

Unapproved  
**SPECIAL MEETING**  
**MARCH 26, 2009**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on Thursday, March 26, 2009 at 5:30 p.m. in the Town Manager's Conference Room, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT.

Present from Council: Console, Forrest (arrived 5:55 p.m. and left at 6:25 p.m), Hemmann, Roberts, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Montinieri, and Chairperson Adil.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Finance Director; Marlene Desjardins, Tax Collector; Chandler Rose, Tax Assessor; Paul Dudley, Data Services Coordinator; Charles Flynn, Fire Chief; Rich Bailey, Deputy Chief; Mark Guerrero, Deputy Chief; Brian Schroll, Deputy Chief; RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager; and Amy Bello, Assistant Town Clerk

#### RADIO BUDGET

RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, said she and Lieutenant Scales manage the Radio System for the Town. They continue to work on the rebanding. This budget has nothing unusual or dramatically different in it. The consultant fee has been cut to \$10,000 with much of the management in-house. Trott is used to help the Town with FCC issues. The service contract is with Motorola. An additional \$2,000 is budgeted for help outside of the contract scopes.

Dave Scales, Police Lieutenant, said that the specialized agency supplies line item covers portable batteries for the Police Officers. On average, batteries need to be replaced once a year. He is also requesting the purchase of a radio control head. Each cruiser is outfitted with a radio. If a radio goes down and a spare is not available, the cruiser is taken out of service.

RaeAnn Palmer said that there is an increase in the cost of the rental of the Callahan tower site. It was negotiated with the signing of the lease.

#### ESCROW FUNDS

RaeAnn Palmer said that most of the Escrow Funds are fees coming into the Town and then money paid out for a service, security, or maintenance. She asked if there were any questions on the Escrow Funds.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked why the special needs fund and the engineering securities fund balance varied so much. He asked if there was any interface between escrow funds.

RaeAnn Palmer said that special needs funds fluctuate based on the money coming in and then the timing of the payout for the needy. Some of those funds are set in a trust. The engineering securities go up and down based on engineering projects that are going on. She said that there is no interface between the funds. The police escrow fund was removed from the list because Town staff was trying to determine the audit trail.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that staff has been trying to get rid of some of these escrow funds.

## FEES

RaeAnn Palmer said that there are minimal changes to the fees. The zoning permit fees will increase and bring the Town in line with surrounding towns. There is a minor increase in the inoperable motor vehicle permit and survey monuments. The police private duty fee has increased. The increase is based on the union salary increase for the officers. Dial-A-Ride fee increases by \$.50 per week. A sliding scale is available for those who can't afford the fee. She said that the Town has to remove the fee collected on electronics brought to the Transfer Station because the State is mandating that the Towns collect electronics and our current vendor does not charge a fee. She said that the Town is proposing a \$2 fee on uncollected motor vehicle taxes. This fee will cover the expense that the Department of Motor Vehicles charges the Town.

Councilor Forrest asked if the \$2 fee is a State mandate or if the Town could set the fee.

Bonnie Therrien said that \$2 will cover the cost of the fee to the Town from the DMV. It could be increased, but we are not in the business of making a profit.

RaeAnn Palmer said that there is a page on Community Center fees. Kathy Bagley, Director of Parks and Recreation, is here to answer questions.

Kathy Bagley, Director of Parks and Recreation, said that some of the fee increases are needed to stay even with the custodial staff union increases. Other increases are recommended to make some additional money for the Town.

Chairperson Adil asked if she was doing her due diligence to not out price other facilities like the community center.

Kathy Bagley said that she has looked at other Towns' fees and feels comfortable. In response to Deputy Mayor Montinieri's comments, she said that the Town has started a quarterly membership for the use of the Keane Sports Center. She said that the gymnasium rental has picked up now. She said that the Keane Foundation is allowed to use the facility for free for their events. Connecticut Childrens Medical Center (CCMC) rents the gym during some day hours because they do not have a gym at the school.

Councilor Roberts asked what the percentage of private and non-profit usage is.

Kathy Bagley said that she is not sure, but will get that information to the Town Council.

## TAX COLLECTOR

Marlene Desjardins, Tax Collector, said that there is a reduction to her part-time staff from 19.5 hours a week to 15 hours per week. There is a reduction in printing and postage because tax bills will be printed and mailed in-house.

Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, said that the new software program for mass mailing will bring down the postage costs and staff time.

Marlene Desjardins said that book binding has gone down because she will use a new vendor. She said that her assistant is going through the State certification process. Funds are in the budget for that. The current software is very productive. It helps her to track down people who owe taxes. She said that she understands that times are tough but she needs to have her part-timer in the office so that she can concentrate on collecting the back taxes. She said that the office is busy every day.

Lisa Hancock said that it is also important to have the hours so that the person can work full-time during the month of July.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked how long the person was in the position and if that person would be willing to take a pay cut so that the hours could be maintained.

Lisa Hancock said that the person has been in the position since November. She has not approached the person and asked if she is willing to take a pay cut. Reducing the hourly rate worked in her office because the Financial Analyst position was vacant.

Chairperson Adil asked if the Town increased the motor vehicle collection fee from \$2 to \$3, could it pay for the existing hours.

Bonnie Therrien said that staff would look into it.

## ASSESSOR

Chandler Rose, Town Assessor, said that his budget is the same as last year. He said that he would like to keep all of the professional personal audit money in the budget. It costs \$10,000, but brings in about \$100,000 in taxes. The audits are done randomly. There are about 1300 personal property accounts in Town. This audit pays for 20 audits a year.

Councilor Forrest asked if more audits were conducted, would the price increase according. He asked where the revenue would be added to the budget if the Town Council funded more audits.

Chandler Rose said that he is not familiar with the bid price but could look into it.

Lisa Hancock said the additional revenue would go into the lawful additions and deletions account. The entire amount may not be seen there because there will be other offsets.

Councilor Console asked what the temporary office coverage account was for.

Chandler Rose said that it pays for the coverage for the Board of Assessment Appeal's meetings.

Bonnie Therrien said that on page 50 she removed the request for \$50,000 for computer software. She said that the Assessor and Tax Collector have been frustrated with the current MUNIS software.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked what the basic deficiency was with MUNIS.

Chandler Rose said that MUNIS is based out of Maine with its parent company in Texas. They do not have in-house staff that is familiar with Connecticut tax laws. When an issue comes up, they are not equipped to answer it because they lack the Connecticut tax law knowledge. He said a vendor should know what the Town and State laws are with assessing and tax collection.

Bonnie Therrien said that other Towns have already switched to other software programs.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that he would like to know what other communities are doing and if there is a shared capacity.

Bonnie Therrien warned that this \$50,000 will be a recurring cost for the next 4 years.

Chandler Rose said that many Towns are using Quality Data. It is a local firm with Connecticut certified Assessors on staff. He said that Walsh and Associates is also a local vendor. He said that he feels that he is always behind the curve.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that he would like to see some collaboration.

Chairperson Adil said that the Departments need to flush this out and get back to the Town Council will more information.

Lisa Hancock said that she has been working with MUNIS and they came for a site review. She has worked with the Development Department and finally spoke to the President of the company. In turn, he has committed money to project development for the redevelopment of the program. It will take time for that to happen. The Town did receive some additional training and software for free.

Councilor Hemmann said that all States have different tax laws. MUNIS has accounts all over. She said that she can't believe that Connecticut has such unique laws.

There was a discussion on Connecticut tax laws.

Councilor Console asked for a timeline on purchasing and installing a new system and training staff. He also asked for a list of benefits and how it would interface with MUNIS.

## DATA SERVICES

Paul Dudley, Data Services Coordinator, said that this is a zero maintenance percent increase budget that will keep things running. The Support Services line item represents all of the contracts.

Councilor Roberts asked what was ESRI?

RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, said that ESRI is a mapping software. She said that the purchase of it will be in next month's agenda packet. If the Town Council votes to approve it, then this cost will be for the first year's maintenance.

Paul Dudley said that he would like to replace 20 PCs a year. This budget scaled it back to 10 PC replacements next year. At that rate, it would take 10 years to replace all of the computers. He said that the Town has about 150 computers. The Town is currently moving from 03 software to 07 software. New computers are replacing computers that are moving down to replace even older computers. He said that the replacement of 10 computers a year will not sustain the fleet. The Town will have to pick up the momentum at some point. To stay on a five year replacement cycle, the Town needs to replace 20 computers a year.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked if the Town considered leasing equipment.

RaeAnn Palmer said that Town staff looked into it last year and the cost to lease it was more in the long run. The Board of Education leases its computers but it receives large discounts on software for educational purposes.

Councilor Hemmann asked if work is being shared across offices.

RaeAnn Palmer said that the software compatibility issues between the different versions are being worked out. Staff determined it would be better to purchase new machines with the updated software. No training money is budgeted. She said that with the use of the new computers, staff is becoming more familiar with the new software.

Councilor Hemmann asked if Town staff looked at training and skill levels across the board.

Paul Dudley said that low skill levels in one area high behind the confidence in the one application that is used the most.

Councilor Hemmann said that technology can help with efficiency. Efficiencies should be seen since new computers were funded and because of the network improvements.

In response to Deputy Mayor Montinieri and Councilor Roberts' questions, Paul Dudley said that the computers were purchased from a State bid. There is a slight price decrease. He said that the renovations were great for the upgrading of cabling and fiber links and speed switches. He was able to get rid of much of the band aiding.

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

Chuck Flynn, Fire Chief, said that the salary and wages account, insurance account, and copy and binding accounts are all fine.

Lisa Hancock said that because of the new abatement ordinance, firefighters can receive an actual check from the Town or an abatement of taxes. Some funds will be removed from the line item in the budget. It will be a wash though, because the funds will go into the calculation of the mill rate on the other side of the budget.

Chuck Flynn said that he would like the Town Council to consider adding the \$8,550 back into the training and safety account. He said that this will help fulfill a safety training requirement. He said that there are five members getting their paperwork together to join the Department and another nine that will be beginning before July 1<sup>st</sup>. They need this training. He said that the recruitment account, professional services account, support services account, postage and delivery account, water charge account, rentals account, office machinery service account, repair and maintenance account, cleaning and household supplies, and specialized agency supplies account are all fine. He said that the IT account has been moved to the Town's budget on page 97. He asked that Deputy Chief Schroll discuss the equipment budget.

Brian Schroll, Deputy Fire Chief, said that each company brought in requests for equipment. These recommendations were then brought down to a manageable level.

Chuck Flynn said that the furnishing account is fine. The carpet replacement is needed at the three fire houses but the Department can do without it. The fire facilities maintenance account is self explanatory. He said that the repair and maintenance account and heating oil accounts are fine.

Councilor Walsh asked about the reduction in the fuel account.

Bonnie Therrien said that the reduction is because of the low bid the Town received for diesel fuel.

Councilor Roberts asked how many firefighters there were in Town.

Chuck Flynn said that there are 93 officers.

Chairperson Adil asked why the water usage was so much more at Company One.

Chuck Flynn said that the community gardens are behind the fire house and use a lot of water.

Councilor Walsh asked about the fire training.

Chuck Flynn said that there are 90 training classes and many can be done on-line. It makes it easier for firefighters to take these classes on their own at their convenience.

Bonnie Therrien said that the spending freeze continues especially after she hears more rumors of a 10 percent cut in State aid. She asked the Fire Chief to go over the Fire Department's CNEF request.

Chuck Flynn said that the Department is requesting pagers and thermal imaging cameras to replace existing units. The Department is also asking for the replacement of the Chief's vehicle and the existing Chief's vehicle will be given to the Deputy Chief. The Deputy Chief's vehicle is a pieced together 1996 police cruiser that had been totaled.

#### REVIEW OF BUDGET WORKSHOP DATES AND DATE TO VOTE ON BUDGET

Bonnie Therrien asked if Town Councilors are able to attend the Budget Adoption on May 11<sup>th</sup>. If State information will be available around that time, the meeting may need to be changed. The Town Council must adopt by May 15<sup>th</sup>.

The Mayor agreed to keep the budget adoption date to May 11<sup>th</sup>, but if there is the possibility of more State information coming in, then the vote won't occur until May 15<sup>th</sup>.

#### TAX ABATEMENT FOR THE RIDGE AT WETHERSFIELD – ASSISTED LIVING

Rick Mahoney, Attorney for John Trataglia, owner of The Ridge at Wethersfield entered the meeting.

Bonnie Therrien said that the property owner of The Ridge at Wethersfield wants to build an assisted living facility in Wethersfield. It has been approved by Planning and Zoning already. The owner approached the Town about a tax abatement so that the process could move forward. After negotiating with them, she thinks that a five year abatement has been worked out. The taxes to the Town will increase. She is comfortable with this request and feels that this is a workable project.

Chairperson Adil said that the reduction to taxes will only be for the additional taxes.

Bonnie Therrien said that the abatement will not be issued until the Certificate of Occupancy is granted.

Lisa Hancock said that she has reviewed the financials of this project. HUD has required substantial funds in reserve. The reserves are built into the project. There was a different tenant originally but HUD required a tenant with a proven track record. HUD is confident of the professional management who will run the company.

Bonnie Therrien said that this tenant has a good reputation in the field.

Chairperson Adil asked if a market study was done to show that this fits a need in Town.

Rick Mahoney said that a market study was done in 2008 and showed full occupancy of the facility within 2 ½ to 3 years. The building should be completed in September of 2010. The current taxes are \$11,400. The request is for a weighted abatement. This is not a nursing home or medicare facility. He said that the owner needs to get it built and get people in the facility so that is why a weighted request for abatement is being presented. This project is only viable with the financing because it is a HUD project. There are two oversights, a financial and engineering review. First American is in charge of the funding.

Bonnie Therrien said that this abatement was unanimously approved by the Economic Development and Improvement Commission.

Rick Mahoney said that the Town Planner was wonderful to work with. He worked hard to get all of the people together.

Councilor Console asked how this facility would differ from AHEPA.

Bonnie Therrien said that AHEPA receives subsidies. The AHEPA facility is empty because it is in a lawsuit with its contractor.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that this was strongly supported by the EDIC. Wethersfield wants to be business friendly. This will bring additional taxes to the Town. It is a cautious approach and is a good project to have in Town. He urged all Councilors to support this.

Councilor Walsh said that it sounds like the risks are as minimal as they can be and the Town recognizes a net gain.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that the Town Manager did a great job negotiating this deal from the proposal that the Town first received.

Bonnie Therrien said that personal property is not part of this abatement. There will be some personal property tax for the Town when the facility is up and running.

Councilor Walsh moved **“TO APPROVE THE TAX ABATEMENT OF 65 PERCENT IN YEAR 1, 60 PERCENT IN YEAR 2, 55 PERCENT IN YEAR 3, 30 PERCENT IN YEAR 4, AND 30 PERCENT IN YEAR 5 FOR 291 RIDGE ROAD, LLC TO BEGIN ONCE THE CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY IS GIVEN FOR THE PROJECT”** seconded by Deputy Mayor Montinieri.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 6-0-0.

Councilor Walsh thanked Rich Mahoney for his work in preparing this abatement.

Bonnie Therrien handed out answers to questions that Councilors had at the March 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, the Connecticut State Department of Education Projected Impact of the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund Program, and budget comparisons. She said that it looks like the Federal stimulus funds can't be used for capital expenses but for new special education programs or to stop layoffs. She said that there are still a lot of unanswered questions.

Councilor Roberts said that it would be better for the Board of Education to say it is laying off teachers and then use the money for those teachers.

Chairperson Adil said that if the Town Council cuts the Board of Education budget by a certain percentage, then layoffs would occur.

Bonnie Therrien said that it looks like the money is for preschool and special education programs. It doesn't appear to be a well thought out Federal funding program.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

At 7:45 p.m., Deputy Mayor Montinieri moved **"TO ADJOURN THE MEETING"** seconded by Councilor Walsh. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 6-0-0.

Amy Bello  
Assistant Town Clerk