

## **JANUARY 16, 2007 SPECIAL MEETING**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on January 16, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Silas Deane Middle School.

Present: Councilors Cascio, Drake, Forrest, Kirsche, Kotkin, Montinieri, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Fortunato and Chairperson Adil.

Also present: Senator John W. Fonfara, Senator Paul R. Doyle, Representative Antonio Guerrero, Representative Russell A. Morin, Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Chairperson Adil announced that the purpose of this special meeting with State Legislators is for the Council to discuss with them the Legislative priorities for the 2007 session.

Senator Doyle stated that this is his thirteenth year as a State Office holder and that the main focus for 2007 will be State aid. He said that he hopes that it is a good year for Wethersfield and that the Town will not know of the outcome of the Legislative Session before its budget planning since the session is late this year. He said that an increase in the sales tax has been mentioned in order to provide some of the increase to municipalities. He said that he'd like to propose that any monies received from the increase in the sales tax go directly to towns for property tax relief.

Representative Guerrero stated that at an off-site caucus of Democrats today, it was discussed that the main items to be addressed should include health care reform, energy, transportation, and property tax relief. He said that property tax relief is a great need for many towns and is not an easy task to undertake. Representative Guerrero said that health care is a big priority and needs to be available to all residents of Connecticut. He said that transportation will be a big initiative over the next two years and that Wethersfield will be well represented with Representative Morin now on board at the capitol. Representative Guerrero stated that more and more businesses are leaving Connecticut due to the congestion on Interstates 95 and 91. He said that he wants to keep moving forward with the initiatives taken regarding this at the last session.

Senator Fonfara congratulated Councilors on their new positions due to Russ Morin being elected as a State Representative. He said that he looks forward to working with Representative Morin in general, but particularly on the Energy Committee. Senator Fonfara said that he has already discussed with Representative Morin the need for energy solutions that will impact people now such as reducing rates for their constituents, towns, and businesses within the State.

Representative Morin said that the caucus held earlier today was a nice opportunity to meet with Legislators and shape where they want to go with all of the hot topics mentioned. He said that as a member of the community and now as a Representative, he is able to see issues from both sides. He said that the Legislators all agreed that property taxes are important; and of top priority to him along with property taxes are health care and clean water as well. Representative Morin said that he will continue to push for improvements and progress in technology, transportation, energy and the environment. He said that there are no easy solutions, but Legislators cannot just give up by stating that there are no solutions. Representative Morin said that he will continue to look to the Town Council members to serve as co-chairs on various committees. He said that he looks forward to hearing the priorities of the Town Council and to see what he can do to assist in bringing the issues forward.

Chairperson Adil asked the Councilors to share projects and ideas that they have in mind for priority in the upcoming 2007 Legislative Session.

Councilor Drake asked if it is anticipated that State funding will continue for the Board of Education's revamping of Wethersfield High School, or if it will be reduced. Senator Fonfara stated that he doesn't see this changing, although there is more focus lately on tightening down on requests for change orders for school construction projects.

Councilor Cascio inquired about the State's ECS formula asking if there is any movement in that area, since he did not hear any of the four Legislators mention education as a priority.

Senator Doyle answered that he looks at all State aid to towns equally and that any funding towns get is good. He said that education is a top priority and that government committees have presented a plan for massive increases in education aid. Senator Doyle stated that for the past twelve years the government's budget for State aid/education aid has been rather low.

Councilor Cascio pointed out that many communities are looking for aid for after school programs and that Wethersfield in particular is looking for aid for all-day kindergarten. He said that he doesn't know if the Legislators will also be meeting with the Wethersfield Board of Education, but that after school programs and all-day kindergarten need to be addressed.

Representative Morin commented that part of the property tax relief initiatives would be to include education cost sharing and special education funding. He said that the Legislators recognize education as a priority and through tax relief and dollars going back to the towns; it will be up to individual towns to determine where the funds will be allocated.

Councilor Kotkin commented that although there is not a commuter rail stop in Wethersfield, he feels that a lot of people in Town and in this area would make use of the State's mass transit system and he is happy to see that this area will be addressed. Councilor Kotkin said that he is pleased to hear that a continuing effort will be made to clean up the water of the Wethersfield Cove and that he hopes to see that the MDC towns receive more funding for clean water. Councilor Kotkin stated that when Councilor Drake was chairperson of the School Building Committee, there were rebates that the Town received from CL&P due to certain energy efficient improvements, and he suggested that the Legislators look at possible incentives to towns for energy efficiency. Councilor Kotkin said that he would also like to see a push for the proposed renovations of Mill Woods Park and the \$700,000 approved by the Legislature for this which has yet to be released.

Senator Fonfara addressed Councilor Kotkin's comments regarding energy, stating that last year's bill addressing energy improvements at local schools and reimbursement for such was unfortunately never acted on. He said that the passage of the bill would allow for an equal playing field for the affordability of energy efficient renovations for all Towns throughout the State.

Senator Doyle stated that he will work hard for funding for energy efficiency; however, he cannot guarantee anything since the funding is at the discretion of the Governor.

Chairperson Adil asked about funding for the Marsh Street guardrails and Senator Fonfara answered that he's hoping that funding can be found for this.

Councilor Walsh stated that anything that can be done with regard to property tax relief will be greatly appreciated; however he stated that an increase in the sales tax could be very repressive on poor people in the State. He asked if there will be some sort of exemption allowed or if a more progressive form of taxation will be considered instead.

Senator Doyle clarified that neither he nor the delegation support an increase in the sales tax presented by the tri-town contingency.

Councilor Forrest addressed the beautification and redevelopment of a commercial center in Wethersfield. He said that there has been an extreme amount of progress in recent years, and that a decent amount of funding has been received. He said that continuation of the project will utilize the funds already received as well as future funding. He asked the delegation to keep this Wethersfield project in mind.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien suggested that the delegation keep in mind that the Council has worked hard to keep Wethersfield volunteer firefighters as volunteers even if they are paid firefighters elsewhere. She said that CRCOG offered a session last week to discuss State incentives for shared/combined services within municipalities.

Representative Morin commented that the delegation is working on submitting a bill to address the volunteer firefighter issue.

Chairperson Adil thanked the delegation for their past support. He stated that the Town of Wethersfield will be pursuing another STEAP Grant this year and will appreciate any support provided by the delegation on this. He stated that Wethersfield has a newly formed Redevelopment Agency and would also appreciate any funding for this committee's initiatives as well.

Senator Doyle asked that the Town provide the delegation as soon as possible any information and knowledge regarding its application for the STEAP grant.

Senator Fonfara congratulated the Town on its formulation of a Redevelopment Agency and that he is glad to see work being done to attract businesses onto the Silas Deane Highway.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato commented that open space should be another priority and that grant funding for this would be greatly appreciated.

Chairperson Adil commented that Senator Doyle has been seeking funding for open space for a long time and continues to do so. Chairperson Adil thanked all for attending and wished them luck in the 2007 Session.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

At 7:00 p.m., Deputy Mayor Fortunato moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano  
Town Clerk