

Unapproved  
**SPECIAL MEETING**  
**FEBRUARY 5, 2009**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on Thursday, February 5, 2009 at 5:30 p.m. in the Town Manager's Conference Room, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT.

Present: Councilor Console, Forrest, Hemmann, Kotkin, Roberts, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Montinieri and Chairperson Adil.

Absent: Councilor Cascio

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, and Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

At 5:51 p.m., Councilor Kotkin moved **"TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS PERSONNEL MATTERS – TOWN MANAGER SEARCH"** seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0. Also present were Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, who left the meeting at 5:55 pm and Robert Beezat and Carl Luft from the PAR Group (via speaker phone). No motions were made and no votes were taken during executive session.

At 6:23 p.m., Councilor Console moved **"TO LEAVE EXECUTIVE SESSION"** seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

**DISCUSSION OF CORE SERVICES FOR THE TOWN & BUDGET GUIDANCE TO THE TOWN MANAGER**

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that she has handed out a list of Mandated Services, Core "Support" Services, and Draft Core Services. She would like the Town Councilors to identify the top ten or so core services. She said that at the last meeting the Town Council asked how a 10 percent cut across all Departments would impact the Departments. In the Assessor's office, they can't absorb a 10 percent reduction because their budget is all salaries. Talking with the Police Chief, a 0 percent level budget would mean not filling the three vacancies and laying off people. The question is - What is it that the government should be doing?

Chairperson Adil said that with the Grand List and the Governor's budget, the Town Council needs to come up with a number for cuts.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that she doesn't want the Town Council to look at the money and how it is delivered, but the actual services.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that when he saw the results of the 10 percent cut on Departments he was very disappointed. He said that he doesn't want the Departments to think what they gave to the Town Council was acceptable but he understands the point she is making that 10 percent is very different from Department to Department. Maybe an alternative would be to show the Town Council what could be cut from the Departments without impacting the Department and list some priorities. These Departments need to think creatively and come up with some shared responsibilities and creative solutions, especially since the Governor is rewarding towns for regionalizing and penalizing them for failing to do so. He said that he was disappointed in the exercise and felt there was a lot of cynicism in it. If the Departments are not going to do the exercises and leave it to the Town Council, there will be a lot more pain.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that at the last meeting, the Town Council asked if there was a 10 percent reduction what programs will not stay. But then another question came back to her as to what the Council members were asking of the Departments.

Councilor Kotkin said that if someone asked him about a 10 percent cut he would look at not just programs but would contact his counterparts and see what things other Towns can do for him for a fee. That may have been the question but the answers were not good.

Councilor Console said that he would be thinking out of the box.

Councilor Hemmann said that even within the confines of the building, there are things that can be done to find solutions. Can the Town combine departments and cross train positions? How can the Town make things more customer service savvy?

Councilor Roberts said that there was no detail to show how much would be saved by eliminating certain things.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that this was not the question that was asked of the Departments.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that he appreciates the comment that the direction wasn't clear.

Councilor Roberts said that they don't need to be rocket scientists to assume that the question was what would a 10 percent decrease do to the budget. No one said a 10 percent decrease to their budget would equal a \$563,000 cut and this is what would make up the cut. They just threw out some programs.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that when some Departments did the exercise they clearly sent back a decimated story that would alarm the Town Council, instead of thinking creatively about the dilemma being real. The budget dilemma is real. He said that he doesn't think that the Town Council should be making the qualitative choices. They should be made by Department Heads

who know their departments and staff. If the Town Council micromanages, it will be making decisions without knowing the full appreciation of the Departments.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, asked him to expound upon that. What if a Department comes back with a reduction that the Town Council doesn't approve of. There needs to be some policy direction.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that he agrees. Once the exercise comes back to the Town Council with some sincere efforts by Departments, the Town Council is going to have to make some hard decisions at the leadership level. He said that he is speaking directly to the quality and content that was received a month ago. People took the attitude "I will show you what a 10 percent cut will do to the Department" instead of looking at the real crisis that is facing the Town and State.

RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, said that the Town Manager set out the directive about the 10 percent and she was then on vacation and did not answer the questions that the Department heads asked. The Department heads were geared up to do the Core Services exercise. Town staff was gearing up to look at the most important services and identify them and cost them out and see about getting rid of the rest of them. The ten percent cut was throwing a curve ball to the organization with little or no direction and they were also working on putting together a budget with a 0 percent increase per the Town Manager. She said she understands the Town Councilors' comments, but in fairness to Department Heads there was confusion. She said that she understands now that the Town Council wants the Department Heads to do a thoughtful analysis of services and then find cuts that would equal about 10 percent.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that if the 10 percent is a tripping block, remove it and say the Town Council wants to see proposals and thoughts on where cuts can be made. Some Departments will have to make more cuts based on Department size. That goes hand in hand with the Core Services program.

Chairperson Adil said that as policy makers, the Town Council needs to tell the Departments what are the priorities.

Councilor Roberts said that they go hand in hand. Obviously police enforcement and maintaining order are number one. There is a range of things that the Police Department does. Maybe there are some things that are nice, but not necessary when the times are bad.

Chairperson Adil said that a DARE officer may not be necessary.

Councilor Hemmann said that the Board of Education would have to be included in that discussion since DARE is part of their health education.

Councilor Forrest said that he would echo Deputy Mayor Montinieri's comments. When the Town Council gets to the budget discussion and needs to start hitting the red buttons, which buttons should be removed first. This exercise was to ask the Departments where the red buttons were in the Department and the Town Council, as a policy maker, will decide what red buttons to remove and where. The Departments need to look and see what items are red buttons and then the Town Council will decide where to cut. Some Department Heads took the assignment the way it was meant and used creative ideas.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that under fleet services, it is a core service but a creative look at it may be to extend the life of a vehicle or look at different approaches to maintenance. Fleet maintenance can still happen, but cuts can be made within it.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that things like the Nature Center should close. It is not a core service. But the Town Council as a policy maker has to determine this.

Councilor Forrest said that the Park and Recreation Department can say that is their first red button.

Councilor Console said that if each Department Head looked at their Department as a business, what would they do to stay in business?

Councilor Hemmann said that the Town Council has to prioritize what exactly the business is to begin with.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Town can regionalize services, but if the Department Heads concentrate on things that are not important to the Town Council or that the Town Council thinks the citizens should have, then it is a moot point.

Councilor Console said that the Department Heads need to look at what to do to stay in business. Maybe Park and Recreation would say that the Nature Center is nice to have, but the Town needs to start charging a fee to cover the cost so there is money to maintain the fields.

Councilor Hemmann said the Core Services exercise tonight is to address what the services are that the Departments provide. In looking at the mandated and support services, these are things the Town needs to deliver. Then on the next list, the Town doesn't have to do any of the things.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked what that would do to help the Town Council with the budget preparation. Does that mean everyone in Departments at the bottom of the list will go and those at the top of the list will stay?

Bonne Therrien, Town Manager, said that an exercise like that would help her. There are services that have to go. She can select them or have the Town Council lead her in selecting them.

Chairperson Adil said that the Town Council needs to decide what is important. He said that he loves the Nature Center but it is costing the Town money.

Councilor Console said that the Department should say this is what is important to the Town and why.

Councilor Hemmann said that the Park and Recreation Department has made programs self-sustaining over the past five to eight years. Those activities can spin out on their own because they are self-sustaining. The charge of the Nature Center was to become self-sustaining and it hasn't been able to do that.

Chairperson Adil said that the Town Council should list its priorities and then determine what programs are self-sustaining, too.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that how the Town provides the service is the role of the Department Heads and the Town Manager.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that his only concern with this approach is how does one prevent the core services departments from not participating in this cost savings exercise because they consider themselves the untouchables. There is fat in every Department.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that not every service in a Department is a cores service. All Departments will have to do the exercise. Core services are very different from Town to Town. Policy makers have to decide what it is, that is important for this Town.

A discussion ensued concerning the lists of programs that the Town Manager presented.

Councilor Kotkin said that he doesn't think a core service that the Town has to provide is counseling. The Town needs to have a referral network for counseling. Counselors don't need to be employed by the Town. He said the Town doesn't need to promote tourism. He doesn't think the Town needs to supply Department Heads with direct clerical support. He said that the Town Manager should take the initiative to have a pool of clerical people in Town Hall. He said that he thinks there are too many. That is the old style. The Town doesn't need Assistant Department Heads, either. He asked why can't the Assistant Park and Recreation Director act as the Nature Center Director and have him at the Nature Center or close to the Nature Center completely. He said that the Finance Director is properly staffed but she needs to invest money more effectively. Revenue can be raised. He is not sure about the ROPE program.

Councilor Hemmann said that a discussion will have to take place with the Board of Education about that. ROPE and DARE are part of the curriculum of the education program.

Councilor Hemmann asked about regionalizing the food and clothing programs or have volunteer organizations pick up the programs and house them.

Councilor Roberts said that she is concerned with the new service provided by the Social and Youth Services. Her concern is that the Town Council is building in another service that residents will be used to receiving and it will be harder to remove staff from that Department. On the Police list, the National Night Out and Citizen's Police Academy can be removed. She asked what the Town actually gets by having an accredited Police Department.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Town gets a lower insurance premium.

Councilor Roberts said that the amount of time to that is probably not gotten back in insurance savings.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that after listening to the Town Council she will bring these ideas back to the Department Heads and that may be a good time for a joint meeting.

Councilor Roberts said that instead of having Council mail delivered can it be posted on-line.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that if the Town Council is willing to do it, that it can be done.

Councilor Console said that the police are on patrol anyway and it is good for the officers to know who the Town Council is anyway.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that he would like to look at the core services of the library and what extraneous services that are found there that can be eliminated. There is an awful lot there that can be removed and still maintain core services. The Fire Marshal has been gone for two months. Who is providing that service now?

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that two gentleman are providing part time services.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that should be a permanent arrangement. Ambulance service can be provided out of house.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that a final report of that will be finished soon.

Councilor Console said that employees don't really need to take vehicles home.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that electricity and heat is another area. Lights are on in buildings all night and the buildings are being heated. Are there controls in all buildings?

Chairperson Adil said that he would like a 24/7 review of what is going on in the buildings at all times.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said some recreation programs and senior meals need to be looked at too. Some summer recreation programs need to be eliminated.

Councilor Hemmann said that new sidewalk installation should be halted.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that Planning and Zoning mandates some of that work.

Councilor Console asked what was the therapeutic recreation program?

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that it is a wonderful program for those with special needs but it is very unique to a Town. There are about 30 or 40 people who use the programs. The Director of the Therapeutic Recreation program works about 30 hours a week.

Chairperson Adil said that the Town can start privatizing the garbage removal and residents would have to pay for the service.

Chairperson Kotkin said that refuse and recycling is core as part of health. It is important to push the recycling items out of the trash. There is a tremendous revenue source there.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that refuse collection should be every other week and recycling every week. That would force residents to make better decisions about trash. Larger recycling bins could also be implemented.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that eventually towns will have to go to a pay as you throw program. The residents pay for what they throw out. In Coventry, they have implemented this and recycling has gone up 40 percent.

RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, said that the Town is waiting for the technology that would allow for the barrels to be weighed by the automated arm that lifts the barrel to throw it out.

Councilor Kotkin said that the Town Manager should tell the Director of Public Works that his goal for the Town should be to get the Town to 35 percent instead of 30 percent for recycling. He said that he would love to pay non-unionized staff more for reaching goals.

Councilor Roberts said that DVD's should be removed from the Library.

Councilor Console said that the Fire and Police boats can be combined.

Councilor Roberts asked who was doing the other things that the Fire Marshal did.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that Paul Dudley in Data Services is handling the telephones and channel 16.

A discussion ensued concerning regionalization of the dog pound.

Councilor Console asked about street lighting.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that Watertown has a policy on streetlights that she would like the Town Council to look at.

Councilor Forrest said that at the Green Summit, a gentleman discussed light pollution, too. Some residents will say that it is a safety issue.

Councilor Console asked about the Cove boat launch.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that it is the actual launch. It costs the Town money to run the launch in season.

Councilor Kotkin said that the Park and Recreation Department has plans to totally redo the area. It would make a lot of sense and would become a revenue generator.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, asked if the top 15 draft core services made sense. In response to a question, she said that there are too many mandates to allow the Town to regionalize the Fire Marshal.

Councilor Console said that the Fire Marshal was spending time on the telephones and asked how much of his time was spent as a Fire Marshal and how much spent on the other tasks.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that he spent 85 percent of his time as Fire Marshal.

Councilor Walsh asked if grants should be listed higher on the list because they pay for themselves.

Councilor Roberts said that with elderly services under Social Services, she asked how much staff was involved.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that there is an Elderly Services Coordinator and Senior Center Coordinator. Elderly and Dial-A-Ride are ranked higher than youth programs. Should it move ahead of recreation and Library?

Councilor Roberts said that the youth and recreation programs have options but the elderly do not.

Councilor Hemmann said that recreation programs that are self-sustaining should be kept.

Councilor Kotkin said that soccer and little league are not run by Town government. Barracudas Swim team is run by the Town.

Chairperson Adil said that Teen Theater is too.

Councilor Forrest said that any non self-supporting recreation programs are on the table.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that the Keane Foundation may step in and fill the gap in some senior programs.

Councilor Roberts said that there were turf issues with the Community Center and senior center. The seniors pay for many of their programs.

Chairperson Adil asked about leaf pickup.

Council discussed it and decided it was a core service.

Councilor Roberts said that fleet maintenance is a core service but does it have to be done in-house.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said she has asked Physical Services to look into that.

Councilor Console asked what GIS was.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that it is Geographical Information Systems, like mapping on computers. The Town has a full time person to do this. Is that a core service? CRCOG may be doing it on a regional basis.

Councilor Forrest said that he thinks it is a core service. It helps the Town Council in policy making decisions.

Chairperson Adil said that if CRCOG does it, should the Town?

Councilor Hemmann said that the MDC could do it.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Assistant to the Town Manager, is looking to move towards an ESRI software base that would mean that Town staff would learn how to make their own maps and be trained on the software.

RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, said that with training, the conversion would be about \$25,000. It is an efficiency tool, too. It would allow the Engineering Department and Assessor's office to have the information at their fingertips.

Councilor Hemmann asked about child daycare.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that it was low on the list because there are other places. It is not self-sustaining.

Councilor Forrest said that the Nature Center should be on the list. The Library could be open less.

Councilor Console asked about the senior meals.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that is from CRT and there is a big demand for it.

Chairperson Adil said that Dial-A-Ride is expensive. It should be more self-sustaining.

Councilor Roberts asked how much the Friendly Visitor program cost the Town?

Councilor Hemmann said that the program is based on volunteers.

RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, said that part of the Elderly Services Coordinators job is to coordinate those types of services. If the Town could get a church group to take over the service, it may be a good idea.

Councilor Forrest said that maybe the Library reference desk doesn't need to have more than one person there at a time. He also suggested combining finance duties with the Board of Education's Finance Department so that only one person is writing checks. He said that Physical Services for the Town and Board of Education should be combined. The Police and Fire boat services should be combined. The Town has three pools. Swimming is a core service but having three pools may not be. Maybe extending hours would be better than opening three pools.

Councilor Kotkin said that if the high school pool is open when Willard Pool is open, it would be a redundancy. Mill Woods has flooded at times and been closed down. It wouldn't be good to have Willard closed, too.

A discussion concerning the use of the pools ensued.

Councilor Forrest said that some Police services are subsidized.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Town Council should not grant any waivers for police services. She said that this discussion has given her a lot of direction. She will sit down with Department heads and come up with ideas.

Councilor Hemmann asked how much is given to outside organizations.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that she is only allowing contribution to be made to organizations that if they are not made, the Town will lose other money. One example is the Transit District. Without a contribution, the Town can't get the subsidy for Dial-A-Ride. She said that on a positive note, during the Budget review, every Department has brought in a zero budget increase.

Councilor Kotkin said that in general with recreation, the Town is probably subsidizing football and soccer by having a staff member at Cottone Field during games. That service will need to be paid for by the organizations.

Chairperson Adil said that the Town Council will have to decide about the Fire Department. In the past, the Town Council has been very generous with the Department.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that Towns are generous with volunteer departments, because the cost of a paid department is so high.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

At 8:07 p.m., Councilor Console moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Hemmann. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano  
Town Clerk