

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL AND  
BUDGET AND FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE  
MAY 4, 2010**

The Budget and Finance Subcommittee of the Wethersfield Town Council held a Budget Meeting on Tuesday, May 4, 2010 at 5:30 p.m. in the Library Community Room, 515 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT.

Present: Councilors Drake, Hurley, Kotkin, Manousos and Chairperson Hemmann.

Absent: Councilor McAlister, Montinieri, Roberts, and Deputy Mayor Console.

Also present: Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, Pam Rapacz, Registrar of Voters, and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

The Hearing began with the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

REGISTRARS OF VOTERS

Pam Rapacz, Registrar, reported that telephones and computers are on every desk in the Registrar's Office. The voting machines have been changed from the lever machines to the opt-scan machines. People have commented that they miss the curtain around them while voting so privacy booths with openings to the wall have been supplied. Pam Rapacz also reported elections are more expensive with the new system but the machines are faster and more accurate. The lever machines often broke and no one was aware of the situation. The Registrar's Office has two Registrars, two Deputy Registrars and two assistants. The Registrars and Deputies work 12 hours work and the two assistants work 6 hours a week. She explained six employees are needed because of the two parties and the need to take each other's place. Pam Rapacz also reported that 2010 is going to be fine but for 2011, the ballots, which may cost \$4,000 and the programming of the memory cards, which may cost \$6,000 or more will need to be paid. She explained that the Secretary of State had paid for the ballots and memory cards, but is no longer going to. Pam Rapacz also reported that the Registrars tried to have a law passed this year to diminish the number of polling places for the primary only, but it was pulled by the Senate and rejected. She will continue to study the redistricting. Pam Rapacz also reported that a law was passed in which fewer people were needed at the polls so the cost for elections was reduced from \$25,000 to \$15,000 to \$16,000.

TAX COLLECTOR

Marlene Desjardins, Tax Collector reported that the computer program in the Tax Collector's office is centered on billing and collections. The Tax Collector's Office collects all of the Town's revenue, parking tickets and false alarm tickets.

Councilor Hurley asked if the Town had an online payment system.

Marlene Desjardins responded that the Town currently does have an online payment system but does not have the software which enables someone to look up their tax information, but noted that this is a goal of hers.

Councilor Hurley inquired about the cost of the software.

Lisa Hancock noted that when there was discussion on the capital and non-recurring fund, the software that is referred to is the same software package that was discussed that night. She noted also that she is still in negotiations with the software company but at this time, the cost is \$98,000 for the software and server spread over seven years. The total estimated project with the maintenance over seven years is \$192,000, which includes the server, the maintenance and the software. Lisa Hancock explained that they currently have on-line payment but is limited as to what it can do. She explained that by state statute if someone owes prior taxes, their payment has to be applied to prior taxes. At this time, the only thing that they can accept is the taxpayer's current levy payment on line.

Chairperson Hemmann asked Marlene Desjardins what could or would she do differently.

Marlene Desjardins responded that she would like to see the department become more electronic. The department now has validators at the counter which automatically sends out a receipt and they have also eliminated the stamps.

Councilor Manousos asked on the status of the initiatives, particularly the warrants.

Marlene Desjardins responded to date they have not attached anyone's bank account because there hasn't been enough warrants left behind. Warrants for motor vehicle and personal property have recently gone out and they will see if they will need to attach any bank accounts.

Councilor Kotkin asked if there has been any improvement in the collections.

Marlene Desjardins responded that it has improved. Eighteen hundred warrants have been sent out this past spring, and last year there were about 2,900 warrants sent out.

Councilor Kotkin inquired about the selling of liens.

Marlene Desjardins responded that they have not sold any tax liens yet because they still need to go out to bid.

Lisa Hancock stated that in addition the option of selling the liens, they are also looking at the possibility of foreclosing on the property. She added also that there are different things for

different pieces and everything needs to be looked at to see the best way to proceed for the situation. Once the warrant season is over, the lists will be put together, and they will then meet with the Town Manager to discuss what the best proposal would be.

Councilor Drake asked if this needed to be voted on.

Lisa Hancock responded that the Town Council has already approved the process so they do have the ability to move forward.

Councilor Drake asked how much is given up when a package is sold.

Lisa Hancock explained that State statute states that the Town is allowed to collect 18% interest on real estate so the Town will get their money if the property is sold. The decision would be whether the Town wants to wait and collect the 18% interest when the property is sold or get the cash flow immediately.

Councilor Manousos stated that he would like to hear more information about the process before they decide to go forward.

Councilor Kotkin asked why they are ahead of collections this year as opposed to last year.

Marlene Desjardins responded that she has been checking numerous deeds for mortgage companies and notifying the mortgage companies whenever back taxes are due. Mortgage companies do not like to see back taxes due, so they will pay the back taxes and add it to the property owner's mortgage.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the January and July bills are being paid at the same rate.

Marlene Desjardins responded that for the most part, bills are being paid at the same rate.

Councilor Kotkin asked if there were any commercial properties that are delinquent in tax payments.

Marlene Desjardins responded that Comstock Ferre and the hotel behind Red Lobster is delinquent. The Town had begun foreclosure process on the hotel but they are now paying \$22,000/month and are almost current.

#### ASSESSOR

Chandler Rose reported that their program is based around the grand list. Re-evaluations will be done in 2013 and money has been set aside under the capital fund for that project. The re-evaluations will be different from the previous one as it will be based on the statistical side where

they will look at sale ratio.

Councilor Hurley asked what the cost is for the re-evaluation.

Chandler Rose responded the cost is \$55,000 paid over four years. Chandler Rose also reported that money is set aside every year for the personal property auditor. Last year 40 accounts were audited and this year they have scaled back to 20 accounts. Accounts are pulled randomly and they look at trends and resales.

Councilor Kotkin asked if Wethersfield has fewer appeals than other towns.

Chandler Rose responded that there were fewer appeals with the revaluation, but this year there was an increase in the appeals.

Councilor Kotkin asked what has been the experience with the Board of Assessment appeals.

Jeff Bridges responded that this is an issue that will need to be addressed and added that this may be the time to refocus on what the criteria is reducing an assessment.

Chandler Rose noted that he does try to work together with the Board of Assessment.

Councilor Drake asked about software to do the re-evaluations.

Chandler Rose responded that they have the software now and there is a push to discontinue the walk throughs. He added that the goal is to make sure that the information is accurate and doing walk throughs are good to check for illegal work done on houses.

Councilor Kaktin asked if the assessed value of the real estate changed for the CL&P building off of Cumberland Avenue

Chandler Rose responded that it has gone down. He explained that he toured the building with the management company and stated that it needed work.

Councilor Kotkin asked what he see going on in town that will positively or negatively affect the Grand List as of October 1, 2010.

Chandler Rose responded that he hasn't seen much. The Town has received the sale from the Hartford Medical Group Building so that personal property will be on the upcoming Grand List.

Councilor Kotkin asked about trends with motor vehicles.

Chandler Rose noted that motor vehicles are all over the place. The supplemental list went down but their actual regular list increased.

Councilor Kotkin asked if there are discounts for high mileage vehicles.

Chandler Rose responded that this program has expired.

Chairperson Hemmann asked what could he or would he do differently.

Chandler Rose responded that he would like to see a separate tax assessment software. The current system being used right now is lacking in many areas.

Councilor Drake asked if a re-evaluation was done, who would suffer more, the residential side or the commercial side.

Chandler Rose responded that they are the same. They don't see a decline in the market, they just haven't seen a market.

#### SOCIAL AND YOUTH SERVICES

Nancy Stilwell reported that this department deals with the basic needs of most of the community. Much is done with the entitlement programs, particularly for people in the lower end of the socio-economic status, including energy assistance, renter rebate and tax appointments for AARP. The office consistently cycles through programs during the year. Many resources go towards helping the elderly stay independent in their own homes, and this includes case management Dial-A-Ride. There has been an increase this year in basic need requests and use of the food bank. The mobile food van is staffed by one member and a core of volunteers, and averages 100 participants every two weeks when it visits the Housing Authority. There is a need with people who have lost jobs, unemployed or barely making ends meet. With Youth Services, they are working with the Juvenile Review Board to try to keep kids out of the court system when possible. Crossroads continues to be held at the junior high, and they also are working with the Keane Foundation to expand their program. They are also working with a coalition in Connecticut called "List" (Local Inter-Agency Service Team) which is a statewide initiative that was started by the court support services division to provide a more coordinated approach to kids who are at risk – on probation in the court system or at risk of being in the court system. They are also working with DCF, the schools, the police, the local youth service bureaus and any other collateral possible to get a network for these children. Nancy Stilwell noted that the year started off with assistance with tornado assistance. Nancy Stilwell added that they are still seeing the impact on the economic downturn and the hardest hit are seniors and single parents with children.

Councilor Drake asked why the economic downturn is hurting the seniors.

Nancy Stilwell noted that some seniors were working part-time and collecting social security, their hours are now being cut or eliminated. Nancy Stilwell also noted that they are looking at collaborative grants with Newington and Rocky Hill and also share equipment back and forth with these towns.

Chairperson Hemmann asked what she could or would do differently.

Nancy Stilwell responded that they are seeing two, three, four generations of the same family coming through for energy assistance, using the food bank and using every available government program that is administered. Her observation is that they don't know how to manage their money. She would like to look for grant money to do life skills training. Nancy Stilwell also added that if they are to help kids in town, they need to start with younger children. For example, they are doing the substance abuse education at the middle and high school level, but she adds that much of the problem is with the parenting. She sees a lot of parents who either don't want to be mean to their kids or don't want their kids to hate them. It is a question of getting to the parents earlier than what is being done now. She would like to see more parent education from the birth through eight level to teach good parenting skills, getting parents to start out with the foundation of mutual respect, communication and structure in a household that will set up for a better adolescence. The population of Wethersfield is shifting and there is a greater need for multi-cultural outreach to parents that may not seek out help.

Councilor Kotkin noted in the last budget, the Youth and Family Services was hit hard and he asked if she was able to continue any of the programs that were cut.

Nancy Stilwell noted that Crossroads continues because it is self funded. They have been approached by Highcrest School to help prepare their kids for middle school. The PTO has raised money and Jeff Bridges said that if the PTO is going to pay, then Nancy's department could help them. They have put together a proposal in which they will work for two hours with six groups of students on decision making and team building.

Councilor Kotkin asked about the escrow account.

Nancy Stilwell noted the increase was due to donations and fundraising.

### PARKS & RECREATIONS

Kathy Bagley reported that her department does recreation programs in the community center and schools to the facilities at the Solomon Welles House, the parks and the nature center. She noted a lot is done with special events in town and different community support groups that they work with. Aquatics is a big part of what they do. One of the key things is looking at the funds that are raised to run their programs and what is seen in the budget is what the town provides funds for. The biggest item is the Aquatics and the different staffing costs. A lot of other programs are

self sustaining and staff has to raise money through fees to run those programs and they have to balance how high the fee can be, how much money is needed to be made versus what people can afford to pay. They also offer scholarship programs. The Park Board took action a few years back and said that they never wanted to see a child not be able to have an experience in a program just because they couldn't afford it. They will also write off pool passes in conjunction with social services.

Councilor Hurley asked Kathy Bagley what the biggest thing that her department needed right now.

Kathy Bagley responded that the biggest thing is funds to keep up the maintenance of the facilities. She noted that the beach at Millwoods Pond needs to be refilled as it has been washed out.

Councilor Manousos asked where most of the fees come from with revenue.

Kathy Bagley responded that most revenue is program fees and there are also specialty programs that fees are collected for.

Councilor Manousos asked if her department was comfortable with her fees.

Kathy Bagley responded that they are comfortable with the fees charged and they have managed to hold on and make their revenue projections by watching expenses and monitoring expenses. Fees have not been raised in the current year or for the summer, but may raise some of the self-sustaining program fees in the Fall because a variety of programs and expenses have been taken out of their budget for next year and moved them into their self-sustaining budget.

Chairperson Hemmann asked what she could do or would do differently.

Kathy Bagley responded that things are done differently all the time. She stated that her department is getting involved with the Wethersfield Early Readiness Council which started out through grant funds looking at getting preschoolers ready for kindergarten and the skills that are needed. The goal is to collaboratively look at the community with all the resources that are out there, the religious and cultural communities and try to bring everyone to the same table, identify what needs to be done and then this process is to help set up goals to get to that and using existing resources, not adding to a budget, not adding additional funds to the process but to take what other people are doing and put it together in a plan. She would like to get people to think collectively about that.

Councilor Drake asked if Greenfield Pool is due for a renovation.

Kathy Bagley responded that it had a major renovation in 1996 in which the structure of the pools were completely rebuilt and this was done through a referendum for recreation

improvements throughout town.

Councilor Hurley asked why there is a town garage employee who opens Cottone Field in the morning and then sits in his truck for the remainder of the day.

Kathy Bagley explained that it is a multi-million dollar facility and there have been issues at the time about parking, gates that are opened and neighbors being affected by the parking for the games. The staff is also trained on how to clean blood off the field if something happens during a game.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the Nature Center is able to survive on the way in which they are being funded.

Kathy Bagley responded that this year and next year will be fine and they are looking at different ways to raise revenue for the future.

Chairperson Hemmann asked if non-residents are charged a higher fee than residents.

Kathy Bagley responded that they do pay different amounts.

Councilor Manousos asked how the Little League field holding up.

Kathy Bagley responded that it has done well. They are finishing up the press box, which was built by volunteers. Kathy Bagley added that they continuously look at their programs to see what was done last year and what will be carried over to next year and evaluate the things that are going on now.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

At 7:20 p.m., Councilor Hurley moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Drake. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 6-0-0.

Dolores Sassano  
Town Clerk  
*Approved by vote of Council  
June 7, 2010*