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REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 5, 2009

The Wethersfield Town Council held a meeting on Monday, January 5, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Silas Deane Middle School.

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

Absent: Councilor Cascio

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri led the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, presented a highlight of the following report:

RECENTLY APPROVED DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

411 Hartford Avenue – Buck Arts Academy

Plans have been submitted for demolition and renovation to the barns on this property to accommodate an arts academy. The PZC approved the plans at their December meeting.

1025 Silas Deane Highway – OR and L Construction – Wethersfield Shopping Center

A site plan for a 19,000 s.f. free standing, medical office building for the north end of this shopping center has been submitted. The application was approved by the PZC at their December meeting.

UNDER PERMIT REVIEW

185 Broad Street – Silas Robbins House Bed and Breakfast

An application to renew and revise the conditions of approval for the special outdoor events will be heard by the PZC at their January 6 meeting.

DEVELOPER/PROPERTY OWNER/REALTOR CONTACT

- We have been meeting on a preliminary basis with a new interested party working on plans for the Comstock Ferre property,
- Discussed possible redevelopment plans for property on the Berlin Turnpike.
- Discussed concept plan for national chain restaurant looking at site on the Silas Deane Highway.
- Met with local business interested in expansion.
- Met with local business interested in possible reuse and renovation of former Abbate Florist on Silas Deane Highway.
- Working with local realtor on new listing of commercial property on Russell Road.
- Working with small local business looking to relocate on Silas Deane Highway.

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- Talked to 2 property owners about possible renovation and use of façade program funds.
- Working with property owner on possible use of tax incentive program to fund project.

SILAS DEANE HIGHWAY REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

- Continuing to work with CRCOG representative to discuss possible options and locations for new bus shelters at key locations on the Silas Deane Highway and in other locations in Town.
- Staff has filed an additional STEAP application for \$500,000 for the remaining funding necessary to complete the streetscape improvements in front of Town Hall.
- The December 10 ceremony scheduled to celebrate the completion of phase 1 of the streetscape improvements in front of Town Hall was cancelled due to the weather and will be rescheduled to a future date most likely in the spring.
- The proposed amendments to the zoning regulations affecting mixed use zoning were approved by the PZC at their December meeting.
- Attended meeting to discuss inclusion of a portion of the northerly end of Silas Deane Highway up to Jordan Lane in Hartford's Wethersfield Avenue Streetscape project.

OTHER NEWS AND INITIATIVES

Economic Development and Improvement Commission

- Wethersfield Life has graciously agreed to provide some monthly space for an update on economic development and EDIC initiatives. EDIC member Doug Sacks has been providing a summary of monthly activities to improve communications with residents and businesses.
- The Salute To Business event was held on Wednesday December 3 at the Wethersfield Country Club. Local businesses were recognized in several categories:
 - New business recognition was awarded to:

▪ Little Caesars	Wing Crazy
▪ The Bean & Grape	Noble Nails
▪ Roche Service Co.	Fabulous Jewelry
▪ Top Trimmers Salon	The Boiler Room
▪ J & L Medical Services	Ooh La La A Dog Spa
▪ Live Right Body Mind Spirit Wellness	
 - Longevity recognition (over 40 years in business) was awarded to:

• Michael Albino Plumbing & Heating	Atlas Tile
○ Bliss Market	Clearing House Auction Galleries
○ CT Association of Land Surveyors	Cross Automotive
○ D & K Sound Services	Friendly's Restaurant
○ Goodyear Auto Service Center	Hairport Hair Designers
○ Hine's Sudden Service	Kentucky Fried Chicken
○ Manousos Wines & Liquors	McCue Gardens
○ Modern Barber Shop	Plaza VII Hair Design
○ Sal the Tailor	Sebastianelli Jewelers
○ Town Oil Co.	United Paint & Wallpaper
○ Welcome Aboard Travel Agency	

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- Special recognition was awarded to:

- 9/11 Memorial Sports Center
- Pelton's Home Healthcare
- 912 Silas Deane Highway LLC
- Hine's Sudden Service
- Liberty Bank
- Wolcott Hill Condo Assoc.
- Kentucky Fried Chicken

- The Commission is working on the development of a Buy/Shop Wethersfield program and will present these ideas in the near future.
- Commission members have initiated a new phase of the business visitation program and have started to meet with the newest members of the business community 100 visits are planned.

Redevelopment Agency

- Staff has prepared an RFP for consulting services to prepare a redevelopment analysis and Plan for the Fun Zone property.

Tourism

- Volunteers are working on significant updates and redesign to the Historic Wethersfield website.
- The Holiday schedule for the Horse and Carriage rides was distributed.

Preserve America

- The Steering Committee met on November 24 to discuss implementation strategies for the Plan.
- We are continuing to work with the State on the awarding of \$115,000 towards the gateway project at Marsh Street. We are working on plans in anticipation of putting the project out to bid in the near future.
- A subcommittee is beginning work on the details of the wayfinding signage program.

Councilor Console asked about the status on Humphrey's and the old Amici's Restaurant.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said that work is continuing on the inside of Humphrey's restaurant. The work is not happening as rapidly as the Town would like but they are continuing to work on it. There is nothing to report on the former Amici's space. Some budget issues were run into with that space. The Town does not have any programs specific to their needs in ways of assistance. He did give them some suggestions for additional financing options.

Councilor Forrest asked about the 1025 Silas Deane Highway property, the medical facility that passed the Planning and Zoning Commission. He asked if there was a timeline for construction.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said that they are working with the State of Connecticut on access and parking improvements. Hopefully that will be worked out soon and construction can begin before the spring. He said that he would hope that completion would be by the end of the year.

Councilor Forrest asked if that project went through the Design Review board.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said that they did. Some changes were made. He said that he had

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a rendering that he could get for him.

Chairperson Adil asked how this location would be different from the 1260 Silas Deane Highway building that is currently up and running.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said that some of the tenants from that building will move to this building and some of the existing tenants will stay and use the additional space. He said that the question is what will happen with the plan for the additional space that was approved by the Town.

Chairperson Adil said that there was a very good picture in the Hartford Courant this weekend of the horse and carriage rides in Old Wethersfield. He asked if the Town might be able to acquire that photograph.

Peter Gillespie, Town Planner, said that he would look into that.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jack O'Leary, 27 Coleman Road, said that just up the river in Massachusetts there is a town that is historically connected to Wethersfield. Hadley, Massachusetts is having its 350th Anniversary in June while Wethersfield is having its 375th Anniversary in September. He said that he received a packet from Hadley detailing their plans. The Town has a copy of it. He spoke to Paul Courchaine about forming a group to go up to Hadley Massachusetts for their parade. He would love to have a float. The Town needs to decide by April 2009 to be a part of the parade.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, said that he wasn't able to attend the MDC meeting but it seems that there are things that MDC is working on that are coming in on the low side. The issue for the Town is that it bonded a lot of money for the MDC project. Why doesn't the Town go back and renegotiate with them now to bring down the price. There are going to be several years of tough times. The Town needs to bring down the salaries of its teachers and administrators, too. He read in the newspaper about the school allocations being reduced. The Town needs to reduce its own school expenditures in order to keep the property taxes down. Many areas need to be looked at, including eliminating classes that have too few students in them. The Town shouldn't be looking for more ways to tax, but places to cut expenses. The Town shouldn't be raising taxes in a depression. The Town needs to find ways of cutting back.

George Ruhe, 965 Cloverdale Circle, said that in the election of 1982 there was term being used about the economy. The Town needs to look positively to what is transpiring in Washington. There is a tone that will be conveyed down to the State and Town. The economy is in dire straights. Wealth is no shield to the problems. He does not sense the same level of concern that many people in the community have. He senses an expression of optimism. Another item of concern is the revaluation. Home sales and prices are continuing to fall. He would like to urge the elected officials to be aware of that as citizens of this Town get their revised tax assessments they are going to be very worried. Homes sales continue to tumble. He heard rumors to the

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effect that the Superintendent of Schools is asking for a salary increase of 230 percent. He said that it seems a bit outlandish and maybe it is. As the budget process begins, he would strongly urge that the Town Council really take a good look at every nickel and dime that is spent and squeeze as hard as the citizens have to squeeze.

COUNCIL REPORTS & COMMENTS

Councilor Forrest said that at a Shade Tree Commission meeting, they approved a construction project on Hartford Avenue which might have needed the felling of two large trees. The project can be completed without the removal of the trees.

Councilor Kotkin said that shortly before the Council meeting, he attended a meeting of the Park and Recreation Board. The Board had been approached by the Keane Foundation and asked if they would like to hold a carnival in Cove Park in October as part of the 375th Anniversary celebration. The Board spoke favorably of the plan.

Councilor Roberts said that on Saturday, January 24th there will be a fundraiser for the St. Patrick's Day Parade. Tickets are \$25 per person. There are two honorees, John Miller is the Town Honoree and she is the Grand Marshal of the Wethersfield contingency.

Councilor Kotkin said that a friend of his daughters found the Town streets maintained the best of several towns during the holidays. He complimented Town staff.

Chairperson Adil complimented the Wethersfield Fire Department for the work they did just after Christmas with the fire on Boulter Road. He asked if the family needed any assistance.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the family's insurance company has already taken care of everything and the family has a rental.

OTHER BUSINESS

Councilor Kotkin moved **"TO AUTHORIZE THE TOWN MANAGER TO SIGN A CONTRACT WITH NATIONWIDE PAYMENT SOLUTIONS TO PROVIDE INTERNAL CREDIT CARD PAYMENT PROCESSING FOR TOWN OFFICES"** seconded by Councilor Roberts.

Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, said that she is here with Jim Plunkett of Nationwide Payment Solutions.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Finance Director came to her with a proposal from Nationwide that would allow all Departments throughout Town to better utilize credit cards and the public will be able to use it, too. She said that this will be an added service to the Town.

Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, said that in addition to being an added service, she would like to

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start the payment service in the Tax Office first. Once it is working well it can be moved to other offices. There is no cost to the Town but there will be a convenience fee charged to the customer. The more the service is used, the less it will cost the taxpayer. It will be an excellence advantage.

Councilor Forrest asked what is the contract length and what are the terms for renegotiations.

Jim Plunkett said that Master Card, Visa and American Express have allowed an assessment to be passed to the citizens for on-line transactions. It did not allow it to be done in person before. Nationwide has been working with the credit cards to develop a solution specifically for these types of transactions. For the last three or four months, he has been working with this program nationwide. The contract is for three years. There is a sixty day out at anytime. There is no cost to the Town like set up fees or annual fees. It is a standard merchant agreement. The system will allow for two transactions to occur simultaneously with one deposit made to the Town and the other to Nationwide. The convenience rates vary depending on the card type and how it is processed. Nationwide can offer the Town a 2.45 % fee that can be scaled down based on volume. The rates from Master Card and Visa change every October. In the last ten years there have not been any major changes to their rates.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked if it was Nationwide payment or Municipay.

Jim Plunkett said that Municipay is the branch and Nationwide Payment Solutions is the company. The company is based out of Portland, Maine and does about \$3,000,000,000 in transactions for 20,000 retail merchants.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked how long Nationwide was in New Haven, Plainfield, and Ridgefield.

Jim Plunkett said that the rules just changed this past year. Plainfield has been on board for three months, Ridgefield was just set up.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked how long are the funds held by Nationwide.

Jim Plunkett said that Nationwide does not hold the funds. It is an actual payment processor. The money will go directly into the accounts.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that the funds are held for two business days through settlement.

Jim Plunkett said that they are not really held but that is how long it takes to get the funds there. The transaction is authorized at the point of sale. Overnight those transactions are sent out in batches over the network and the actual banks have to issue the credit to the person. It depends when the bank receives the hit and authorizes the release of the funds. Nationwide guarantees that will be done in two business days.

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Councilor Kotkin said that the Town has its money deposited in Bank of America. It will take two days before the money will appear in the Bank of America account.

Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, said that with the current collection with cash or checks there can be a period when it is held. The turnaround is very similar to what it would be with the Town staff preparing the deposits and bringing it to the bank.

Councilor Kotkin said that the money will be in the Town account in about the same time as cash or check.

Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, said some checks will be in the Town account but the funds won't be available to the Town.

Councilor Kotkin said that assuming this reduces the workload, the tax collection would be more efficient.

Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, said that it may be a little less workload through the processing through the financial system. There will still be preparation and processing but may cut down on bank deposits. For every check that the Town deposits and cash deposited, the Town is charged fees on each transaction. This will also reduce some of those costs.

Councilor Kotkin said that on a \$2,000 tax bill, the homeowner would be paying an additional \$50 if using a credit card. He asked if he had an estimate of how many taxpayers might use this.

Jim Plunkett said that in one community they do about 1% on-line and 10% percent in office with credit cards. 95% of communities do not accept credit cards because they can't figure out a way to budget the transaction fees. Customers are given the option to opt out of the transaction at any time. At the end of the transaction, the customer signs once for the Town and once for Nationwide. Only 5% of municipalities in the United States are accepting credit cards. The 1%, the on-line transactions, number is very accurate. That payment has been allowed for 10 years.

Councilor Kotkin asked why this service is being initiated when the collection rate is already so high.

Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, said that this is an additional service to offer customers and to reduce the banking fees. It offers another choice to the residents.

Councilor Console asked who reconciles these accounts to the Town.

Jim Plunkett said that there is no reconciliation. Nationwide collects the fees. The system automatically figures the fee and separates the fee as a separate transaction.

Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, said that the money would go into the account through the bank reconciliation process.

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Councilor Forrest asked if someone used there card as a debit card would it have the same fees.

Jim Plunkett said that yes it would have the same fee. The debit cards as key entered transactions are no less expensive, than if they are swept through a machine.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. Councilor Roberts voted NAY. The motion passed 7-1-0.

Councilor Kotkin moved **“TO REFER THE TAX AMNESTY PROGRAM TO THE BUDGET COMMITTEE FOR REVIEW AND ANALYSIS”** seconded by Deputy Mayor Montinieri.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that this is a new piece of legislature that was part of a State bill that allows municipalities to develop an ordinance to offer a one time tax amnesty program. She said that this is something that she is not in favor of but wanted to bring it to the Town Council’s attention and have it referred to the Budget Committee. The reason many towns are not going to offer it is because there are already back taxes and the interest rates are included as part of the revenue. If the Town offsets it with this amnesty, all of that interest will be lost. In this economy, it is not something that should be offered. The collection rate is excellent at 99%. The Tax Collector has done an excellent job at collecting back taxes along with the interest rates and fines. Some residents have asked the Tax Collector about this program.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Councilor Forrest moved **“TO AUTHORIZE THE TOWN MANAGER TO NEGOTIATE AND SIGN A LEASE WITH YOUGHIOGHENY COMMUNICATIONS-NORTHEAST LLC, TO CO-LOCATE ON THE RADIO TOWER AT 23 KELLEHER COURT PROVIDED THAT TROTT COMMUNICATIONS RETURNS A FAVORABLE INTERMODULATION STUDY”** seconded by Councilor Walsh.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the lease on the tower would be \$24,000 a year. This is not going to be taking up any of the parking spaces. The Planning and Zoning Commission has approved this. She is waiting for Trott Communications to return a favorable study that this will not interfere with any Town communications.

Councilor Kotkin asked if they accept most of the changes, but not all of them, would the approval tonight enable the Town Manager to approve this without coming back to the Town Council.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that they have already approved all of the changes made by Town Attorney Bradley. The only thing outstanding is the intermodulation study.

Councilor Hemmann said that number two on the back pages says that space is needed for

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building and construction. She asked what that meant.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that it is all within the fenced area.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked what the Trott review would be based on.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that Trott is the company that does all of the Police and Fire communications. They can get a sense based on the placement of the antennas whether or not it will interfere with the Town's system. Trott is also working with the Town on the Nextel issues, too. The Assistant to the Town Manager believes that the Town may finally have an agreement with Sprint/Nextel and FCC to get the project under way. Trott has been the consultant on that. She is hoping for a favorable review by the end of the month.

Chairperson Adil asked what the term of the agreement is.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that normally these agreements are for five years. She will make sure that is the length of time.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS, APPOINTMENTS FOR INTRODUCTION

Nothing this week.

MINUTES

Deputy Mayor Montinieri moved **“TO APPROVE THE SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 15, 2008”** seconded by Councilor Roberts.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. Councilors Forrest and Hemmann abstained. The motion passed 6-0-2.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri moved **“TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 15, 2008”** seconded by Councilor Roberts.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. Councilor Forrest and Hemmann abstained. The motion passed 6-0-2.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 8:35 p.m., Councilor Hemmann moved **“TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS REAL ESTATE NEGOTIATIONS AND UNION NEGOTIATIONS”** seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion

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passed 8-0-0. Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager was also present. No motions were made and no votes were taken.

At 8:40 p.m., Councilor Kotkin moved **“TO LEAVE EXECUTIVE SESSION AND ENTER BACK INTO PUBLIC SESSION”** seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Councilor Roberts moved **“TO APPROVE THE POLICE CONTRACT FOR A THREE YEAR PERIOD BEGINNING JULY 1, 2009 TO JUNE 30, 2012”** seconded by Councilor Walsh.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that this contract is being awarded early. It will not start until 2009. The Police Department has agreed to have the highest co-pays in the Town; 20% in 2009-2010, and 21% in 2011-2012. They will also be offered health savings accounts and the Town will start them out with some dollars. The Blue Care program has been eliminated. They will be contributing more to the retiree health insurance, too. The Sergeant overtime has been eliminated. Wages will increase 3% for 2009-2010 with a one time payment for Lieutenant and Sergeants.

Chairperson Adil said that this is a good contract and he thanked everyone for the negotiations.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Chairperson Adil said that he has been getting some complaints that the Town is not picking up Christmas trees. He said that during the budget session, it was decided to save on fuel costs. There are places in Town to drop off trees. This is just the beginning of things that will have to be cut in order to get the budget in order.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:43 p.m., Councilor Kotkin moved **"TO ADJOURN THE MEETING"** seconded by Councilor Roberts. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk