

**SPECIAL MEETING  
JULY 22, 2008**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on Tuesday, July 22, 2008 at 6:00 p.m. in at the Pitkin Community Center, Room S-1, 30 Greenfield Street, Wethersfield, CT.

Present from Council: Cascio, Console, Forrest (arrived 6:15 p.m.), Hemmann, Kotkin, Roberts, Deputy Mayor Montinieri, and Chairperson Adil

Absent: Councilor Walsh

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

Rae Ann Palmer, Assistant to the Manager, facilitated the Core Services meeting for the Town Manager and the Town Council. She reminded the Town Council that the budget process recently completed raised the following questions: What constituted core services? What services are mandated by federal or state statutes? What services are required by the Town Charter? What are the essential services, those done because they should be done? What are the services that the Town provides but doesn't necessarily need to do? At the end of the day, the Town Council needs to come up with a prioritization list so that as funding streams get smaller and fiscal issues continue, the Town has a way to look at its services and decide what needs to be funded.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that this process is being done all over the country. She said that she will borrow and learn from what others have already done. She said that the challenges that face the Town next year are:

Revaluation – Much of the burden will be felt by homeowners

Fund Balance – Is going down

State Funding Extremely Limited – Is probably going down

Grand List Numbers – Unknown in a revaluation year and limited growth in the Grand List

User Fees – Have been maxed out

Investment Earnings- Are low

Back Taxes – Are being reduced and thus losing interest

Utilities – Are showing double digit increases, including MDC debt payments, gasoline, fuel, oil, diesel, electricity, and water

Health Care – Numbers have been high

Pension – Contributions may be up because the earnings are down

Union Contract Impacts

Contractual Obligations in General

Debt Increase

Due to the economy, the revenues could trend downward

She said that she is very pleased that the Town Council is taking this step now for next year.

Councilor Roberts asked for a breakdown of the numbers of Town and Board of Education employees.

RaeAnn Palmer said that she wanted the Town Councilors to put aside the costs of providing services and department and division designations and focus on the actual service itself. The job tonight is only to identify the core services. There will be other meetings to discuss other ideas. She passed out the 2005 Strategic Plan mission statement and vision statement as well as the goals and objectives of the Town. She also prepared a list of core support services that have to be done to keep the government working: Maintaining the financial system; tax and revenue collection; grand list preparation, certification, and maintenance; maintenance of the Town records including land, legislative action, vital statistics; maintain the computers, networks, webpage, telephones and radios; and maintain Town buildings, grounds, and vehicles. These things have to be done to keep the government running. She would like the Town Council to ask itself if the Town is doing the right work and what it should be doing. Later, the Town Council can look to see if the Town is doing it the right way.

The Councilors went through the services that they believed were mandated, essential, or nice but services.

#### MANDATED

Town Administration  
 Elections  
 Maintenance of Town Infrastructure  
 Sewage\*  
 Public Health (inspections)  
 Insurance coverage  
 Roads (maintenance and snow removal)  
 Home Land Security  
 Compliance of State/Federal Regulations  
 Municipal Agent of the Elderly  
 Municipal Agent of the Children  
 Physical Plant (some items mandated)\*  
 Recycling  
 Building Inspection  
 Planning and Zoning  
 Fire Prevention & Suppression  
 Education  
 Public Safety/Law Enforcement

#### ESSENTIAL

EMS/Ambulance  
 Library Services  
 Dial-A-Ride  
 Park and Recreation Programs  
 Meals for Seniors/Food Bank  
 Trash pickup  
 Economic Development  
 Community Center

#### NICE BUT...

Celebrations/Parades  
 Nature Center  
 Recreational pools  
 Dog Park  
 Library Services  
 Tourism  
 Cove boating  
 Leaf collection

\* Items to be researched

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Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that he is hoping that this exercise will help the Town Council show the public what it will have to give up in services in order to receive a smaller tax increase. Mandated services will not be negotiable and essential probably won't be on the screen for elimination either. "Nice but" items will be open for discussion. The list should be prioritized and the public should understand that some services will have to go in order to keep the tax increase down. The Town Council needs to say where the money is when and if it is needed. If State funding drops and the Town is in the hole \$2,000,000 or \$4,000,000, the Town Council will have a list of services and programs that can be removed.

RaeAnn Palmer said that after the list is created, there will be a meeting with the Department Heads who will advocate for what they do and then a meeting with the community. Tonight is about what the Town Council feels the Town needs to provide to have the quality of life that the Town expects. Everything that the Deputy Mayor said was true, but in the future, the Town could also be in a position where the Town not only has all this imploded but things have gotten worse and only a very narrow core service can be maintained. At least the Town will be prepared for that.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that when the Town staff gets to that point and identifies the budget numbers, Department Heads should know that the essential and nice but services are in the scope of things and the Department Heads should identify where the absolute core of the particular program is for more refinement. The Town staff can't just say that core services are not on the screen because they are mandated. The form in which it is mandated is open for grabs. The public says that the government is heavy. Every Department needs to go back and look at up to 50 percent budget cuts and determine how it would still provide the services. Then the Town Council will really see a core service.

RaeAnn Palmer said that she, the Finance Director, and the Town Manager are signed up to sit through training from Jefferson County Colorado on how they did just that.

Bonnie Therrien invited the Town Councilors to the session on August 14<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m.

Councilor Cascio said that he is not comfortable leaving Park and Recreation programs on the nice but list. He said that they should be under essential. The programs are self-sustaining. Many volunteer programs are run through the Park and Recreation Department. Why is the Town spending all of this money to renovate the Mill Woods facility if the Town Council thinks that the programs are nice but. The Town Council needs to get behind what it believes in. The programs should be on the essential list because they are essential services that the Town has created over the years in this community. If it is not essential, then the Mill Woods renovation should be stopped.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that is a good point.

Councilor Forrest said that he would be comfortable saying some Park and Recreation programs are essential and some are nice but.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that Councilor Cascio's point is a good one. When going back to the Park and Recreation Department with a list some programs will be essential while others will be nice but and the Department can determine what services go where.

Councilor Forrest said that in the same concept of understanding that there is a spectrum, trash pick up may be essential but weekly trash pickup may not be. Library service hours can also be addressed. This spectrum can be applied to many of the services.

RaeAnn Palmer said that there will be several levels of priorities. When the Town Council looks at the Police/Law Enforcement, there is a lot that the Town does that is not mandated. Does the Town need the DARE officer, as an example. The Town Council needs to get the broad concept of what is important.

Councilor Roberts asked where Capital would go?

Bonnie Therrien said that it is mandated.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked where the Fund Balance would go? If it is not mandated, he would say that it is essential.

Bonnie Therrien said that the Strategic Plan calls for an 8 percent Fund Balance.

RaeAnn Palmer asked if it is a service that the Town provides for the citizens or is it something that has to be done to keep the government running.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that it falls under core services like Councilor Hemmann said, but as far as dollars go for funding, it is essential.

RaeAnn Palmer said that she would identify Fund Balance separately.

Councilor Forrest said that there are contractual items that are steadfast numbers. They are almost mandated.

Bonnie Therrien said that she would put debt and bond under mandated.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that they are mandated in the sense that the Town Council has committed to them.

Bonnie Therrien said that Legal Service should also be under mandated. The Town can't give it up.

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Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked how this process would be conveyed to the Board of Education. He said that this exercise is wasted if they are not included.

Bonnie Therrien said that the Superintendent knows that the Town Council is going through this process.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that the Board of Education budget is more than 50 percent of the total Town budget.

Bonnie Therrien said that the Board of Education can be asked to do this too and then meet with the Town Council in the fall at a Fireside Chat.

Councilor Roberts said that the big issue in Social and Youth Services is always around counseling and what kind of mental health the Town should provide.

The Town Council continued listing services.

MANDATED

Inland Wetlands Commission

ESSENTIAL

Crisis intervention

Sidewalk maintenance

NICE BUT...

Counseling

TLC pre-school program

Take home cars for Town employees

New sidewalk

Transfer station

Dog Pound\*

Deputy Mayor Montinieri raised the issue of energy and energy conservation. The Town wide expenditure for energy needs to be talked about. There doesn't seem to be a cohesive plan to address the plans of energy usage and waste. All the costs associated with energy expense need to be discussed. He said the cost is around \$12,500,000. Many of the services have to be provided but the question remains what is the manner in which the Town provides these services. The major problem in Town is the antiquated energy inefficiencies. This is a huge piece of the budget and is an economic challenge to the Town.

RaeAnn Palmer said that this is less of a service, but something that needs to be done as part of an analysis.

The Town Council continued listing services.

MANDATED

Probate Court

Historic District

Town Engineer

\* Items to be researched

ESSENTIAL

Human Resources

Police & Fire boat

NICE BUT...

Police packet delivery

Police community outreach programs

MUNIS

Contributions to outside agencies/groups

RaeAnn Palmer asked the Town Council to prioritize the Essential and Nice But items into three categories each. (blue – first priority, green - second priority, and red – last priority) The Town Councilors prioritized the lists.

RaeAnn Palmer said that the telephone session with Jefferson County will be August 14<sup>th</sup> from 1:00-2:30 p.m. She will take this information from tonight and compile the data. She will also research the items that were questionable, make a list of topics that the Town Council expressed as interested in looking at, make a list of the programs and services provided by the bigger Departments so that the Town Council can determine which go on the Essential list and which go on the Nice But list. Some areas need to have programs and services broken down further, like the Library and Park and Recreation.

Bonnie Therrien said that after these lists are completed, the Town Council needs to determine how to go about polling the public. That will be key to this process. She said that West Hartford had a survey done by UCONN where taxpayers could go into their assessment and add or delete services that they did or didn't want to receive and see the cost of the programs as corresponding with their tax bill. The software program is expensive.

RaeAnn Palmer said that there is also a telephone survey program available.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked if there was a way that a survey could be put on the Town website. The Town would have to have a way to have taxpayers use a code one time and link it to their property address.

Councilor Hemmann said that the article provided to the Town Council was very helpful to see how another community used this approach. It put it in an objective format.

**ADJOURNMENT**

At 7:45 p.m., Deputy Mayor Montinieri moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano  
Town Clerk

*Approved by vote of Council  
August 25, 2008*