

Unapproved  
**SPECIAL MEETING**  
**MARCH 30, 2009**

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

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

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Finance Director; Pam Rapacz, Democratic Registrar of Voters; Brian O'Connor, Chief Building Official; Michael Turner, Director of Public Works; Jim McDonald, Assistant Director of Public Works; Tony Martino, Administrative Analyst; Heather Vargas, Administrative Analyst; Les Cole, Chairperson of the Capital Improvements Committee; Peter Gillespie, Town Planner; Chris Traczyk, Chairperson of the Tourism Committee; Howard Greenblatt, Chairperson of the Economic Development and Improvements Commission; Anthony Dignoti, Fire Marshal; RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager; and Amy Bello, Assistant Town Clerk,

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that petitions for the Wilkus property were filed in the Town Clerk's office and the Registrar of Voters will now certify the names.

#### REGISTRARS

Pam Rapacz, Democratic Registrar of Voters, said that the budget has enough money still in it to pay for one referendum at one location if enough signatures were collected. She said that the Registrars received no pay increase last year and so they are asking for one this year. She said that this year there are unfunded mandates in the budget. This year is a municipal election and the State isn't paying for the audit of the machines or the formatting of the memory disks. There are no other major changes to the budget.

Councilor Kotkin asked if other staff is also receiving a raise.

Pam Rapacz said that other employees will receive a 3 percent cost of living increase.

Councilor Cascio asked how many hours a week the Registrars work.

Pam Rapacz said that a normal work week is 12 hours. During the election season more hours are worked. The day before the election she puts in 21 hours and the day of the election she works 22 hours.

Councilor Cascio asked how Wethersfield's pay rate range compares to other Towns.

Pam Rapacz said that Wethersfield is the lowest around.

Councilor Walsh asked about formatting memory cards.

Pam Rapacz said that all the cards have to be formatted for every election. The State has paid to do this for the State and Federal election but will not pay for the municipal election. It is costly.

#### BUILDING/HDC/PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

Brian O'Conner, Chief Building Official, said that in order to deliver a zero percent budget increase he had to eliminate the part-time secretary position and cut the hours of the part-time inspector and part-time property maintenance enforcer. He said these cuts will hurt customer service. He said that it is most important to have the part-time secretary reinstated for assistance at the counter. His second priority would be for more hours for the part-time inspector. The inspector can do more things in the Department. He can perform inspections and enforce the maintenance code, too.

Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, said that the inspector's hourly rate is \$28.20 and the enforcer's hourly rate is \$22.62.

Councilor Kotkin asked about the volume of building activity and how it relates to the Department.

Brian O'Conner handed out a sheet. He said that permits are down by about 300 this year but fees are up by about \$150,000. He said that the winter is always the slow season and with the current economy it was slower than normal. He expects the volume to pick up now that it is spring. He said that all three inspectors can inspect properties and enforce the zoning regulations, the property maintenance code, the sign ordinance, the Historic District ordinance, and the inoperable motor vehicle ordinance.

Tony Martino, Administrative Analyst, said that the Department is down in revenue right now but he will have a better idea of the numbers in another month. He said that he anticipates it will be about \$250,000 again next year.

Brian O'Conner said that starting July 1<sup>st</sup>, the Department will start the square foot valuation schedule that will increase fees.

Councilor Kotkin asked what kind of flexibility there would be to increase the position's hours during the year as the number of permits increase.

Bonnie Therrien said that a request could be brought to the Town Council to increase the hours for the position and to fund the additional hours.

Councilor Cascio asked if it may be a better idea to look at adding a floater. It seems that offices need hours covered and the busy seasons may be different so a floater would work.

Bonnie Therrien said that the current floater position has been reduced from 19.5 hours a week to 15 hours per week. Most of the 19.5 hours a week positions were reduced to 15 hours and the 25 hour a week positions were reduced to 20 hours.

## PHYSICAL SERVICES

### (FLEET MAINTENANCE)

Mike Turner, Director of Physical Services, said that under the vehicle maintenance budget there is a change in the salary account. One employee was working ½ time in the vehicle maintenance area and ½ time in the physical services area. That position is now full time in the physical services area. The only big change in the budget is the decrease for the fuels based on the bid results.

Jim McDonald, Assistant Director of Physical Services, said that the Department requested 2 dump trucks. They are stainless steel trucks and require less maintenance. Less salt will be used on roads too because the control will no longer be manual. These 2 trucks will bring the fleet to where it should be. These trucks will replace a 1994 and 1995 truck. The trucks have served the Town well but are at the end of their useful life.

Councilor Console asked if the trucks come with new plows, too.

Jim McDonald said that they are part of the bid price.

Mike Turner said that if the Town does a lease purchase on the vehicles it cuts the cost for two years. He said that the number 2 priority is the purchase of a payloader. Both trucks and the payloader could be purchased through the lease purchase. He said that truck vendors are willing to do a lease purchase for the vehicles.

Chairperson Adil asked if equipment can be shared with other communities.

Mike Turner said that it would be difficult to share these items because the Town will need them at the same time as other communities. He said that it is good for specialized equipment. The Town shares a bulldozer with Rocky Hill.

Bonnie Therrien said that the State Smart Growth Plan for Towns will have the State help to pay for the sharing of equipment.

Mike Turner said that the Town currently has two payloaders. One is in the Physical Services yard for loading the trucks and the other is used for leaf composting.

Jim McDonald said that this year one of the payloaders was down during snow removal. The older payloader is from 1989 and the newer one is from 2000. The other vehicle request is for a dual wheel 350 pickup truck. The one it would replace is a 1995 truck with about 82,000 miles.

Councilor Console asked what vehicles would need to be purchased in order to get the fleet to a good position for the next 10 years.

Jim McDonald said that if 2 dump trucks were purchased in this budget, the fleet would be in good shape. The Town can get on a schedule of replacing one dump truck every other year. There is a need for constant replacement. The new trucks are so much more efficient and use less diesel.

Councilor Kotkin said that the Town is paying the second lease purchase payment this year. He said that he would consider a lease purchase for 2 dump trucks and the payloader if there were no big ticket items coming up in the next few years. He asked how the pricing is for these vehicles.

Jim McDonald said that the Department should be able to get by. He said that the pricing is being held over from last year.

Councilor Roberts asked about the trackless machine.

Jim McDonald said that it is a request for a new machine that will remove snow from the sidewalks. It will stop the rutting that the Jeeps make when they remove the snow on the sidewalks. There was also a request for a truck for the mechanics. Their current truck is not large enough to hold equipment and tires that are needed when they are called out to service a truck that has broken down on the road. Their current truck would be passed down to be used somewhere else in the fleet.

Bonnie Therrien said that the Town looked at purchasing equipment from local businesses going out of business but that hasn't come through.

Councilor Hemmann asked if the lawnmowers are Toro brand and if they have snow attachments on them.

Jim McDonald said that the Town has one Toro mower that has a snow attachment. The other mowers cost the Town half the price but don't do snow removal.

Bonnie Therrien said that a stump grinder is an item that could be purchased regionally.

Councilor Forrest asked if the snow plows can be removed from the old dump trucks and installed on the new trucks for a savings in the cost.

Mike Turner said that the snow plow frames are welded on the trucks and have as much wear to them as the trucks.

(REFUSE AND RECYCLING)

Mike Turner said that the only change to this budget is the 2 ½ percent increase to the Paine's contract. The exact number has not been set yet. He said that the CRRA tipping fee has gone down based on a smaller tonnage of recycling based on use. He said that there is a new State mandate for Towns to recycle electronics free of charge. The Town will provide a dumpster and a company will remove the electronics at no cost to the Town.

Bonnie Therrien said that staff is looking into the feasibility of closing the Transfer Station and working with Newington to allow Wethersfield residents to use Newington's Transfer Station. Town staff has discussed single stream recycling with Mike Paine. The problem is the cost of the large recycling bins that the residents would need. The cost is about \$500,000 for the barrels. It is not in the budget.

RaeAnn Palmer said that Mr. Paine is looking for someone to finance the barrels over the next 2 years. He would like the Town to extend its contract with Paines if it alters it.

Bonnie Therrien said that she thinks the Town should go out to bid when the contract expires in 2011.

Councilor Forrest asked if the Town could have fewer collections.

Bonnie Therrien said that it would require a renegotiation of the contract.

Councilor Kotkin said that electricity and natural gas prices have gone down. He asked if the decreases were reflected.

Bonnie Therrien said natural gas pricing is locked in by a contract until 2011.

Lisa Hancock said that the Town elected to work with CRCOG on pricing. She said that staff is also looking at usage and factoring that into the cost of utilities.

Councilor Kotkin asked why the Physical Service's utilities budget went up so much in 2008-09.

Heather Vargas, Administrative Analyst, said that the Town assumed the responsibility of the utilities for the Keeney Cultural Center.

Councilor Forrest asked to see the actual usage numbers that were used to compile the figures. He said that he would also like to see where the electricity is being used.

At 6:40 p.m., Deputy Mayor Montinieri arrived.

Councilor Walsh asked about the tipping fees for the recycling.

Bonnie Therrien said that CRRA used to pay the Town for the recyclables. As of July 1<sup>st</sup>, they will no longer pay the Town.

RaeAnn Palmer said that the amount of recyclables is down, too.

At 6:45 p.m., Councilor Kotkin left the room

Mike Turner said that the streetlight budget has been cut by \$75,000. Some streetlights will be disconnected and the Town should see a savings. The Town has to pay to have the lights removed.

Bonnie Therrien said that other Towns have done this. The Infrastructure Committee will review it in a safety conscious manner.

Councilor Roberts asked how much it would cost to buy the streetlights.

Mike Turner said that it would cost between \$350,000 and \$400,000. There is just never enough money for the Town to buy them.

Bonnie Therrien said that shutting off Town parking lot lights at midnight will save an additional \$3,500. Another energy savings can be found in the Town going to a four day work week. She said that the Director of Public Works can look into it more. The Town doesn't have a good baseline number to use for energy because for the last year the Town Hall has been under construction. The Town employees would work four 10 hour days.

At 6:50 p.m. Councilor Kotkin returned.

## PHYSICAL SERVICES

Mike Turner said that this budget increases because the ½ maintainer position that was shared with Fleet Maintenance is now fully in this budget. He said that there is one unfilled vacancy in the Department.

Bonnie Therrien said that the mosquitoes may be a big problem this year with the reduced bat population.

Mike Turner said that he has done away with the clerical staff associated with the tree position and removed some seasonal positions.

Councilor Kotkin asked why the fall seasonal help was removed and not the summer help.

Bonnie Therrien said that the Town staff could not keep up with all of the grass mowing.

Jim McDonald said that the staff that maintains the parks will be moved over to leaf collection in the fall. It will leave the parks not as well maintained.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that a couple of years ago, all of the leaves were not picked up. He asked what the additional cost was to the Town.

Mike Turner said that there is not an actual cost involved, it just requires more spring clean up.

Jim McDonald said that there was an additional crew used last year and it made a big difference in the leaf pickup program.

Bonnie Therrien said that last year the Town Council reduced the mosquito management budget. This year that may not be able to be done.

## ENGINEERING

Mike Turner said that the commission clerk of the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission has been eliminated. The staff person will take the minutes but will lose the ability to be part of the application process. He said that in the line striping budget the Town owned parking lots will be skipped this year.

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Les Cole, Chairperson of the Capital Improvements Advisory Committee, gave Councilors a handout listing projects. Yellow represents a stimulus package request, Red represents a decrease, and Blue represents an increase. He said that money is tight but he is concerned that things need to be taken care of now and not down the road. He said that Wethersfield has the reputation of being about 90 percent, meaning work is started on a project and only about 90 percent of the work gets done. He said that he would like to see the rest of these projects completed so that they can be taken off the Capital Improvements list. He said that the Town should have an underground water study done. There are some water issues at the High School, the tennis courts and now the auditorium. He said that there are also safety issues that need to be addressed. He said that the Committee would like to continue to build up a reserve balance in case things get even tighter in the coming years. He said that the Plan of Conservation and Development update has \$75,000 budgeted, the Town may be able to remove \$25,000 from that item.

Bonnie Therrien said that this is mandated by the State and the Town Planner has updated figures. She said that it may be time to go out to bond on the roads again. Mr. Cole said that if the Town receives stimulus money, he will reconvene the Committee and reprioritize its list.

Chairperson Adil asked what would happen if the stimulus money comes in after the budget is set.

Bonnie Therrien said that it will be added into the budget.

Councilor Walsh thanked the Committee for all the work it does in going through the process of prioritizing the projects.

Les Cole said that when the Capital Improvement Advisory Committee brought its recommended budget to the Planning and Zoning Commission, it was approved with one descending vote. The person with the descending vote said that there was not enough money in the budget.

Councilor Kotkin asked what is the difference between roof consultant, roof maintenance, and roof work.

Mike Turner said that Tremco prepares a data base for the Town and inspects the roofs annually. They will also do minor repair work. They find some work that is above the scope of their contract. They give the Town a list of routine maintenance that needs to be done. The third category is roof replacement for small structures like the Mill Woods Bath house.

Les Cole said that all of the small roof replacement projects on the list could be done for about \$70,000.

Mike Turner said that he can go to the database to look at the priorities. He said that nothing is acutely leaking. He said that the last bond on the roads was for \$3,000,000 and it did a lot of roads. The Town is falling behind again. The Town needs \$1,200,000 to keep up the roads. He said that the Governor cut 25 percent of the aid to roads and the price of asphalt went way up in the past few years.

Councilor Hemmann asked where the Town was in terms of drainage projects.

Bonnie Therrien said that the Governor pulled back all bonded drainage money.

Mike Turner said that there are about 20 items on the drainage list, some dating back 20 years. He said that the budget item miscellaneous drainage repairs has helped with projects.

Councilor Hemmann said that she would like a list of all the projects with a date of when the project was put on the list.

## FIRE MARSHAL

Anthony Dignoti, Fire Marshal, said that there are no changes to this budget. It is in-line with last year's budget. He said that the part time temporary line item needs to be reinstated to pay for backup when he is sick or on vacation. He said it will also allow the part time person to complete his oversight work on the CREC project.

## PLANNING AND ZONING/EDIC

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, introduced the Chairperson of the Economic Development Improvement Commission (EDIC) Howard Greenblatt and the Vice Chairperson of the Tourism Commission, Chris Traczyk. He said that the commission clerk for Planning and Zoning has remained in the budget but the clerks for the other four commissions have been removed. He said that he and his staff attend 79 meetings a year, 60 of which are not Planning and Zoning and he doesn't know if they can do all the minutes. He said that it doesn't make sense for him to do the minutes. His salary and time could be better spent elsewhere. He said that the professional services have been cut for marketing. He can live with that cut. The budget eliminates the Salute to Businesses for \$3,000.

Howard Greenblatt, Chairperson of the EDIC, asked that the Town Council consider reinstating part of the funding for the event. He said that the Town needs to show it values its businesses. It is an invaluable community service. He said that the businesses are always so generous to the non-profits in Town.

Peter Gillespie said that \$6,000 was removed from the advertising budget and \$1,500 from the breakfast meetings. He said that he can live without those funds. They may start charging to attend the breakfast meetings.

Howard Greenblatt said that the Town needs to have a couple of breakfast meetings a year. It is important for businesses to get together with the Town officials and other businesses.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked if he would like to reposition priorities. He said that he may want to put Keiler on hold and do some local things first.

Howard Greenblatt said that business outreach is critical.

Peter Gillespie said that the Economic Development Commission has not seen this budget yet. He said that in the copy and binding budget, the \$10,000 was for the brochures of Historic Wethersfield that promote the Town. The supply is running low. He said that the Town has them for the calendar year.

Chris Traczyk, Vice Chairperson of the Tourism Commission, said that she would like the Commission to look at the budget and see where it would like to spend its money. The Commission has done a lot to raise the profile of the Town while using very little money. She understands that cuts need to be made but she would like the Commission to have the opportunity to look at the budget and see where to spend the \$8,500.

Councilor Walsh asked how many years worth of brochures would be printed for \$10,000.

Chris Traczyk said that it will cover three, maybe four years.

Peter Gillespie said that he is hoping it will pay for about 80,000 brochures.

Chairperson Adil asked what was the feedback on the billboard program.

Peter Gillespie said that it is hard to quantify its success. He said that he wouldn't highly prioritize the program again but the State thought the program was successful.

Chris Traczyk said that the State thought the program was very effective. She said that the theme of marketing Connecticut was very good.

Councilor Roberts asked about maintenance costs for the website.

Peter Gillespie said that there is an hourly rate to update the website. There is also an annual hosting fee of \$300 or \$400.

RaeAnn Palmer said that the maintenance can be done in-house.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri recommended having brochures printed for only one year.

Councilor Kotkin asked how much was raised by fees for the Salute to Business programs.

Peter Gillespie said that the Chamber contributes about \$5000 and the total contributions are about \$1,200.

Councilor Kotkin asked about the commission clerks and the thoroughness of the minutes and notes.

Peter Gillespie said that the Planning and Zoning Commission must have thorough minutes. The Design Review Commission is also very specific. He said that the Economic Development and Improvement Commission minutes can be done in-house because both he and the Assistant Planner attend the meetings. He said that the Tourism Commission and Redevelopment

Commission can have the meetings tape recorded and a Commission member can take the minutes.

Bonnie Therrien said that there are too many Boards and Commissions. Some should be merged.

Chris Traczyk suggested that Boards and Commissions meet less frequently.

The Town Council discussed the distribution of the brochures. They are distributed along the 91 and 95 corridors and at visitor centers.

Councilor Roberts asked how often the Conservation Plan has to be updated.

Peter Gillespie said that it has to be done every 10 years and was last done in 2000. The Town will lose its eligibility for grant funding if it is not done. He said that the Planning and Zoning Commission will review the old Conservation Plan and determine what to do. Some elements need to be added. The midpoint of fees is \$75,000.

Councilor Roberts said that it seems like a huge amount of money for a plan.

Bonnie Therrien said that the Debt Services advisors were unable to attend this meeting and would be at another budget workshop. She said that she is hearing a 10 percent cut in State aid may be occurring this fiscal year. She said that the next budget workshop is April 27<sup>th</sup>.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

At 8:02 p.m., Councilor Hemmann moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Amy Bello  
Assistant Town Clerk