

SPECIAL MEETING JANUARY 7, 2008

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on Monday, January 7, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. in the Cafeteria of the Silas Deane Middle School, 515 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield CT.

Present: Councilors Console, Forrest, Hemmann, (arrived 7:08 p.m.) Roberts, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Montinieri and Chairperson Adil.

Absent: Councilors Cascio and Kotkin

Present from the Legislative Delegation: Representatives Morin and Guerrera and Senator Doyle

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

DISCUSSION WITH LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION

Chairperson Adil said that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss the upcoming State Legislative Session. There are lots of needs in Wethersfield and the State delegation has helped with them in the past. They have done a wonderful job delivering for Wethersfield on many fronts. He thanked them for all they have done over the past few years. He said the projects are too numerous to mention. He said that the Town Manager has prepared a list of questions and needs that the Town Council will forward to the Delegation.

Senator Doyle said that it was a pleasure to be at this annual meeting to connect. A common theme is always State money. The Session will begin in February and he will continue to fight for State aid for Wethersfield. He said that he is pretty happy with the results this year and hopes to match it next year. The economy appears to be slowing a little. With a surplus, it is easier to allocate a larger portion of that to municipalities. All four of the Delegates worked hard for that goal. He said he would be happy to answer any Council questions.

Representative Guerrera said that he was happy to be at the meeting, too. He said that this is a short State Session. Things need to be put in perspective. The economy is in a slowdown. The bonding issue, although resolved, it will continue to be difficult to put projects on the Governor's list. There have been some good years but there are going to be times when the Towns will have to tighten their belts a little. As Chairperson of the Transportation Committee, he knows the Silas Deane Highway has already been a big issue for the Town. The Delegation continues to try to get money for that road. The Delegation will work hard for the Town of Wethersfield.

Representative Morin said that he will advocate as hard as he can to assist the Town of Wethersfield for State funding. This first year has been very rewarding. He enjoys working with the other members of Wethersfield's Delegation. He said the Town does need to prioritize what it wants so that the Delegates can then work on that funding.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that he would like to get a sense of what the Delegation feels about the Governor's indication that she is going to present a cap for property taxes again this year. He said that this is one of the significant things that the Town would have to grapple with if it has momentum.

Representative Guerrera said that everyone tries to implement some sort of property tax reform. 3 percent, 2 percent, 4 percent is really handcuffing the municipalities. The citizens elected the local officials to run their Towns and they don't need more mandates at the State level to tell them how to do their job. Overall, will there be some sort of cap? He said he doesn't think so this year. The conversation will be taken up, but at this time, he doesn't see it happening.

Senator Doyle said that:

- He concurs with Representative Guerrera's comments. Every session, people hear things in the beginning and panics. The majority of Democrats do not support it. In concept, it is a wonderful idea. However, it is

micromanaging local government. He said that he hopes Towns can have 2 percent or less, but there are times when they may be 3.1 percent over their current budget.

- In response to the first question on the Town Manager's handout concerning the two year budget passed last year, he said that State Aid is not going down and has not gone down in thirteen years. In reality, the first year of the biennial, the increase in the first year is much greater than the projected increase for this year. There has never been a decrease in his 13 years, it has never gone down. He said that it is his job to fight for it again this year.

Representative Guerrero said, to add to Senator Doyle's comment, there were times when the funding was less than what the Town wanted and Senator Doyle fought hard to make sure that Wethersfield received its fair portion.

Representative Morin said, in response to the Deputy Mayor's question, he would not support a cap when you look at the kinds of mandates that are passed on to the Towns, especially on the education side.

Chairperson Adil said that the Town Council will give the Delegation a CD that has the Fuss and O'Neill study on the Silas Deane Highway. This is a cooperative venture between Wethersfield and Rocky Hill. It is an effort to make State dollars more efficient. He said the Delegation has been instrumental in getting more funding, like last year with the Silas Deane Highway Façade Improvement Program. Another project is the \$1,000,000 for the work in front of Town Hall on the Silas Deane Highway. It will create a much more pedestrian friendly appearance and more of a unified look. He said that the Town Manager is working with the Capital Region Council of Governments to receive Wethersfield's share of the State money for regional cooperation.

Senator Doyle said that the Delegation has worked together to get these projects on the Bond Package agenda. It is important to have everyone help to have the Governor put the Town's projects on the agenda.

Chairperson Adil said that this Council is very much in favor of redevelopment along the Silas Deane Highway, although there may be a difference of opinion as to how the Town will get there. Everyone is in agreement that the Town could use more State Aid because it is a regional problem.

Representative Guerrero said that the Legislation passed a huge Infrastructure bill two years ago at close to \$3,000,000. The Transportation Committee has discussed that the State can't forget the main arteries in the Towns. More money should be put into these arteries.

Councilor Hemmann asked about the impact of the decision of binding arbitration at a local level. It is significant many times. This is not a new issue. Unfunded mandates do directly affect property tax reform and this would be a part of doing something in a meaningful way. If something is going to be passed without funding, don't do it. The other issue from the Legislative perspective is to look at the Connecticut Resource Recovery Authority, a quasi-public agency that the Legislature has oversight to, because the impact to the local communities is going to be significant over the next few years and waiting until that happens is not the right timing to start to address it. The Legislature has a complete understanding of the process and problems of CRRA and the potential problems for the future, as the contract with the Towns end in 2012.

Representative Guerrero said that the message is loud and clear. No one at the House or Senate in this room wants to handcuff the municipalities. The Town Council is elected by the people to serve. The Legislators are there to provide funding for programs. But when it comes to the local municipalities, the Legislators want to leave it in the Town Council's hands.

Chairperson Adil asked if the Town Manager wanted to bring up any issues.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that:

- The Youth Services Bureau is a new issue. The Town has been working for awhile to receive State funding but what ends up happening is that the funding is going into private or non-profit Child Guidance Clinics when in reality Youth Service Bureaus have so much work and input with the local youth that they should be given the chance to receive some of those dollars and they are not. There will be a big, State-wide push for Youth Service

Bureaus to receive some of that money.

- There are so many Capital Projects going on throughout the Towns in the State, that it would be beneficial to raise the threshold for prevailing wage. Again, not asking to eliminate prevailing wage, but trying to move up the threshold for prevailing wage.

Chairperson Adil said that one thing that he had concerns over was that there is talk of the reimbursement rate for school projects going down. There is, on the horizon, perhaps the Wethersfield High School renovation project and the Hanmer Elementary School project, and one of the things that will drive the Town Council's decision as to when to put that on the referendum for the community, is what is the feeling about reimbursement and should the Town Council act sooner rather than later.

Senator Doyle said that in the past, it has come up during difficult budget times at the State, but it also may be happen because of other issues like Sheff vs. O'Neil that the allocation may change between local areas and urban areas. It is the Legislative duty to maintain the status quo. Changing it has come up in the past and been defeated. It is pretty easy to defend. If the budget sours, the legislative delegation will continue to fight.

Representative Morin said that it is something that keeps getting reiterated. Of course, the Legislative Delegation will fight for appropriate funding for the Town. They do have to look at the State budget level as he represents Wethersfield but the decisions affect the entire State. He reiterated what Representative Guerrero said, that when times are good it is easy to fund items. When the funds are not coming into the State, the Legislature has to be more careful. He said he will work to make sure the best interest of the Town is being looked after.

Chairperson Adil said that he appreciates everything that the Legislators are doing for the Town. He said that there was a recent article in the Hartford Courant that Wethersfield has become even more of a diverse community and faces bigger challenges. He said that the suburban school districts are becoming more integrated and with that integration comes bigger challenges. When the argument comes from the Cities for more funding, remind them that the suburban areas ringing Hartford are fighting these problems, too. He said while the Town embraces the diversity, it also knows that it comes at a price. He said that he apologized that the Board of Education members were not invited to the meeting tonight.

Chairperson Adil thanked the Legislators for attending the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:30 p.m., Chairperson Adil adjourned the meeting.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

APPROVE BY VOTE OF COUNCIL JANUARY 22, 2007