

**Minutes**  
**Redevelopment Agency**  
**Special Meeting**  
**Redevelopment Bond Referendum Informational Meeting**  
**Tuesday, October 30, 2007**  
**7:00 p.m. - Police Department Community Room**  
**250 Silas Deane Highway**

1. **Call to Order** - Chairman Lee Kuckro called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.
2. **Roll Call/Attendance** - Members in attendance: Lee Kuckro - Chair, Daniel Camilliere - Vice Chair, Joseph Soja, Paul Thompson and Michael Zaleski. Also in attendance: Heidi Lane, Wethersfield resident and guest moderator; and Town Planner/Economic Development Manager, Peter Gillespie.

Members absent: none.

3. **Bond Referendum** -

**Opening** - Lee Kuckro welcomed the audience and said that the meeting was being held to provide facts about the referendum, correct misinformation circulating around town, and give the community an opportunity to voice opinions and ask questions.

**Meeting Ground Rules** - Heidi Lane introduced herself as the moderator, and said that the meeting is informational in nature, not a public hearing. She said that the format for the meeting is as follows: a presentation by the Redevelopment Agency, then an open question and answer session, then 5 minutes each for comments from representatives of each of the 2 political action committees, then closing at 8:30 PM. Anyone could ask a question by writing it on a form provided near the entrance and giving it to the moderator. Each person could submit more than one question utilizing a separate sheet for each question. The moderator would read aloud each question, and the Redevelopment Agency members would answer the question to the audience. Ms. Lane said that civility would rule, so people should listen and respect other perspectives without interrupting. As many questions would be read and answered as possible before the meeting ended in a timely manner at 8:30 PM.

**Redevelopment Agency Presentation** - The presentation was given by Agency member, Paul Thompson. Mr. Thompson started by encouraging people to ask questions, to pay attention to facts and not to what they hear, and to vote. Mr. Thompson said that one of the main criticisms he has heard is that using bond money for redevelopment is risky. He said the real risk is that people will see Wethersfield as an undesirable place to live, because Wethersfield gets 88% of its tax revenue from residential property, has limited commercial area for growth, and has a stagnant grand list. The Redevelopment Agency was formed by the Town Council to address this situation.

Mr. Thompson showed a number of slides addressing some commonly heard "myths" about the referendum and the associated "reality", including: Myth - The Town will use eminent domain to take homes. Reality - The Town cannot take residential property because it is prohibited by Town ordinance; Myth - There are 13 secret projects in the works. Reality - Thirteen commercial sites were reviewed by the Agency to assess redevelopment issues, but there have been no discussions or negotiations with their owners; Myth - The Town doesn't know what it is doing because it has no plan. Reality - The Town has plans in place already, such as the Silas Deane Master plan; and Myth - the redevelopment will only bring more "dollar stores" to Town. Reality - the bond money will give the Town more control over what development takes place.

**Question and Answer Session** - Note: The questions and answers have been shortened to make them more brief. Each question is followed by the name of person that submitted the question, and each answer is

followed by which Agency member responded.

**Question:** Please show a map of the area encompassed by the referendum, to see which homes may be impacted. [Katie Maio, 114 Goodwin Ave.]

**Answer:** No residential properties will be impacted by the referendum. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** Wethersfield's static grand list is a problem, so we need redevelopment as a best option. [Joe Hickey, 28 Meadow View Dr.]

**Answer:** Mr. Hickey said that his was only a comment and no answer was needed.

**Question:** At what point would the town break even, and how much must the tax base grow? [D. Garcia, P.O. Box 290508, Wethersfield]

**Answer:** The pay back period would be determined on a project by project basis, as each project would have different costs. There would be a public hearing on each project, and the Town Council must vote to approve each project. [Paul Thompson] If the town buys and resells property, the proceeds would go directly back to pay off bond debt. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** On what basis does the Agency maintain that the return on the investment will be positive? [D. Garcia, P.O. Box 290508, Wethersfield]

**Answer:** An example summarized recently in a newspaper article, was a vacant property assessed at \$2.5 million presently yields \$24,000 in tax revenue annually. If the property gets redeveloped with one of the possible development scenarios, it could have an assessed value of approximately \$8 million.

**Question:** Since the Agency made a presentation in support of referendum, may those opposed to the referendum also make a presentation? [Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main St.]

**Answer:** No, the meeting is an opportunity for the Agency to correct misconceptions about the referendum. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** What about possible problems with the process after the referendum? What if the referendum passes, the Town acquires property, taking it off of the tax roles, and lines up a developer. What if the developer turns out to have a bad record of completion? How can a citizen stop this risky investment - can a citizen vote? [Robert Smart, 62 Church St.]

**Answer:** Prospective developers would be interviewed and undergo standard screening, such as a credit check, to evaluate the ability of the developer to complete the project. [Joe Soja]

**Question:** Why is the "corridor" for the 3 roads 2,000 feet wide? Properties along these roads are not nearly that deep. Also, the corridor size was omitted from the explanatory text. [Mike Cuddigan, 49 Westlook Rd.]

**Answer:** The Agency is not concerned with residential property. The Agency was trying to satisfy the legal requirement to identify where the bond money can be used, and wanted to include the extent of commercial property. For example, the former Northeast Utilities property is some distance from its corridor. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** What is the overlay zone? [Mike Cuddigan, 49 Westlook Rd.]

**Answer:** It is an area proposed area for development, as identified in the Town's Silas Deane Master Plan. This plan was commissioned by the Economic Development and Improvement Commission and recommended to the Town Council for approval. [Lee Kuckro] The overlay zone and regulation as specified in that plan is not defined at this time. [Mike Zaleski]

**Question:** What specific types of businesses have been deemed most desirable to attract? If the free market has not brought in enough business, how will the referendum be a better approach? [John Adamian, 86 Waters View Dr.]

**Answer:** The Agency does not know what types of businesses will be attracted. [Joe Soja] The Agency does not have a goal to bring specific businesses to Town, but it does want to grow the grand list with mixed use - retail, office and commercial properties. State law requires the Agency to put together a

plan, then present it for public review, before any developers can be engaged. [Mike Zaleski] The Town would then be in position to have some control over the development. This would help address long-time complaints such as having too many "dollar stores" in Town. [Dan Camilliere, Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** I've heard that the bond will increase taxes a lot. How much will they go up for an individual? [Theresa Forsdick, 18 Monticello Dr.]

**Answer:** The explanatory text presents a conservative calculation of the cost, which would reach \$55 per year. This does not include any offset from the redevelopment itself. An example of what the Agency is trying to reverse, is the loss of approximately \$250,000 - 300,000 in personal property taxes when NU moved out of Wethersfield. Any such reversal or increased revenue from redevelopment, will go directly to paying off the bond debt. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** Does the Agency expect that the income from selling property to developers, and the increased tax revenue from redevelopment, will offset the cost of the bond? [Charlie Forsdick, 18 Monticello Dr.]

**Answer:** All proceeds from property sales from redevelopment will go directly to paying off the bond debt. [Joe Soja]

**Question:** Why should parents of school children support the redevelopment effort? [Julie Montinieri, 43 Amato Circle]

**Answer:** The Town's education system is one example of exactly why redevelopment is needed. The town must increase its commercial tax base so it can continue to provide quality education programs, teachers and schools. [Mike Zaleski, Paul Thompson]

**Question:** What opportunity will taxpayers have to support or oppose individual redevelopment proposals? [Charlie Forsdick, 18 Monticello Dr.]

**Answer:** Each redevelopment project must be presented at a public hearing before it can be approved, and the Town Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission would both have to approve. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** What is it about a redeveloped property or building that determines the tax that must be paid? Also, what is it that forbids the Town Planner from meeting with businesses and developers? If so, why not address this problem first, or will the referendum address it? [Ruth Clancy, 76 Sunset Boulevard]

**Answer:** The Town Planner has met with businesses and developers. There has been some success, but the growth in the grand list has still been less than 1/10th of 1% each year for the last 4 years. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** It is understood that the redevelopment process will include public hearings. However, the Boards and Commissions conducting these hearings are politically controlled and can ignore the public. How can citizens have input and control under these circumstances? The only alternative is expensive appeals. [Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main St.]

**Answer:** This concern is understood, but there is no evidence of political control of this process. The Agency members are a bi-partisan group of volunteers acting in the best interests of the Town. The alternative would be to have Town employees in charge of the process. Employees inherently do not have as much of a vested interest, as they do not have to be residents of the Town. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** If the 13 properties reviewed are not secret, why have they not been identified? [Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main St.]

**Answer:** It is not in the best interests of the Town to disclose which properties were reviewed. Mr. Sokolowski followed the Agency's bus tour of the properties, so they can't be secret. [Mr. Sokolowski interjected that he had been invited to follow the bus tour, and the moderator cautioned him about speaking out of turn.] The properties are easy to identify by driving down the Silas Deane Highway or Wolcott Hill Road - you'll see Weight Watchers, Fun Zone... [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** What is the Town's current long term debt? How much has it increased in the last 6 years? [D. Garcia, P.O. Box 290508, Wethersfield]

**Answer:** "long term debt is up 280% in 6 yrs." "44 million total debt including interest - paid down to \$880,000" [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** How much value must be added to the tax base/grand list to recoup the debt, or, how much in increased taxes is expected from redevelopment to pay back the debt? [Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main St.]

**Answer:** Each project is different, and it is a very slow process. [Paul Thompson and Mike Zaleski] The referendum does not require \$10 million to be borrowed, it allows the Town to borrow money after a public process and approval. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** Who will be directly involved with carrying-out the redevelopment plans? That is, the members of the Redevelopment Agency, town staff, developers, etc? [Ed Tevald, 894 Ridge Rd.]

**Answer:** It will depend on the project, but sometimes it will be just Town staff, and other times the developer will use its own staff. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** Earlier, an example was given about a property producing \$24,000 of tax revenue. Are there specific examples of how this would be accomplished? [Ed Tevald, 894 Ridge Rd.]

**Answer:** Many properties are presently being underutilized and therefore are undervalued. Redevelopment increases value of real estate and can create personal property gains therefore increasing tax revenue to the Town. [Joe Soja]

**Question:** Are you really asking the citizens to approve a \$10,000,000 referendum with no projection of the payback? [Robert Smart, 62 Church St.]

**Answer:** No is the short answer. [Lee Kuckro] The bond money would give the Town more financial flexibility and make the Town more competitive. [Paul Thompson]

**Question:** Have all of the donut shops been successful? That is, paying their taxes and providing employment opportunities? [Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main St.]

**Answer:** The point is understood about the number of donut shops in Town. However, they have become an important part of the community. The Agency put forth the referendum to help the Town to diversify and grow the number of businesses using underutilized properties. An example would be medical offices, which provide a necessary service for the citizens and include equipment that would add to the tax base and add jobs. [Paul Thompson]

**Question:** Is the intent to renovate buildings before we know what the potential buyers/tenants need? Most businesses today need to design and build their own facilities. We should avoid waste by guessing before users are identified. [Ed Reyngoudt, 460 Main St.]

**Answer:** The Agency does not intend to renovate before users are identified. The Agency wants to attract development, not act as a developer. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** The Town code / charter allows the public the right to vote by referendum on expenditures over \$200,000. The redevelopment referendum would effectively remove this right. Why has the Agency downplayed this effect? Also, is the Agency afraid that the public is not smart enough to make such decisions? [Ken Sokolowski, 79 Main St.]

**Answer:** It is a misconception that all expenditures over \$200,000 must go to a referendum vote, so the referendum does not affect the public's right as stated. There will be ample opportunity for public input during the redevelopment process. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** Will tax breaks be given to developers, and how will this be fair to existing businesses? [Mary Anne Smyers, 76 Ox Yoke Dr.]

**Answer:** The Town Council is responsible for giving tax breaks, not the Redevelopment Agency. Each project will be different and the obstacles to redevelopment are not always resolved with tax breaks. [Mike Zaleski]

**Question:** First, a comment: The Agency should look to Glastonbury as an example of a town with smart, attractive, well-designed business development. Question: \$10,000,000 seems like a small amount of money to correct all of the problems on the Silas Deane Highway. How will this amount truly have a positive impact on the appearance of the Highway and provide tax relief? [Maryanne Pappas, Fairview Dr.]

**Answer:** Based on the Agency's review, \$10,000,000 will certainly not be enough to fully redevelop everything. The Agency wants to pick a project, do it well, show the Town that this process is beneficial, and move on to another project. [Mike Zaleski] The bond funds would be seed money to show developers that Wethersfield is a good place for investment. The goal is to have the need for the Agency go away after stimulating investment interest in Wethersfield. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** Are there examples of towns similar to Wethersfield that have successfully tackled this problem? [Zach Shoher, 32 Potter Crossing]

**Answer:** The Agency met with officials from Windsor. They successfully redeveloped an old mill into a multi-use project. [Lee Kuckro] Hartford has plans in place for redevelopment zones. One zone includes the intersection of Albany Ave. and Woodland St., where a long-vacant gas station parcel is being redeveloped. [Mike Zaleski]

**Question:** If the Agency is not interested in residential properties, why are they included in the zone? If a development proposal came up that included the need for residential land to make the project size viable, would the Agency reject the proposal outright or consider it an option? [Joanne Mueller-London, 27 Kenwood Rd.]

**Answer:** Residential properties are not included in the zone. The Agency is not interested in residential property. [Lee Kuckro] Residential property is not an option. It is prohibited by Town ordinance. [Mike Zaleski]

**Question:** Comment: This meeting is an example of how Boards and Commissions do not respond to public concerns. Legitimate questions have been asked in a civil manner, but the Agency Chair has responded in a hostile fashion. How will the public hearings be different later in the redevelopment process? [Leigh Standish]

**Answer:** All of the Agency meetings are open to the public and participation is welcome. The Agency wants to hear what the public wants and has an open door policy that will continue throughout the process. [Lee Kuckro]

**Question:** What guarantee does the Agency have that the owners of vacant or blighted property will sell to the Town for redevelopment? [Maureen Martino, 381 Jordan La.]

**Answer:** Private property owners will not have to sell to the Town, but the bond money would allow the Town to proactively attract interest from property owners. [Mike Zaleski] Some owners may want to sell but face obstacles the Town may be able to help correct. [Paul Thompson]

Heidi Lane closed the question and answer session, noting that there were more questions handed-in, but there was not enough time to cover them. She then gave 5 minutes to each of the representatives from the two political action committees to provide their comments.

4. **Comments from the "WIN - PAC Beat the Bond" Political Action Committee** - Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main Street, agreed to speak, saying she did not necessarily speak for WIN PAC, but would speak as someone opposed to the referendum. She said that the main problem is the lack of trust in government, based on the way the Town in recent years decided to buy turf ahead of books, and the way the Town has renovated its buildings. Ms. Ruhe said she is not opposed to redevelopment, but wants to know more specifically about what the money will be used for, and wants to be able to vote on each project. She also believes that the prohibition on eminent domain for residential property could be changed if an attractive enough deal came along. Another concern is the total amount of debt carried by the Town. With the upcoming need for bonding to renovate the Hamner School and the Wethersfield High School, she feels the redevelopment bonding would create too much debt.

**Comments from the "Wethersfield Investment Now" Political Action Committee** - Tony Homicki, 201 Cumberland Avenue, spoke on behalf of this PAC which supports the referendum. He said he has 30 years experience as a property appraiser, including 18 years as the Town of Newington Assessor. He believes that Wethersfield needs to have a more balanced tax base, like its neighboring towns. Mr. Homicki said that the grand list of most neighboring towns has doubled between property tax valuations, but Wethersfield's has not come close. He said sometimes there are obstacles that the Town can address that do not involve buying property or large development deals. He gave an example of when a company left Wethersfield because it needed a larger water supply lines, but the Town would not spend the money for the upgrade. Mr. Homicki said he does not want to see the NU property be vacant for a long time like the Weight Watchers building, so he supports the referendum.

**Closing Remarks** - Lee Kuckro suggested that the audience use Town history as a guide to deciding whether a more proactive approach to redevelopment is in the best interest of the Town. He said that the State had a plan in 1928 to expand Hartford Avenue as the main north-south route through Wethersfield. The Town hired an engineer to design the Silas Deane Highway, fought the State's plan, and won the protection of the residential and historic nature of Old Wethersfield. In 1962, the Town created the State's largest Historic District in Old Wethersfield, creating inherent limitations on private property rights in the process of preserving the historic roots of the Town. In 1928, and in 1962, there was opposition to these plans for change, but the Town has benefited immeasurably from those decisions. The redevelopment referendum is another one of those points in time when a decision needs to be made for the greater good of the Town.

5. **Call to Adjourn** - Lee Kuckro adjourned the meeting at 8:38 PM.

6. **Next Meeting Date** - November 7, 2007 at 5:00 pm. (regularly scheduled meeting).

Respectfully Submitted,

Kevin T. Sullivan  
Agency Recording Secretary