

SPECIAL MEETING JULY 10, 2007

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on Tuesday, July 10, 2007 at 6:00 p.m. at the Nature Center, Prospect Street, Wethersfield CT.

Present from the Town Council: Councilors Cascio, Drake, Forrest, Kirsche, Kotkin, Montinieri, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Fortunato and Chairperson Adil.

Present from the Board of Education: Board Members DeAngelo, Malec, Montinieri, Penny Stanziale, Vice-Chairperson Hodges, and Chairperson Roberts.

Absent from the Board of Education: Board Members McKenna, Rodriguez, and Tristan Stanziale

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Michael Kohlhagen, Superintendent of Schools; Karen Clancy, Director of Business Services; Frederick Bushey, Interim Supervisor of Maintenance and Operations; Bill Holler, GIS Administrator; Nancy Stillwell, Director of Social and Youth Services; Sergeant David Gove, School Resource Officer; Matt Daskal, Intern; and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk

INTRODUCTION OF NEW SUPERINTENDENT, MICHAEL KOHLHAGEN

Gerri Roberts, Chairperson of the Board of Education, introduced Michael Kohlhagen, Superintendent of Schools. She said that he started on July 2nd.

Michael Kohlhagen, Superintendent of Schools, said that he is thrilled to be in Wethersfield. He is in the process of meeting with Principals, staff and parents. He said the skills he has and what he has to offer are aligned with the current state of the Wethersfield Public Schools. He said that he is planning on staying for awhile and will do many great things in the years to come. In the spring, he visited all of the schools and met with many of the staff and students. He outlined his priorities- enhanced communication; university, corporate and non-profit partnerships; short and long term planning in areas of budget, facilities, safety and instruction. He will be working very closely with the existing staff to make improvements wherever possible. His instructional priorities include - early literacy and reading in pre-K through 12th Grades; math, science and technology for all students; special education and English language learners; enrichment/gifted and talented. He is in support of continuous improvement and academic achievement. He said that the broad, system-wide focus will be - professional development for staff; targeted instruction for those groups of students in need; improved student achievement; accountability at all levels from his office to the teachers; and high expectations for every student and getting children to do things that are not expected of them.

Councilor Drake said that he knows that it is not a requirement to live in Town but he hopes that the Superintendent will consider living in Wethersfield. He said that he feels that a residency requirement should be part of the job.

Gerri Roberts, Chairperson of the Board of Education, said that as a Board, it has no expectations that he will move to Town. She said that many people who work for the Board of Education have an hour commute. She is not concerned where he lives as long as he is in Town when he is needed.

Councilor Drake said that at the Superintendent's level, to be totally involved in the Town would be a good thing.

Michael Kohlhagen, Superintendent of Schools, said that after spending a week in Wethersfield, he hopes to be here forever and get his children here as often as possible. He said that he will be in Town before, during, and after school.

Councilor Kotkin said that it seems like he has high level staff vacancies and wants to know what his priorities are for filling them.

Michael Kohlhagen, Superintendent of Schools, said that since July 2nd, central office staff has been working hard to

make sure that there will be a smooth opening of schools. He said he is ready for the first day of school and the new teacher induction. He is hoping to discuss a reorganization in the future, post positions in the next few weeks, and have a full staff for the fall. He said that it is his philosophy to provide a very high quality education at a reasonable cost to the taxpayers. He said that he will fill vacancies that are necessary and not just fill vacancies because the position existed before. He wants the system to be lean and mean. The current staff has done a magnificent job.

Councilor Cascio said he is thrilled to have the new Superintendent in Town. He hopes that his energy level becomes infectious. Teachers and staff need to see him in the schools.

Michael Kohlhausen, Superintendent of Schools, said that he will be visiting the schools in Town every day.

YOUTH AND VANDALISM/VIOLENCE REPORT - LAURA MORRIS, COMMUNITY HEALTH EDUCATOR, CENTRAL CT HEALTH DISTRICT

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that the Youth and Vandalism/Violence Task Force was created over an event that occurred at an Ice Hockey event in Newington. The Mayors of Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield created the Task Force. A needs assessment was completed to determine if there is an increase in youth vandalism and violence. The findings are being presented tonight. She said that she will discuss the data and her findings tonight. She said she tried to be very inclusive in the study. She presented the attached PowerPoint presentation (attachment 1).



[Task Force on Violence and Vandalism](#) [292 KB PDF* file]

She highlighted data showing:

- An increase in suspensions over three years.
- The School Resource Officer's data on violence and arrests.
- The Town's prevention and intervention programs.
- The State of Connecticut Juvenile Court cases from New Britain records.
- Emerging issues.
- Recommendations.

Michael Kohlhausen, Superintendent of Schools, said that his staff will take a look at the data and reconcile some minor discrepancies and also look to find ways in which to work together. In response to the large spikes in data, he said that in the past five years there have been some major changes in Federal and State reporting. Increases in violent incidence may have gone up in part to this reporting. He credits the good reporting by the Police Department with the cooperation between the Police Department and the Board of Education. The Board of Education has set up a breakfast for Newington and Wethersfield sporting team captains and he will be meeting with the Newington Superintendent tomorrow to discuss ways to create a healthy rivalry.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that the District received a small grant to which part of it is to continue the Youth Leadership Program and the other part is to do education with Middle School students on fighting and intimidation. It will fund about 15 students this year.

Councilor Cascio said that the elementary school level has the DARE program and the High School has an officer but there seems to be a void in the Middle School. He asked if there are any grants to help communities subsidize Middle

School endeavors.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that there are intervention programs at Silas Deane Middle School. The DARE program has been proven to be not effective. She said that she feels it is effective in that it builds communication with the youth and the Police Officers which is vitally important. She said that she is always looking for funding when it comes to youth or violence and prevention.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Keeney Foundation at the Community Center will put a lot of its money into funding for Middle School students.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked for more information about dropout rates because of the correlation between dropout rates and criminal behavior.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that the retention rate of 11 percent is not actually the dropout rate but the percentage of students who have not attained enough credits to move ahead with the class to the next grade. The dropout rate is 4.7 percent. The 11 percent retention rate is for the High School only. The elementary and middle school retention rate is less than 1 percent.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked how many of the youthful offenders are dropouts.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that she does not know but can ask the police department if they have that data.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked what reference was used to obtain the data about the high percentage of Special Education students. She also asked if the data contained a break down by disability.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that all of the data came from the Connecticut State Department of Education. She does not have a breakdown by disability but can ask if the data is available. The data is for Special Education students only and not 504 students.

Councilor Forrest asked if there was a spike in suspensions in the 2005-2006 school year or if it is an upward trend.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that there is a spike over the prior year. She said that she is not sure if that is because of the change in reporting that the Superintendent discussed or an actual spike.

Matt D'Angelo, Board of Education Member, said that he remembers having more expulsions last year than usual. He doesn't know if it was just a fluke.

Gerri Roberts, Chairperson of the Board of Education said that as a follow up to the Deputy Mayor's question regarding dropouts, the Town does not have the most reliable system for tracking dropouts. There is no way of knowing if a student moved or went on and received a GED or just dropped out.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that she only has the percentage of cumulative dropouts. She said that she will ask for more detailed information.

Gerri Roberts, Chairperson of the Board of Education, said that since the Town has to prepare the information and send it to the State she would prefer that the information be collected from the Board of Education. She asked if comparable data is available for the surrounding Towns.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that she has data from the other Towns but doesn't want to get into a comparison type issue because all of the Towns are different. There are some issues similar across all the Towns but the demographics are different.

Councilor Kotkin asked whose recommendations are shown in this report.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that the recommendations or suggestions are based on her experience working with youth in Hartford on violence prevention.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the four Mayors, for their meeting in September, want to discuss the next steps and keep this effort going.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that she will continue to look at the data yearly to make sure that there is no real upward trend. She said that she doesn't think that there is a real issue with violence in Wethersfield. There are things that the Town can do to make it better.

Councilor Drake asked if the increase in reporting of incidents can be a result of the police officer stationed at the High School.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that some of the issues that the School Resource Officer deals with are police matters and some are school matters.

Councilor Drake said that since the officer is in the building it would seem that there would be more reporting.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that the Town is in the third year of a School Resource Officer but now there should be a decline.

Councilor Drake said that it would seem to him that it would create more reporting.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that in general there are issues in society about boundaries and with being a "disposal society". Families, as a whole, need to be engaged. The Department of Corrections actually teaches youthful offenders manners.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that parents can be hard to engage. She said that she is looking into creating a coalition of youth in Town that will include parents.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if any of the other four Towns have a program in place that really seems to work.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that Rocky Hill does have a program that works, it connects many groups.

Nancy Stillwell, Director of Social and Youth Services, said that the Youth Advisory Board has been working with Rocky Hill.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that there are similarities between the Towns and the Towns can learn from one another.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that during the past few years, Nancy Stillwell has been working closely with the other Towns.

Gerri Roberts, Chairperson of the Board of Education, asked if there is something that the Board of Education should be doing as well.

Laura Morris, Community Health Educator for the Central CT Health District, said that the Town Council and Board of Education will be invited to the Youth Leadership Council presentation on September 27th.

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM - SANDY FRY, CAPITAL REGION COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that parents drop children off at school and buses are not full and it causes traffic issues. This problem has been studied for about two years. She said that this is a Statewide and Nationwide

problem, too. Lieutenant Powers has been very involved with these traffic issues. Sandy Fry, Capital Region Council of Governments, said that there are many reasons to try and have children walk to school. One important reason is to form a sense of community. She presented the attached PowerPoint presentation (attachment 2).

Safe Routes to School



[Safe Routes to School](#) [2.4 MB PDF* file]

Safe Routes to School is a program that encourages children to walk and bike to school. She spoke of the State and CRCOG initiatives. She said that the Federal Transportation funding comes in six year bills. The last bill, passed a couple of years ago, allowed \$1,000,000 a year in Connecticut for safe routes to schools. It is a kindergarten through eighth grade initiative. The Federal Government said that 70 to 80 percent of the money can be used on infrastructure and 10 to 30 percent needs to be spent on encouragement and education. The State has done a couple of rounds of requests for infrastructure projects. It is a lengthy process, but CRCOG is encouraging participation. UCONN is working with the Department Of Transportation to create program materials. CRCOG wants to work with Towns who want to create safe routes to school plans. CRCOG is hopeful that the Town will provide it with one school from Wethersfield to participate in the program. The real goal is to have one school in Town involved and then replicate the process at all of the schools because of the benefit it has to the Town.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato thanked Sandra Fry for the presentation and said that this program was discussed at the last Shared Services meeting. It is an initiative that would be the decision of the Board of Education, however, the Town Council is supportive of this if it is something the Board of Education wants to pursue. Some parents in Town have taken an interest in this and there may be some funds available, so this may be a good time for the Town. She said that at the same time the Town is looking at a program like this, it must also look at bus activity for the cost of busing and empty buses. The two topics need to go hand in hand.

Councilor Drake said that at the meetings he attended there seemed to be a lot of discussion on children not taking the bus and having the buses empty. He said all of the meetings seem to center around how to get children riding the buses not about walkers. He asked if a substantial number of students decided to ride bikes to school next year, would there be a place for the students to lock their bikes.

Mike Kohlhagen, Superintendent of Schools, asked if installing bike racks would be part of the infrastructure grant.

Sandra Fry, CRCOG, said that the Department Of Transportation is not good at giving out small grants. She said that she would look into it.

Councilor Cascio said that more importantly, one of the things the Town needs to do is work more closely with the parents since they seem to be the culprit for the problems that are occurring in the school parking lots with drop off and pick up. As a community, the Town may need to do a workshop on children's safety for the parents. There are school buses that are three quarters empty. The focus should be why students are not taking the bus.

Matt DeAngelo, Board of Education Member, said that when the Town redistricted a few years ago the schools started having staggered starting times. A complaint that he has heard is that parents need to be at work and can't wait for the buses so that a parent drives his or her children to school. Also he noticed that in the last few years the buses are packed the first few weeks of school and then seem to be empty after that. He said that he doesn't know why that occurs.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that the first month of school is the honeymoon period and after that parents are in a hurry to get to work and find it easier to drop the children off.

Jan Malec, Board of Education Member, said that before the Town starts to look at infrastructure issues, the Town needs to reach out the community and see what is going on. On her street, when she leaves for work on a school day, there are SUV's waiting for the bus at the bus stop. Parents will say that they don't want a first grader at the bus stop alone, so the parents should be walking to the bus stop. It doesn't teach the students to do anything on their own. If these parents won't walk to the corner, they won't walk to school.

Councilor Kotkin said that it seems that the program would start at only one school and not be district wide.

Sandra Fry, Capital Region Council of Governments, said that the thinking is that CRCOG would like to get one school from several Towns to start the program. Individuals from the Towns would then be sent to the workshops. CRCOG would need the Towns to let CRCOG know the school and individuals that would be involved in the program. The Town would want to start with the school that already has a good walking population.

Councilor Drake asked if Towns ever close roads down in the morning for an hour to allow for walking.

Sandra Fry, Capital Region Council of Governments, said that in Hartford there are some streets that are one way during the morning hours. A lot of the schools that were built in the 1950's had paths leading to them from neighborhoods. Parents don't want children to walk on the paths anymore out of the parents' sight.

Chairperson Adil said that based on the commentary at the meeting, it appears that the Town is very interested in this program. He suggested that the Deputy Mayor, Superintendent of Schools, and Board of Education Chairperson continue to work with CRCOG.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that as a parent of a third grader going into fourth grade, the issue is leaving her home alone in the morning, not her walking to school. As parents, we are given mixed messages about laws concerning children.

ENERGY SAVING PROGRAMS - TOWN AND BOARD OF EDUCATION

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that during the budget process it was asked that Shared Services take a look at energy efficiency programs for the Town and Board of Education and see if there is anything that either group is missing. A report from Mike Turner, Director of Public Works and Maurice McCarthy, Supervisor of Maintenance and Operations was in the packets. The big question on the Town side is locking in on the electricity fixing program. The three companies that the Town interviewed said that there is no guarantee that the Town will save any money. It could cost the Town more. She suggested that the Town Council discuss it more before it makes a decision. Most of the Town's energy savings have come through renovation projects, energy audits, and programs through Connecticut Light and Power.

Mike Kohlhagen, Superintendent of Schools, said that he met with Rodney May, Energy Management Consultant. He met with a small committee that meets regularly and is sending the Board of Education an updated report. He said that Karen Clancy, Director of Business Services, brought copies of the latest report dated July 2, 2007 and it talks about cost avoidance. It shows a considerable cost savings.

Karen Clancy, Director of Business Services, said that the first page is the cost avoidance for the month of May. The actual cost for the month was \$78,123.83 and without the cap it would have been \$94,435.14. The cost avoidance was \$16,311 for the month of May. The second page shows the cost avoidance from 2005 to May of 2007. There was a savings of \$398,954.88.

Councilor Drake asked how the consultant says that the Town has saved this. Basically he is telling the Town to turn the thermostat down and how is this cost avoidance.

Karen Clancy, Director of Business Services, said that Mark Foley does the software piece. He plugs in every bill to his program and that is where these reports come from.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked what the next step for the Shared Services Committee would be.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that she would like to see an update at the next Shared Services meeting and have the item on every other agenda for updates and new initiatives. Connecticut Light and Power continues to come out with new programs.

Councilor Kotkin said that the new energy bill that the Governor signed on June 4th has 125 sections to it. He said that he believes some of them have to benefit the Town. He said he would be interested in hearing from CRCOG or Senator Fonfara's office on potential benefits. He asked if the work had begun on the Wethersfield High School pool.

Frederick Bushey, Interim Supervisor of Maintenance and Operations, said that the work is suppose to start tomorrow. The crane will be there on Thursday for the steel for the new units. The project will run about three or four weeks.

Chairperson Adil asked about the Town's green or clean energy program.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the last quarter report hasn't come in yet but the Town is at around 140 sign ups, heading towards the second panel.

Chairperson Adil asked if the Board of Education has talked about where the panels would be going as he would like it to go to the High School.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Clean Energy Committee will be making its recommendation shortly. She thinks that is where the Committee is heading, too. Virginia Judson is the Chairperson of the Committee. The committee is meeting tomorrow night.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if it was possible and appropriate for the Board of Education to do a mailing through the schools about the program in order to have more residents involved in it.

Councilor Drake said that the Town has to pay for the invertors on these units. He asked if the Town should wait until several units are purchased. The Town should be putting money aside for the invertors. The invertors may end up costing more than the cells.

FINAL STATE BUDGET IMPACT

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the State has just released the final budget figures. Basically, the Town is a wash with the State budget figures. Some numbers have gone up but others went down. The additional dollars were used to offset the tax rate. Newington was down about \$300,000 that it didn't budget and Rocky Hill was down about \$180,000. She said that she feels Wethersfield was very lucky. The State is projecting that it will not be continuing this funding. If the State goes through with its second year projection, there will be a huge gap next year. The State has never passed its second year budget as projected.

Julie Montinieri, Board of Education Member, said that the same thing is happening at CABE. They are concerned about the second year.

Stacy Hodges, Vice Chairperson of the Board of Education, said that the Town Manager mentioned a low tax increase this year and asked how it compares to other Towns.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that it is about even. Newington had a revaluation year and put aside a lot of money for capital because they have not been doing it for years. They are going to take the \$300,000 gap from the capital. Rocky Hill was about even with Wethersfield in expenditures. It was very interesting how Towns budgeted this year.

Stacy Hodges, Vice Chairperson of the Board of Education, said that the Town should publicize this information and capitalize on it.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato thanked everyone for attending the meeting, especially those helping: Dolores Sassano, Town

Clerk; Bill Holler, GIS Administrator; and Matt Daskal, Summer Intern.

Chairperson Adil thanked everyone for attending and wished them a happy and healthy summer.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:00 p.m., Councilor Drake moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0. (Councilor Forrest left at 7:30 p.m.)

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

APPROVED BY VOTE OF COUNCIL AS AMENDED AUGUST 6, 2007

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