

## **OCTOBER 12, 2006 SPECIAL MEETING**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on October 12, 2006 at 6:00 p.m. in the Town Manager's Office at the Wethersfield Town Hall.

Present: Councilors Adil (6:10 p.m.), Cascio, Drake, Forrest, Kirsche, Kotkin, Walsh, and Chairperson Morin.

Absent: Deputy Mayor Fortunato.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Mike Turner, Director of Public Works; Kathy Bagley, Parks & Recreation Director; Jim McDonald, Physical Services Assistant Director; Bob Bauer, Parks & Grounds Supervisor; John Thibeault, Charles Lilley, Chris Hock, Craig McGovern, George Bisio, Bill and Tracy Eck, Jennifer Wolfe, Steve Baldwin, Neil Brickley - members of the volunteer committee; Tom Ragonese and Tim Verre - members of the Parks & Recreation Board; and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Chairperson Morin explained that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to discuss work to be done on Town fields and he pointed out that a committee of volunteers has been formed to help with the improvement of the fields. He said that he appreciates the work of the volunteers and the Town staff in working toward the goal of decent athletic fields and fields for Wethersfield children.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that concerns have been brought to her attention regarding the condition of a number of athletic fields throughout Town and a meeting was held regarding the lack of funding available to improve the fields. She said that it was suggested at the meeting that a number of the Town's sports leagues get together to develop a volunteer group willing to help with funding to get the fields in better condition. The Town Manager said that she has provided the Council with information regarding three project areas proposed for work, which are the aeration of fields, the Millwoods Little League proposal, and the High School baseball infield work. She said that the High School baseball infield work has been referred to Dr. Proctor and Jay Cottone, and she has yet to hear back from either of them. The Town Manager stated that she has met with various appropriate Town staff, as well as committee members, to discuss the aeration of the fields and the Millwoods Little League proposal. She said that the aeration of the fields will depend heavily on the weather conditions and timing. The Town Manager said that it is felt that this maintenance can be done and she has involved the Union President John Cashman since she has to take into consideration work that the Town staff does. She said that Mr. Cashman has been very positive about working with the volunteers to see if outside companies will be allowed to come in to do maintenance work. She said that all of the dollars and services are donated by either sports leagues or businesses in Town and represent a positive boost for the Town. The Town Manager said that there is work that Town staff has never done, such as extensive aeration, and therefore equipment is not available to do this type of work. She said that because of this the Union would not have any issue with this type of work being done by someone other than Town staff; although regular union work would be done by Town staff during the day, with the leagues paying for overtime for one person and the Town making arrangements for any additional overtime costs. The Town Manager said that there could be a problem with scheduling since the Town staff is busy with leaf pick-up at this time of year, and that there could be an issue with the groups' requests to fund and install taller fencing at the baseball field at Millwoods. She said that all of the proposals have been reviewed by the Parks & Recreation Board who has made an advisory opinion to the Council to move forward with them.

Chairperson Morin stated that there has been a long history of Wethersfield Sports Leagues stepping up to the plate to work together with the Town, and he'd like to see this continue.

Tom Ragonese, Chairperson of the Parks & Recreation Board, stated that the presentation by the volunteer committee was made to the Board approximately two weeks ago and the Board voted unanimously that the Town fully support this project since it will be a great benefit to Town fields and in turn to Wethersfield's children.

Councilor Adil asked how the list of targeted fields was derived, and was told that the aeration proposal is for approximately 15.5 acres and will be spread out amongst the different sports leagues. Councilor Adil verified with Ms. Bagley that the projects will stay away from the upper fields at Millwoods, and she verified that this is correct. Councilor Adil asked if the beginner fields at Highcrest will be maintained and was told that the project will not include those fields. One of the volunteer committee members commented to Councilor Adil that the group looked at girls and boys soccer, baseball and baseball fields, and that the current list is just a starting point for improvements.

Councilor Drake commented that this appears to be a no-brainer of a decision to make and wonders what any negatives to the project could be. The Town Manager said that the main concern is timing for the Town staff so that they don't get behind in their regular tasks. Councilor Drake asked where the major staff effort would be and the Town Manager said that they would be assisting with the aeration and with some of the Millwoods work. The Town Manager said that per union contract agreement, there is some work that cannot be contracted out.

Chairperson Morin commented that the union contracts have to be honored and the purpose of this meeting is to continue to have a working relationship with the public in order to achieve goals. He said that the volunteers are offering a gift to the community and the Town needs to work with them to possibly reallocate Town staff duties.

Councilor Walsh asked how the process will work with the sport leagues agreeing to pay the overtime for one Town staff member. The Town Manager verified that the Town will pay the overtime and then bill the league for the amount. Councilor Walsh asked if the six foot fence is the one discussed during budget deliberations and budgeted for. The Town Manager said that the fence was discussed; however funds were not budgeted for it, and the Town will not be responsible for the materials, but only for the installation. Councilor Walsh stated that the information provided to Councilors states that the fence will be purchased by the Town. Ms. Bagley said that the league originally thought that the cost of the fence was included in the budget; however they have since been made aware that it is not.

Councilor Cascio commented that this is a great initiative and he asked Ms. Bagley how the proposed work fits into the long-range plan of the fields in Town. Ms. Bagley explained that it was discussed that if the Master Plan of Millwoods moved along more quickly, new projects on other Town fields could be brought forward. She said that while she continues to work on the Master Plan, the leagues have stepped forward to work on other fields throughout Town. Councilor Cascio asked the Town Manager if there are tasks, other than leaf collection and the Library relocation work, that Town staff will be removed from in order to work on the fields. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she'd like to see work on the High School Baseball field begin in the Fall so as to get a jump on the Spring season. Councilor Cascio stated that he agrees that the work needs to be done; however, there is a limited amount of staff hours to go around and he'd like to have it verified by Town staff that this work can be accomplished, rather than to start a task and not be able to complete it. The Town Manager stated again that the projects are contingent upon the weather and the availability of Town staff. She said that overtime was not budgeted for these projects and additional overtime funds will be required. Councilor Cascio asked the Town Manager if she can provide an estimate of the additional overtime funding to be required. She said that she does not have an estimate and that it is hoped that most of the work can be performed during the regular weekly work schedule. Councilor Cascio stated that it is important to maintain the fields throughout Town and that this has been the goal of the current and past Councils, yet he wants to make sure that the Town staff is not overworked in order to accomplish these goals.

Councilor Kotkin commented that this is a fantastic effort and he thanked all involved. He said that this effort continues a long partnership between the Town and the sports leagues. Councilor Kotkin asked if the proposed work on the Millwoods Little League Stadium accomplishes the goals of the plan previously set forth for this field, or will the Town still need to tear up the field and install proper drainage. Ms. Bagley said that the proposed work will go a long way toward accomplishing the renovations to the field, and a future evaluation will take place to determine further work necessary. Councilor Kotkin asked if the proposed work will help with the irrigation problem at the little league field and Ms. Bagley said that it will, especially in the infield and along the base paths. Councilor Kotkin questioned why the Highcrest fence is being redone already and said that he was told that when the fence was installed, a low grade of fencing was used. He verified that the fencing to be installed at Millwoods will be of a better quality and was told by Ms. Bagley that she will be making this recommendation. Councilor Kotkin asked for a status report of the Millwoods upgrade process. Ms. Bagley stated that the Council approved \$50,000 for the hiring of an architect to design the lighted Little League field and a newly built soccer field. She said that a draft of the proposal for the

hiring was sent out to members of the Millwoods Master Plan Committee, and it is hoped that State funding in the amount of \$700,000 will be approved.

Councilor Forrest stated that he shares in the accolades to all involved, and asked how the Town will be working with the Board of Education regarding the upgrades to the High School baseball infield. The Town Manager said that she sent a copy of the proposal to the Superintendent of Schools and he is supposed to be reviewing it with Jay Cottone and then getting back to her.

Chairperson Morin requested that, should the Council give approval tonight, the Town Manager communicate with the Board of Education to move on this issue more quickly.

Councilor Forrest stated that one of his concerns is that the work being considered for the High School baseball infield should be done within the next fourteen days and that the work should be approved tonight by the Council and passed on to the Board of Education. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Board of Education needs to meet to discuss the issue and then vote to approve or not.

Councilor Kirsche said that he understands that the contractor has aeration equipment that the Town does not, and asked if the Town Manager envisions this work being contracted out going forward or if the Town will acquire the equipment necessary for this work. The Town Manager said that the Town has performed aeration work with the equipment available; however, the contractor has better equipment in order to achieve better aeration. She said that a cost benefit analysis would need to be performed in order to determine if it's best to contract the work out, purchase the equipment for the Town, or share the purchase and use of the equipment with a surrounding Town. Councilor Kirsche stated that it is incumbent upon the

Town and the planners of the sports leagues to make sure that this is maintained in the future.

Chairperson Morin stated that this issue goes back a long way, and volunteer efforts have benefited the Town in many instances. He thanked the Committee for their efforts thus far and their continued work and cooperation with the Town to get things done.

Councilor Adil moved "**TO ACCEPT THE FINANCIAL DONATIONS FROM THE YOUTH LEAGUES AND OUTSIDE CONTRACTORS TO REFURBISH THE PLAYING FIELDS AND THAT THE TOWN MANAGER WORK WITH TOWN STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND THE OUTSIDE COMPANIES TO HONOR UNION CONTRACTS AND SCHEDULE WORK TO MINIMIZE AN IMPACT ON THE PRESENT WORKLOAD OF THE TOWN STAFF'S DUTIES**", seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

At 6:40 p.m., Councilor Cascio moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Kirsche. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano  
Town Clerk

*Approved by vote of Council 11/20/2006*