

JANUARY 3, 2006 REGULAR MEETING

The Wethersfield Town Council held a meeting on January 3, 2006 at 7:05 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Silas Deane Middle School following an Executive Session at 6:16 p.m. in the Town Manager's Conference Room at the Town Hall at which all Councilors except Councilor Cascio were present when Councilor Kotkin moved **"TO ENTER INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION"**, seconded by Councilor Kirsche; with all Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voting AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0. Also present at the Executive Session were Town Manager Bonnie Therrien, Town Planner Peter Gillespie, Town Attorney John Bradley, and P&Z Commission Chairman Joseph Hammer. At 6:52 p.m., Councilor Walsh moved **"MOVE OUT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION AND ADJOURN TO THE REGULAR MEETING"**, seconded by Councilor Kirsch. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

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

Absent: Councilor Cascio.

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

All stood for the pledge of allegiance to the flag which was led by Councilor Adil.

Economic Development Report

Town Planner Peter Gillespie gave a presentation of the December, 2005 Economic Development Report which included the following:

- 1532 Berlin Turnpike - Nathan Hale Apartments, AHEPA Inc. - Elderly housing project, building permit has been approved
- 76 Country Club Road - Wethersfield Country Club, construction underway for new maintenance building
- 1715 Berlin Turnpike - Car Wash Facility, application approved
- 286 Silas Deane Highway - Express Dental Lab, plans approved
- 181-187 Main Street - Old Town Café - Outdoor patio, application approved
- Folly Brook Boulevard - Age restricted housing, application approved by Inland Wetlands Commission
- Old Reservoir Road/Back Lane - Harris property - age restricted housing, zone change application approved; pre-trial options have been discussed
- 411 Hartford Avenue - Doug Buck - Art Academy, applications filed
- Fun Zone - Silas Deane Highway, discussion of renovation of the building; application filed for use of back road for entrance/exit
- Wellness Center, working with realtor to find a site to construct a medical/wellness center

Mr. Gillespie reported that the preliminary report of the Silas Deane Highway revitalization was submitted and reviewed by the Silas Deane Highway Advisory Committee who made numerous comments to the consultant and are currently awaiting a response. Mr. Gillespie said that the Committee is currently working with the Hartford Business Journal to have an article written about the Silas Deane Highway Revitalization plan and efforts in next week's edition. Mr. Gillespie reported that the EDIC's Annual Salute to Business event was attended by more than 140 people. He said that the EDIC has announced a new program they are working on aimed at encouraging residents to shop more locally. He said that the EDIC is planning to sponsor a workshop to profile successful business techniques and they have also started to discuss the creation of the façade improvement program for the Silas Deane Highway, as well as putting together the annual report on economic development over the past year. Mr. Gillespie reported that the Tourism Commission is negotiating with the National Trust for Historic Preservation on a scope of services for a Tourism Plan for Wethersfield and that the Town has been designated as one of only a few Connecticut municipalities as a Preserve America community. He also announced that the PZC recently approved the amendments to the outdoor lighting

regulations including athletic field lighting.

Councilor Adil asked Mr. Gillespie to provide an update on the recent EDIC suggestion regarding consulting for Wethersfield businesses. Mr. Gillespie said that he has an upcoming meeting with SCORE who provides free business advice and the EDIC is looking to incorporate this into a program provided for new businesses in Town. Councilor Adil asked for an update on the developments at the Church Home property. Mr. Gillespie said that a lot of the interior framing is done and there has been a lot of interest shown.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked Mr. Gillespie to provide an update on the Porch and Patio property. Mr. Gillespie said that all of the facilities in Connecticut have been closed for unspecified, financial reasons. He said that to-date he has had only preliminary discussions with a realtor. Deputy Mayor Fortunato suggested that Mr. Gillespie and representatives from appropriate committees attend the joint Council and Board of Education meeting on January 28 to discuss how education can support the Town's economic development.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HEARING

ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER A180, Town Council Rules of Procedure

ORDINANCE AMENDING PART I - ADDING CHAPTER 2 - LOCAL DISASTER EMERGENCY TO THE REVISED CHARTER AND MUNICIPAL CODE

Ken Sokolowski, 79 Main Street, suggested that the Council reinstate the five minute public comment at the end of the Council meetings.

No one else wished to speak and the Chairperson declared the Hearing segment closed.

U.S. Small Business Administration

Chairperson Morin introduced Claire Holmes from the SBA who provided information on disaster loans, including the types of disaster loans available, mitigation loans, credit requirements and interest rates, loan terms, loan limits, and loan eligibility. She announced that a disaster outreach center will be available at the Pitkin Community Center starting tomorrow, January 4 from 12:00-7:00p.m. and thereafter Monday-Friday 10:00a.m. - 7:00 p.m. and this Saturday, January 7 from 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. for two weeks.

Councilor Adil asked Ms. Holmes to explain the loan eligibility and she provided an overview of the loan program and the difference between eligibility and qualifying for a loan. She said that the program is fairly lenient and flexible; however, prudent since these are tax dollars being lent.

Councilor Drake asked for clarification of the high credit risk applicant. Ms. Holmes said that the program was designed as a last resort program with one interest rate and over time legislative action changed this so that those who had no credit elsewhere received a lower interest rate than those who could obtain credit elsewhere. She said that the program lends 90%+ at the lower interest rate.

Councilor Kirsche asked Ms. Holmes to explain the steps to be taken to obtain a loan, which she did, explaining that most applications will be accepted right on sight.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if the Town Manager has contacted the individuals in Town who she knows were impacted by the rains to inform them of the loan program. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that those neighborhoods impacted will be contacted by means of a letter and a flyer with information regarding the program. Deputy Mayor Fortunato requested that home visits be made available for those applicants who are elderly or disabled. Ms. Holmes said that the application form is not available in Braille or large print; however, it is available in Spanish

and also on line. She also said that home visits are offered for those who cannot make it to the Community Center. Ms. Holmes commended Emergency Preparedness Administrator Dick Fippinger, his crew, and the staff at the Community Center for their cooperation and enthusiasm in delivering this program.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Kitch Breen Czernicki, 239 Crest Street, commented that the minutes should fully reflect the activity of the Council and those who participate. She said that accurate and complete minutes provide an archival record for the future, a record of where Councilors' stood on various issues in Town, and makes all involved responsible for what they say. Councilor Czernicki suggested that if the Council approves the abbreviated version of Council minutes that they also approve the abbreviation of staff in the Town Clerk's office.

Najibo Habesch, 101 Highland Street, spoke in support of the proposed resolution for introduction regarding the property tax increase limitation for senior citizens. Mr. Palesh suggested that the Council also include in this resolution handicap accessibility improvement expenses incurred by parents with disabled children living in their home.

Mike Cuddigan, 49 Westlook Road, spoke in opposition to the proposed change in Town Council minutes format, stating that the minutes should reflect what happened at the meeting including what is said by the Councilors and the public. Mr. Cuddigan read from a letter from Town Attorney Bradley to the Town Manager stating the purposes of the Council minutes. Mr. Cuddigan said that he'd like the minutes restored to the level of detail provided prior to December 5, 2005 and commented that the minutes of December 19, 2005 should not be approved as they stand, but should provide greater detail before being approved by the Council.

Donna Hemmann, 315 Garden Street, commented that Section 501 of the Wethersfield Charter states that the Town Clerk is to be responsible to the Council to keep a journal of its proceedings. Councilor Hemmann said that the minutes should reflect what is said by anyone at the meeting. Ms. Hemmann said that she disagrees with the minutes format reflecting motions and votes only since she, as a previous Councilor, has referred to previous minutes many times for review and that the minutes of the Council and boards and commissions have also been helpful to Town staff. She requested that the Council not approve the proposed change in Town Council minutes format and suggested that technological equipment be looked into which would assist in the transcription process. Ms. Hemmann said that changing the minutes format will do a disservice to both the present and future of these important records. Ms. Hemmann agreed with Mr. Palesh that parents of disabled children should also be considered regarding property tax relief.

Ken Sokolowski, 79 Main Street, commented that the proposed change in Town Council minutes format is short-sighted and is not in the best interest of the people of Wethersfield. Mr. Sokolowski spoke of an email he sent to each Council member requesting that they vote down this proposal, considering the public's right to meaningful information.

Scott Coleman, 200 Cold Spring Road, Rocky Hill, distributed a printout of a PowerPoint presentation to the Council members which addresses the proposed change in minutes format and he spoke in opposition to the proposal. Mr. Coleman suggested that representatives from Wethersfield and Rocky Hill discuss the format in order to provide insight to one another and share ideas.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, commented that the minutes don't always reflect what was actually said at Council meetings and he suggested that the minutes be typed verbatim, rather than filter what was said. He suggested that the minutes continue in the current format and that something even better technologically be looked into. Mr. Young commented on the United States' economy and the pathetic job market and high taxes in Connecticut.

Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main Street, spoke on behalf of George A. Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, who conveyed his opposition to the proposed change in minutes format. He said that a well-informed citizenry is essential to address issues of local importance. Mr. Ruhe also commented in opposition to the five-minute limit of public speaking during the Public Comments segment of Town Council meetings as well as the removal of additional public comment at the end of the Council meetings. He urged the Council to vote down the proposed minutes format, eliminate or be flexible in the enforcement of the five-minute rule, and reinstate the public comment at the end of Council meetings.

No one else wished to speak and the Chairperson declared the Public Comments segment closed.

Councilor Adil moved "**TO REMOVE ITEM B.2.a FROM THE TABLE**", seconded by Deputy Mayor Fortunato. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

COUNCIL REPORTS & COMMENTS

Councilor Forrest commented that a number of citizens showed up for Council hours during the holiday season and it was suggested that residents be provided the opportunity to submit their email address to the Town in order to receive email correspondence pertaining to Town issues.

Chairperson Morin read an email from Leigh Standish supporting citizen participation at Council meetings and opposing the proposed abbreviated minutes format. Chairperson Morin requested that the Town Manager bring the recent NU rate hike to the attention of Town Staff and suggest ways that they can conserve energy. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she currently has a draft on her desk for review. She said that she has also received from various utility companies the programs they are offering for energy assistance.

COUNCIL ACTION

Councilor Adil moved "**TO APPROVE THE ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER A180, TOWN COUNCIL RULES OF PROCEDURE**", seconded by Councilor Forrest.

Councilor Drake said that he was on the committee that reviewed this and he supports the motion; however, he would like to see the reinstatement of the second round of public comment at the end of the Council meeting.

Councilor Kirsche said that he also supports the motion with the inclusion of the second round of public comment at the end of the Council meeting.

Councilor Kotkin moved "**TO AMEND CHAPTER 180-4 SECTION D TO READ 'HIS/HER' RATHER THAN 'THEIR'**", seconded by Councilor Adil. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Chairperson Morin said that he supports these relatively minor changes; however, he does not support adding the second round of public comment at the end of Council meetings.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. Councilors Drake and Kirsche voted NAY. The motion passed 6-2-0.

Councilor Forrest moved "**TO APPROVE THE ORDINANCE AMENDING PART I - ADDING CHAPTER 2 - LOCAL DISASTER EMERGENCY TO THE REVISED CHARTER AND MUNICIPAL CODE**", seconded by Councilor Walsh. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Change in Town Council Minute Format

Deputy Mayor Fortunato moved "**TO DISAPPROVE THE PROPOSED MEETING MINUTES FORMAT FOR TOWN COUNCIL MEETINGS AND THE MEETINGS OF ALL TOWN BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**", seconded by Councilor Forrest.

Councilor Adil commented that the idea behind the change is a laudable one and has brought up some good ideas. He

suggested that software be utilized to produce verbatim records. Councilor Adil said that although the manual deciphering and transcription can produce wasted time, he finds that often times important information is not included in the minutes. Councilor Adil said that he'd like to see more efficiency in the smaller committees where the template format would be more timely. He said that it appears to be the consensus to keep the minutes format as is; however, he'd like to see continued efforts to improve minutes transcription efficiency.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato recognized the work of the Rules and Procedures committee, stating the importance of constant evaluation of how business is conducted efficiently. She suggested that current technology be explored that would make the minutes transcription process more efficient. Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that she has often looked back to previous minutes as a reference for information and appreciates the tremendous worth of more detailed minutes transcription; therefore she supports the motion to disapprove of the change in format.

Councilor Drake said that he originally supported the format change not realizing how often the minutes are referred to for information; therefore he has changed his view and now supports leaving the format as is.

Councilor Walsh said that he agrees with Councilor Adil that the Town should continue to look at ways to more efficiently transcribe minutes. He also thanked residents who appeared before the Council this evening to speak to the issue of format change.

Councilor Kotkin said that the minutes provide a historical record of the action taken, the words spoken, and the rationale of the Council; therefore the higher level of detail should be maintained.

Councilor Forrest said that he agrees with all that's been said and appreciates the public comment to the issue. He said that he supports the minutes continuing to be transcribed with greater detail.

Chairperson Morin said that he agrees that the minutes should continue to be provided in the format that they have been historically.

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

OTHER BUSINESS

Dissolution of the Artificial Surface Football Committee

Councilor Adil moved "**TO DISSOLVE THE ARTIFICIAL SURFACE FOOTBALL COMMITTEE AND TO THANK THE MEMBERS FOR THEIR SERVICE TO THE TOWN**", seconded by Deputy Mayor Fortunato.

Councilor Adil commented that the committee did a wonderful job and the project is an example of private donations defraying the costs to the Town. He said that he would like to see improvements made to the floors of the concession stand bathrooms and to the entranceway to the field.

Councilor Drake asked about the funding approved by the Lighting Committee. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that this is a separate fund and the Town receives copies of all the balance statements.

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

BIDS

Scott Packs for the Fire Department (Grant Money)

Councilor Walsh moved "**TO AUTHORIZE THE TOWN MANAGER TO AWARD A CONTRACT TO SHIPMAN'S FIRE EQUIPMENT CO., INC. FOR THE PURCHASE OF SCOTT AIR PAKS AND RELATED EQUIPMENT IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$253,967**", seconded by Councilor Adil.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that the Town received a Federal grant to replace all of the Scott Air Paks all at once rather than budgeting for them over two years.

Fire Chief Flynn thanked those who assisted in obtaining the Federal grant. He said that the Fire Department has been able to take the 10% matching funds out of this year's budget, but will be looking for this funding next year. He and Chief Harris provided examples of and an explanation of the Scott Air Paks.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked how often the Air Paks are replaced. Chief Flynn said they will last for fifteen to twenty years. Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if modifications will be made to the Air Paks. Chief Flynn said that there is the capability for upgrading since these are not the most expensive Paks.

Chairperson Morin thanked all involved for their great service to the Town.

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

ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS, APPOINTMENTS FOR INTRODUCTION

Resolution For Property Tax Increase Limitation for Senior Citizens

It is requested to the Town Manager, Bonnie L. Therrien, to provide information on the legal implications and financial impact of providing a limitation on future property tax increases on Wethersfield senior citizens.

Statement of Purpose:

In order to minimize the impact of future large property tax increases to senior citizens who have lived and contributed to the town for many years, a tax limitation plan could be put in place for citizens 65 and older and having been a Wethersfield residence greater than 10 years, that their future tax increases would be limited to the smaller of either the town's general tax increase for the year or 2%.

MINUTES

Councilor Kotkin moved "**TO TABLE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF DECEMBER 19, 2005**", seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:30 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

Approved by vote of Council 1/17/06