

**REGULAR MEETING
SEPTEMBER 15, 2008**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a meeting on Monday, September 15, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Silas Deane Middle School.

Present: Councilors Cascio, Console, Forrest, Hemmann, Kotkin, Roberts, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Montinieri, and Chairperson Adil.

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 Cascio.

PROCLAMATIONS

KIDS DAY

Chairperson Adil presented a proclamation for Kids Day America.

Dr. Christopher Lavoie accepted the presentation and said that he was happy to host the Kids Day in Wethersfield this year. Events will be held at Webb Elementary School on September 20th from noon to 3:00 p.m. It is free to the public.

BLOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Chairperson Adil read the Blood Cancer Awareness Month proclamation.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HEARINGS

ORDINANCE PROVIDING PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FOR OWNERS OF HIGH MILEAGE MOTOR VEHICLES AND HYBRID PASSENGER CARS

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that this Ordinance was brought forth from the Budget and Finance Committee. It is an exemption for high mileage passenger vehicles up to \$1,000 of the assessed value of each vehicle. The last time Town Staff checked the numbers, there were about 40 vehicles in Town. This would equate to about \$30 off of the taxes of each vehicle. This ordinance will only be in effect until 2010 when it will be reviewed again by the Town Council.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Michael Patrella, 306 Brimfield Road, said that he has been having an issue in front of his house for a year. There is a sink hole. The Town has temporarily repaired it several times. He said that Halloween is coming and if leaves fill the hole, children could get hurt. He said that he has been to Town Hall many times and the Town Manager has been fantastic. He said that he has an issue with the Town Engineer. Over a year ago, he was told that the hole is the Town's problem and now he learns that the Town doesn't have the equipment to fix the problem. The job has to be subcontracted out for \$50,000. He said that if his child or another child gets hurt, the Town will have a bigger issue than \$50,000. He said that he already has a lawyer involved. He has had a workhorse in front of his house for a year. He needs some resolution. He knows there is a process to follow but he needs to know what it is and have some communication from the Engineering Department. He would like the Town Council to make something happen.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, said that Wall Street has been in turmoil over the past 13 months. With the problems with Merrill Lynch and Lehman Brothers, jobs will be lost and this will cause a ripple effect. There are going to be some pretty bad times ahead. The only good thing is that oil prices dropped. He said that last time he spoke about Ralph Capanera and Barbara Ruhe running for State Senate and Representative. The Town needs to see a 3 percent cap. Ralph Capanera is saying that he will put a sunset on some of these temporary taxes. High taxes do not make a strong economy. He said that he spoke more than once about money the Town sends to Hartford. It gets very little from the money.

COUNCIL REPORTS & COMMENTS

Councilor Walsh said that the Redevelopment Agency met and discussed the zoning proposal. The Redevelopment Forum will be held on October 15th at the Silas Deane Middle School Auditorium.

Councilor Roberts said the Shared Services Committee met. All modules of MUNIS are up and running on both the Town and Board of Education sides. The Fireside Chat has been scheduled for October 6th at 5:00 p.m. It will include the Town Council, Board of Education, and members of various energy committees along with the School Building Committee.

Chairperson Adil said that he would like the Technology Committee invited too.

Chairperson Roberts said that the Shared Services Committee discussed core services that have been identified. She said it sounded like the Board of Education would be interested in looking at their core services some time in the future. Finally, the Committee discussed possibly combining Information Technology Services with a goal to have something final by the next budget session.

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Councilor Hemmann said that she would like the core services information given to the Library, too. It is a worthwhile exercise that the Library can gain from.

Councilor Kotkin thanked the Town Councilors for handing in their reviews of the Town Manager and Town Clerk. The Budget Committee will review them for the October meeting. The Insurance Committee is meeting later in the week. This year, in the first two months of the year, the Town appears to be about \$150,000 ahead in health insurance.

Councilor Console said that he read an article in Wethersfield Life about a woman who was attacked at the Wethersfield Shopping Center and no one helped her. He said that he found it shocking that in Wethersfield, a volunteer town, no one came forward to lend a hand. As far as the sink hole, he would like to drive by and see what is going to cost \$50,000. He said that it looks like the Town is taking some action about the Police sprinkler system. He is glad to see that some progress is being made. He said that over the next couple of months, the Town will take a hard look at what town employees have Town vehicles and some money can be saved. He said that he thinks the list can still be cut back a little. He said that the Cornfest was great but afterwards he had residents ask why the fire truck that is unfit for fire fighters to use was used to give children rides. He said that it is not right. The fire truck was used more at the Cornfest than at fires for the last three years.

Councilor Cascio thanked the Chamber of Commerce for the Cornfest this weekend. He said that many hours of volunteers go into putting the fair together. It reaches out to the community and businesses, too. He said that it always has a rainy day, though. Many of the sporting events are starting at the high school. There is a lot of parking along streets for these events. The football team won its opening game and it is great to see the turnout. The Town needs to really look at the parking. He asked for an updated report on the activity of the Northeast Utilities building on Wolcott Hill Road.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri congratulated the Keane Foundation for the opening of the 9/11 Memorial at the Community Center this past week. He said that it was one of the finest events that the Town has had recently with the collaboration of the volunteers of the community. He was glad to see the news coverage for the Town. It was a terrific thing to witness. He is proud to be part of the Committee.

Councilor Hemmann reminded Councilors that on September 20th there will be a fundraiser to benefit the purchase of a defibrillator for the high school. It will take place at the Wethersfield/Rocky Hill Elks Club. She said that she believes the cost for one defibrillator is about \$1,500.

Chairperson Adil said that:

- The Wethersfield High School Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) is sponsoring an energy saving lighting sale on Thursday, September 18th from 4:30 to 9:30 p.m. in the high school cafeteria.

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- The Secretary of the State will be honoring World War II Veterans on September 18th at the Community Center from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.
- Wethersfield Business and Civic Association is having a reception on September 25th from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Wethersfield Country Club.
- The Town of Windsor invited delegates from Wethersfield to join in Windsor's 375th Anniversary Parade on September 27th. He said that he would like to see Councilors march.
- The Connecticut Annual Citizens Corps Council Conference 2008 will be held on September 29th. Let the Town Manager know if you are interested in attending.
- The MDC and Connecticut River Watershed Council are sponsoring a "Source to Sea Cleanup" on October 4th.
- The Redevelopment Commission's second forum will be held on October 15th.
- A group of three businesses in Old Wethersfield are organizing a fund raiser to benefit the Wethersfield Fuel Bank. The fundraiser will be October 16th at the Bean and Grape on Main Street.

COUNCIL ACTION

ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS, AND APPOINTMENTS FOR ACTION

Councilor Kotkin moved **"TO APPROVE THE ORDINANCE PROVIDING PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FOR OWNERS OF HIGH MILEAGE MOTOR VEHICLES AND HYBRID PASSENGER CARS"** seconded by Councilor Console.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Assessor will put together an application form for people who own hybrid vehicles to apply for the exemption. The application will have to be filled out every year. The Ordinance will end in 2010 and the Town Council will have to review it then and extend it if it wants.

Councilor Kotkin said that the Budget Committee endorsed this unanimously. This has only been allowed in Connecticut for about a year. It was part of an Energy Efficiency Act that was passed by the Legislature in 2007. The Town is taking a very measured approach by only allowing a \$1,000 deduction in the assessed value of the car. As an example, if someone owns a hybrid vehicle assessed at \$15,000, it would be taxed on \$14,000. It sends a message that the Town is serious about energy efficiency. It will not cost the Town much money and will raise awareness.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked about application rules.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the exemption would be modeled after the State's. The Assessor already has the applications and procedures from the two other Towns that have this type of ordinance in place. It will not be retroactive but will apply to any vehicle that qualifies, new or existing.

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Councilor Forrest asked if it was possible that it be noted that the ordinance goes directly to the Connecticut General Statutes. He would like it to be spelled out to residents, not just a link to the statutes.

Chairperson Adil said that he endorses this ordinance. Given the 2010 initiative and energy conservation efforts, this is an excellent way to show citizens that the Town wants to protect the environment.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

OTHER BUSINESS

Deputy Mayor Montinieri moved **“TO CHANGE THE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING FROM NOVEMBER 3, 2008 TO NOVEMBER 5, 2008”** seconded by Councilor Roberts.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that normally the night before an election the meeting is cancelled or rescheduled. She asked that it be rescheduled because the Town is on such a tight timeline with the referendum question that has to be set. The Board of Education and Building Committee are making their recommendations to the Town Council on November 5th.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Forrest moved **“TO WAIVE 50 PERCENT OF THE POLICE FEES FOR THE MIKEY’S PLACE ANNUAL 5K WALK/RUN/ROLL”** seconded by Councilor Cascio.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Town Council has done this in the past. A 50 percent reduction in fees would be \$456.94. The Town Council did budget for a few of these fee reductions but eventually she may have to come back and ask for more money as more requests are made.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri moved **“TO WAIVE THE POLICE FEES FOR THE 9/11 COMMUNITY CENTER CEREMONY IN THE AMOUNT OF \$ 913.88”** seconded by Councilor Roberts.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that this is a request from the Keane Foundation for the 9/11 Sports Facility Grand Opening. There were several officers there for traffic control. They are asking the Town to waive the entire fee because it was a joint event with the Town.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that he is in favor of the full amount because the Keane Foundation has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars on behalf of the community for the community center facility, a building owned by the Town. It is a small gesture.

Chairperson Adil said that he concurs. It was a wonderful event.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

THE USE OF TELEPHONE CONFERENCING FOR COUNCIL MEETINGS

Chairperson Adil said that, as of now, there is nothing in rules and procedures that allows or disallows telephone voting. The Committee wanted to clarify the rules and has prepared a draft for review.

Councilor Console said that being a Councilor is a volunteer position. He said that he holds a job and sometimes has to be somewhere else and can't attend a meeting. If there is an important issue, he wants to be able to vote. He thinks it is important that he has the right to call in and cast a vote. It should not be taken advantage of and Councilors should try not to miss meetings but sometimes it is unavoidable. If the Town Council is made aware of the situation before the fact and the Town Council agrees that it is all right to call in then he doesn't see why it can't be done. He said that it is an efficient way of doing business. It is important to keep the flow of business going and allow for the Town Councilors to vote.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that he appreciates Councilor Console's comments. He said that he has serious objections to telephone voting for a couple of reasons. There are several ways that topics that come before Council get addressed. The Town Council has opportunities to provide feedback on those topics formally at the meetings but also informally. Also, when he is in attendance at a meeting, the body language and some of the exchange from the public can be subtle. When speaking, some of those subtleties can be gathered by being present. For the most effective compilation of thoughts for him when he votes on something is to make sure he has that full comprehensive information. He said that he thinks that is lost over the telephone. The telephoning in during the budget was cumbersome. The quality of the phone exchange was difficult. It prevented for a smooth transition in discussion because of the nature of the telecommunications plight. Once the Town Council moves into the Council Chambers, it may change. He said that there will be some higher technologies that may allow for a more productive exchange. He said he would leave that discussion open for later. He said that his concerns are not personal to Councilor Console. He said that it is not easy to work with a work schedule as volunteers. He said that he hopes the full representation of the group is generally captured. He said that he also relies on his colleagues to express his point of view or share collaboration. He said that he feels that it is an important topic and asked that it be brought before the full Town Council.

Councilor Cascio said that this was done during the budget session and it is not the first time that it has been done in Town. It also shows that the individual is taking the initiative to be a part of the meeting. He said that he doesn't have a problem with it. Before the Town Council votes on it, the Town should find out what other communities do about this. What is done at the State and

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Federal level? Is there a Statute that mentions it? He said that he thought that a Councilor asked permission of the Town Council to phone in and the Town Council said that it was okay. He said that before the Town Council goes any further, it needs to see if there is a statute of restriction that doesn't allow the Town to do this.

Chairperson Adil said that research has been done.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Freedom of Information Statutes allow for it. Congress and State Legislatures are not allowed to do it. It varies between towns. Some allow it, some have written that it is not allowed, and some allow it under certain circumstances only. The Bond Counsel is leaving the decision up to the Town Council.

Councilor Kotkin said that in the private sector, there are many meetings by telephone. He thanked the Town Council for allowing him to listen in on a budget meeting in 2007. He said that the one issue that he can't get around is that if there is a meeting where four members are at the meeting and there are four or five members connected by phone and that would not be how the populous wants the Town Council to govern them. It is probably a situation that won't occur but how would the Town get around it. Would only one Council member be allowed to phone in?

Councilor Hemmann said that she is happy that the subcommittee brought this back to the full Council for discussion. She said that when she was elected to serve on the Town Council she never thought she would be put on a project at work that would take her away so much this year. For the remainder of the year, she will be away for two weeks at a time. She said that she takes her commitment on the Town Council very seriously but it is very difficult to fly back and forth from North Carolina. She supports trying to create some guidelines for telephoning to occur. It is the reality of business in the 2000's. The Town Council should look to accommodate it. During Town Hall renovations, the Council Chamber renovations looked at technology that would be available moving forward. The Town Council would be remiss if it didn't plan for that technology to occur. Some guidelines need to be looked at. She said that if four members of the Town Council are present and five are on the phone, the meeting should be postponed. It is a realistic discussion to take place. The Town Council should plan for that. She said that it is important for her to be able to call in. The MDC does allow this for part of its procedures. She will look for some guidance from them concerning guidelines.

Councilor Forrest said that there is certainly a balancing act with this. It is important to have all of the Councilors participate to the greatest extent, while the Town Council needs to do its business in an orderly and proper fashion. His concerns are the slippery slope of having the Town Council meeting virtually, and how it impacts the quorum, the existing technology, and the telephone disconnecting before a vote. The Town is challenged to get a live feed of the meetings out and all microphones working. The idea of a telephone disconnecting is a probability. He said that is a high concern for him. There is also a low probability, but it exists, of fraud with telephone voting. The technology may be there in the future, but it does not exist yet.

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Councilor Walsh said that he empathizes with Councilor Hemmann with her travel. He said that the Town Council is elected by the citizens of Wethersfield. The meetings are posted for the first and third Mondays. The citizens have a right to come and see their representatives face to face. He understands that there may be difficult situations when a Council can't be present. If the Town Councilors are not at the meeting, they lose the direct contact that the Town Council is supposed to have as a volunteer representative.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that one of the facades of the language that was being discussed was to allow or require some discretion provided by either the Mayor or Town Manager. He said that he had concerns with that, too. It could be seen as personal or political in nature. That would invite a certain amount of vulnerability or criticism that erodes open discussion where everyone fends for himself.

Councilor Console said that this gives the subcommittee a lot to think about. He said that this is mushrooming into something bigger than it was. If there were less than five members present, there wouldn't be a meeting. It is on a case by case basis. If it is a meaningful vote and one of the nine Councilors can't be there, he or she could call in.

Chairperson Adil said that these comments will be brought back to the subcommittee. He said that anything that is done by the Town Council can be interpreted as being a policy that Boards and Commissions can use as well. Whatever the Town Council does as a policy, all Boards and Commissions should follow suit. All points on both sides were made very well. If Councilors or the Public have additional comments, please get them to the Town Manager prior to the next subcommittee meeting.

Councilor Roberts moved **“TO AUTHORIZE THE TOWN MANAGER TO APPLY FOR AND ACCEPT, IF AWARDED, THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE GRANT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$14,042 FOR FIFTY PERCENT OF THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR’S STIPEND AND CELL PHONE SERVICE AND FOR A RADIO ANTENNA”** seconded by Councilor Kotkin.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that a computer should also be included in this motion.

Councilor Roberts moved **“TO ADD THE WORDS ‘AND FOR A COMPUTER’ TO THE MOTION”** seconded by Councilor Kotkin.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that this is a grant from the State of Connecticut. The Town Council has already approved the increase to the annual stipend. The Town is also able to apply for other items. Dick Fippinger, Emergency Management Director, would like to have the State grant pay for ½ of his cell phone and a computer to hook into region three directly and an antenna for the Town Hall roof.

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Chairperson Adil said that the emergency center has become an integral part of the Council Chamber renovations. He said that he is happy to see the Town looking for as much State aid with it as possible.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

BIDS

Councilor Forrest moved **“TO AWARD THE BID FOR SALT FOR ROADWAYS TO MORTON SALT, EASTERN SALT CO. INC., AND INTERNATIONAL SALT CO.”** seconded by Councilor Kotkin.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said the Town has \$100,000 budgeted for salt. She said that normally the bid is awarded to the top three. The Town always goes with the low bidder but if there is a situation where the low bidder has run out or can't deliver, there are other bidders available.

Councilor Hemmann asked if this is the old salt or the new salt method.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that it is the new method.

Councilor Console asked what was spent on salt last year.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that she would check but she thinks it was all spent last year.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that the annual usage according to the form indicates 2500 tons. Based on the low bid price, the Town will be overbid. Is that safe to say?

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that she can only spend \$100,000. She will have to come back to Council to spend more.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Kotkin moved **“TO AWARD A CONTRACT FOR THE TOWN MANAGER SEARCH CONSULTANT TO PAR GROUP AND TO AUTHORIZE THE TRANSFER OF \$25,000 FROM THE CONTINGENCY ACCOUNT 1910-59250 TO THE TOWN COUNCIL PROFESSIONAL SERVICES ACCOUNT 1110-52220 FOR THE SEARCH PROCESS”** seconded by Councilor Console.

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Councilor Kotkin said that the Town solicited bids from management firms earlier in the summer to help the Town find the best candidate. The Town received proposals from six firms, four national firms and two regional firms. For cost reasons and based on the proposals, the Committee interviewed three of the six firms, two of them in person. The PAR Group was interviewed by Blackberry last week and in person tonight. The Committee looked at the qualifications, experience, and cost. The Committee voted in favor of the PAR Group.

Councilor Walsh thanked the PAR Group for coming. He said that the company will be good in helping the Town Council to find the Town Manager's replacement.

Chairperson Adil commended the Committee for doing a thorough search process. He fully supports the recommendation.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Forrest moved **"TO AWARD THE BID FOR LAND RECORDS IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$25,000 FROM ACS ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS INC. OF EAST SYRACUSE, NEW YORK"** seconded by Councilor Roberts.

Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk, said that the Town sent out six requests for proposals. ACS Enterprises Solutions Inc. was the best proposal. It will bring in an additional computer for title searchers and doesn't charge a paper fee like Cott.

Councilor Hemmann asked if the Town should have some guidelines in place to make sure services are bid out more often than every ten years.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Finance Director has come out with a draft purchasing policy for Department Heads' review and she will make sure this is in the policy.

Chairperson Adil said that he hopes this bid will get the Town more automation in the Town Clerk's office. He said that he fully supports this.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Roberts moved **"TO AWARD THE ACQUISITION OF A NEW ANIMAL CONTROL VEHICLE TO WARNICK FORD OF NEW JERSEY IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$22,841"** seconded by Councilor Forrest.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Town has put aside money over a two year period for the purchase of this animal control van. It will replace a 1998 vehicle. This is a State bid. There is not an alternative fuel vehicle available. The current vehicle is a natural gas vehicle and has been nothing but trouble.

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All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

MINUTES

Councilor Forrest moved **“TO APPROVE THE SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES OF AUGUST 25, 2008”** seconded by Councilor Cascio.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. Councilor Hemmann abstained. The motion passed 8-0-1.

Councilor Forrest moved **“TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 2, 2008”** seconded by Councilor Hemmann.

Councilor Hemmann said that on page 14713 at the bottom of the page where she discussed the wayfaring signs, please add “time, energy and money”.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. Councilor Cascio abstained. The motion passed 8-0-1.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 9:03 p.m., Deputy Mayor Montinieri moved **“TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS REAL ESTATE NEGOTIATIONS AND UNION NEGOTIATIONS”** seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0. Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, was present during the Executive Session. No motions were made and no voted were taken.

Councilor Roberts left the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

At 9:10 p.m., Councilor Walsh moved **“TO LEAVE EXECUTIVE SESSION”** seconded by Councilor Console. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:10 p.m., Councilor Kotkin moved **“TO ADJOURN THE MEETING”** seconded by Councilor Cascio. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk
*Approved by vote of Council
as corrected October 6, 2008*