Councilors a copy of an OPM report to CCM talking about the tax burden in Connecticut. The State expenditures continue to go up much faster than the consumer price index. 8 percent of homes are in the foreclosure process. He said that the State owes a lot of money and has many budget challenges. The State budget information is very important for Councilors to have for the Town's budget process.

Fred Odell, 41 Oldham Road, said that he is a member of the Wethersfield Men's Garden Club and also the Beautification Trust. The Garden Club maintains the rose garden. Many of the heritage gardens have been lost during the building renovations. He is at the meeting to ask that the dumpster on the side of the parking lot be relocated. It is in the way of the path that leads to the garden and is visible from the Silas Deane Highway.

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, said that at the last meeting there was a discussion on quality of life issues. There are a lot of little things tied into it. Open space is a big issue. There are many benefits to having open space. Quality of life issues go beyond capital improvement problems. Cell phone use while driving is an issue. The relaxed attitude of the Town Council allowing residents to speak past the five minutes is good. There is a situation in Town where a commission threatens the freedom of speech. He said that there were some good ideas at the joint Town Council and Board of Education meeting. The Town can't continue to spend as it has in the past. The Town Council must ask hard questions and think about quality of life issues in Town.

COUNCIL REPORTS

Councilor Manousos said that the Budget and Finance Committee met tonight and interviewed a short list of Town Attorney candidates. The Committee will meet again and have a recommendation for the Town Council.

COUNCILOR COMMENTS

Councilor Hurley said that the Wethersfield High School band is collecting Christmas trees for \$10 as a fundraiser. Call 860 721-8854 for a pick up.

Councilor Roberts said that she has already seen trees curbside and wants to make sure that the information about tree pickup is on the scroller.

Councilor Manousos said that there is a Cub Scout troop that is also collecting Christmas trees.

Deputy Mayor Console said that he was under the assumption that the Town removed the snow on Morrison Avenue because the road is so narrow.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that he will look into it.

Deputy Mayor Console said that he would like to get an update on the plans for Morrison Avenue, too.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that town staff has nine different scenarios that it is now preparing maps for. Two meetings are being planned with residents on Morrison Avenue. He is hoping work will be done in the spring.

Chairperson Hemmann said that:

- The annual State of the Town will be held on Thursday, January 21, 2010 at 8:00 a.m.
- Cub Scout Pack 51 is also picking up Christmas trees. There is no fee but a small donation is requested. The contact number is 860-777-5309
- Christmas trees can also be dropped off at Greenfield Pool parking lot, Mill Woods Park, or the transfer station.
- She received a flier from Senator Fonfara's office concerning a Silas Deane Highway Task Force. She is sending a letter back saying that she was disappointed in his lack of collaboration with the Town.
- There will be a Joint Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Council meeting tomorrow to discuss quality of life issues and to work through problematic enforcement.

Councilor Roberts said that she had not seen the flier from Senator Fonfara and asked for a copy.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that he is starting the Old Wethersfield reorganization project to look for solutions to use historic sites while preserving them. He is continuing the budget with department heads breaking down the budget into operational budgets. The tax collector did a great job with the stipulation on Hospitality Corporation tax issue.

Councilor McAlister said that he wanted to confirm that the Old Wethersfield Master Plan was not costing the Town any money.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that there is \$75,000 in the budget for updating the comprehensive plan. \$15,000 of the \$75,000 will be used for the neighborhood collaborations. The original Old Wethersfield Master Plan was done through a grant.

Councilor Drake said that he applauds the Town Manager's efforts to look into the privatization of the Physical Services. He said that he hopes the Town Manager can get the process going and will keep the Council up-to-date.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that he will get contract pricing and bring it to the Budget and Finance Committee and the Public Works for review.

Councilor Kotkin said that for the past few years the Town Council received quarterly updates from the Finance Department. He hasn't seen one for this fiscal year. He asked if the Council could receive one in February for the second quarter. It was a fairly detailed report that provided information on where departments stand vs. the proposed budget and actual revenue received. It will be very helpful for the budget process.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that the second quarter report should be done by the end of the month.

COUNCIL ACTION

Councilor Console moved **"TO APPOINT ANDREA L. BOYLE FOR A TERM FROM 1-04-10 TO 1-01-13 AND RICHARD SITNIK AS AN ALTERNATE FOR A TERM FROM 1-04-10 TO 1-01-11 TO THE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD"** seconded by Councilor Manousos.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

OTHER BUSINESS

Councilor McAlister moved **“TO AUTHORIZE THE TOWN MANAGER TO APPLY AS A SECONDARY APPLICANT, FOR A CONNECTICUT COMMISSION ON CULTURE AND TOURISM COOPERATIVE MARKETING GRANT AND TO UTILIZE FY 2009-2010 FUNDS FOR THE \$3,120 MATCH”** seconded by Councilor Manousos.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that this is a grant for tourism services. Traditionally the Tourism Commission advertises in publications. This is a new opportunity to advertise more regionally. Town money is needed to leverage against the grant money. It is a positive use of local money.

Chairperson Hemmann said that she is pleased to see that the Tourism Commission is looking to see the outcome of its advertising efforts. It is helpful to determine what is not working and what can be done better with its funds.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

BIDS

Councilor Manousos moved **“TO AWARD A CONTRACT TO WETHERSFIELD SWEEPING SERVICE FOR STREET SWEEPING AND CLEANING OF CATCH BASINS AND STORM SEWERS, NOT TO EXCEED \$79,389”** seconded by Councilor Drake.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that this is the same company that provided these services last year. Street sweeping is paired with catch basin cleaning. The total cost is not to exceed \$79,389, \$45,000 for street sweeping and \$34,389 for catch basin cleaning. Since the Town moved to a straight salt mixture the street sweeping is not as intensive. The staff recommends this bidder.

Councilor Montinieri said that he thought the Town stopped using sand more than a year ago and that last year’s budget should reflect the lower cost. He asked if the reduction in the cost is due to bidders being hungry for work.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that he is not sure how many sweeps were made last year and if that impacted the price. He will look into it.

Councilor Montinieri said that if the cost for one sweep is less because bidders are hungry then the Council can amend the bid to show a smaller amount and not appropriate the extra \$20,000 for wiggle room.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that the Town sweeps in the spring and may need to go back and sweep intersections and down hills again. The additional funding would be needed.

Councilor Montinieri said that he is making the observation that the not to exceed amount came from last year's budget and this year the bids are much less.

RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, said that the Town did one sweep last year and the total was \$44,000. Historically there are areas of Town that need an extra sweep. Town Staff determines the company should go back over. Last year was the first full year with no sand. Town staff feels comfortable with this amount.

Councilor Drake questioned the per hour charge vs. the per catch basin charge shown on the memo.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that he would look into it.

Councilor Manousos asked if the mixture being used now causes more damage to roadways.

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, said that salt has a more corrosive nature to it then the salt/sand mix. The Town is also doing pretreatments to the streets with brine.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

MINUTES

Councilor Kotkin moved **“TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 21, 2009”** seconded by Councilor Hurley.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, handed out a summary of budget of the State for 2010-2014. It said that one time revenue will not be coming back, the rainy day fund is exhausted, debt service is increasing, and budget below line savings targets will be difficult to achieve. He said that the parking lot is too dark and with the ice it is dangerous. The joint meeting tomorrow night is a good idea. If there are zoning regulations on the books they should be enforced. He said that Councilor Kotkin asked for quarterly financial reports. It is a great opportunity to see expenditures by department and reforecast as needed.

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, said that he was interested in hearing the Building Committee's report. He has waited for his wife outside of the Library and looks at the wall in

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front. It looks like it was never touched. He said that his wife is a real lobbyist for the Library. He wishes the Town would do something about the signs at the dais. It looks like the Councilors are hiding behind them.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:35 p.m., Councilor Roberts moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Console. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano

Town Clerk