

SPECIAL MEETING OCTOBER 1, 2007

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on Monday, September 17, 2007 at 7:10 p.m. in the Pitkin Community Center, Banquet Room, 30 Greenfield St. Wethersfield CT.

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

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk, Senator John Fonfara, Senator Paul Doyle, and Representative Russell Morin.

Chairperson Adil said that the purpose of the meeting is to get an update from the Legislative delegation on what is happening at the State level and with State bonds. He said he also wanted to let the Legislators know about the Town's bond referendum question that will be on the November ballot.

Senator Fonfara said that the Governor has threatened to veto the bond package that was passed a couple of weeks ago. There has been some public acrimony on this. There is a lot more substance than just partisanship as portrayed in the newspaper. This Town is dependent on State assistance through the bond act. The State borrows through its investments to pay for projects, like roads, bridges, education, and other important projects for municipalities. This isn't a slush fund or money that is inappropriately earmarked. This money is for important projects that go through a very deliberative process in the Legislature. Connecticut does not have a county government like a number of other states do. County funding is a great benefit to municipalities. Connecticut doesn't have that. The money has to come from somewhere. The State has always been a partner with the individual communities and this Governor has chosen to be more hard lined than most. It may sound good in the press but an important project to the community is denied. Many projects have been denied in the last few years and it has affected the community greatly.

Senator Doyle arrived at the meeting.

Representative Morin said that Senator Fonfara's dissertation was very accurate as to what is happening with the bonding package. It sums up how many feel in the House of Representatives at this time as well. Every one of us could look through the projects and ask why something is in there but to everybody's community these projects are important. The communities come to their Representatives and ask for assistance with these projects and the Legislators try to help them. As was said these are projects that are important to help Towns and Cities to remain vital. If the State Legislators can assist in that it will help the local taxpayers in property tax relief because the Town won't have to think about funding the projects. He said that he has been very supportive of the bond package. At last week's Special Session nothing was decided but hopefully there will be more meeting in the future. On the House of Representative's side, it seems that the sessions are never finished. He said that his priorities won't change. He will continue to fight to help give property tax relief through increased State funding. The delegation is doing its best to help the community and will continue to do so. He said that he relies on the Town Council's input, too and will continue to work with the Town Council and Town Manager.

Senator Doyle said that he spoke to Representative Guerrera earlier today. He will not be able to attend this meeting because he has another commitment in Rocky Hill. He said that he knows Senator Fonfara and Representative Morin discussed the importance of the projects in the bond funding. The other four Towns of his district also have projects in there. The bond bill doesn't just have money for projects for individual towns but also clean water funds, school construction dollars for local communities, and other items across the board that impact communities across the State. He said he is a bit frustrated on how the bill is being categorized by the press and the Governor that it is overspending. The bottom line is nothing gets spent by the State of Connecticut unless authorized by the Governor and the Governor has 100 percent control of the bond package. The bond bill is simply a list of priorities by the Legislative branch of government, what they think the government should do. It is not spending anything. It is not a budget. Not a nickel is allocated until it is on the bond commission agenda, which is fully controlled by the Governor. He said that he is not sure why there is such a hullabaloo about this bill. The Governor has full control of how the bond money is spent. This

process is frustrating. This is the major issue. He is hoping it will be resolved in the next few weeks so that he can get ready for next year's session.

Chairperson Adil said that the Town is working on a lot of things. There is a great School Facilities Plan, energy conservation projects, and economic development planning. Right now the Town has a request before the voters for the approval of a \$10,000,000 referendum to fund the Redevelopment Agency's efforts to revitalize the Silas Deane Highway, Berlin Turnpike, and Wilbur Cross Parkway. He said that he wanted to make sure the Town's Legislators were aware of what the Town was doing because as the Legislators talk to voters, questions may come up. A lot of people have questions as to how the bond will work. The redevelopment issue began in the 1970's when the Town commissioned a report on the Silas Deane Highway. The study didn't go anywhere but the Economic Development and Improvement Commission was formed. There is now a tax abatement plan and a blight ordinance in place. Through the EDIC and State assistance, there is STEAP money available for the resurfacing of building facades on the Silas Deane Highway. These are all small steps. The Town is trying to get to the next step by funding the Redevelopment Agency with funds from private funds and possibly State funds. He said that the Town Manager will send the Legislators a complete history of the bond referendum.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato thanked the delegation for attending the meeting. She said that since she will not be with them in January she asked for a few minutes to share with them two items that she feels are important. Transportation, specifically school bus transportation and that the Town has to provide it but many buses are not always filled to capacity. She said that this needs to be looked at, at the State level as to how transportation is changing and how families are changing. The reality is that more children are being transported to school by other means, other than buses. There are cost savings and energy efficiencies that can be realized if there is a way for parents to relieve that transportation if they are not going to use it because it does have a major impact on Town budgets. This is an area that needs further investigation with this trend. She said that she would encourage the State Legislators to look at that. It is not to not provide transportation but to recognize that it is not being fully utilized and the savings could be used in other ways, like a program to encourage walking to school. The other issue is for supportive housing. There is a shortage of housing in the State. An idea that merits an investigation may be to look at how motels on the Berlin Turnpike may be converted for supportive housing. There is an infrastructure there and the Town's façade program could be a model for the entire Berlin Turnpike, not just Wethersfield. That could be a State initiative on how to create more affordable housing and keep young people in the State. Cape Cod did this when tourists wanted to own a piece of the Cape. A motel was turned into efficiencies and people bought them. She said that in the twelve years that she has served the Town, she has brought several issues to the Town's legislators and thanks them.

Councilor Walsh thanked the Legislators for all they do for this community and for supporting increased funding for education this year. He said that they have been very diligent in looking out for the Town and hopes they will continue to watch out for unfunded and under funded State mandates.

Councilor Forrest said that the Town has a bond referendum question coming up. That shows the priority that this Council has. The Council is working hard with the money that the State Legislators bring to the Town to offset Town funds. He said that he hopes the Legislators will continue to look for avenues to assist the Town as the Town Council moves forward in any funds towards the total effort. He thanked the delegation.

Joseph Soja, 30 Hedgetow, member of the Redevelopment Agency, thanked the State Legislators. He said that they are important to the State and everyone in this community. The Town has a bond referendum up for vote this November. He asked Senator Fonfara if, in his experience, the State has supported other Redevelopment Agencies in other Towns.

Senator Fonfara said that he cannot identify a specific allocation for a redevelopment agency but he can say that millions of dollars have been provided for projects related to redevelopment that may not have been defined as for a redevelopment agency. It is not unusual to have funding for redevelopment projects. If he is thinking about the buttress money from the State with this project, he said he thinks it makes perfect sense. He said that he has given his commitment to make it a priority to deliver dollars from bonding to Wethersfield to buttress whatever is endorsed in the referendum.

Joseph Soja said that what you are saying is that the Agency needs to be a little creative.

Senator Fonfara said that he thinks the Redevelopment Agency is being creative in putting this forward. This is a very positive step. He said he supports it one hundred percent and with his efforts along with his colleagues, he will bring additional dollars from the State to make the dollars the Town puts forward go further.

Councilor Kotkin said that he wanted to thank the State Senators and Representatives for the work they did to help keep down the increase in the mill rate this year. Their work was greatly appreciated. He said that they passed a very comprehensive energy bill this year, 120 sections. He said some of the sections will indirectly affect the Town but some of them can directly affect the Town. Town Staff would like to know where the Town can take advantage of them and where it can directly benefit from the bill. The Budget Committee will be looking at an abatement of taxes on hybrid vehicles that get more than 40 miles per gallon. He asked if there was a list of sections of the bill that the Town Manager and Superintendent of Schools could focus on in terms of where the Town can benefit from this bill. That would be really helpful.

Senator Fonfara said that he is the Chairperson of the Energy Committee and Representative Morin is also on the Committee. He said that the bill, along with the law passed a few years ago, buttressed together is a major initiative in the State. This Town along with others in the State can really benefit from taking a look at the bill and understanding it fully. He said he will commit his staff and non-partisan staff to help Wethersfield through the Town Manager and Town Council. He said the aspect of the bill that he fought so hard on was the partners program. The essence of it is to truly provide energy efficiency and managing energy at the most costly times of the day and year. The Town can really reduce energy costs by focusing on that part of the bill. Wethersfield can benefit from that especially in its schools whether it is through solar or wind or other alternative means of energy generation. He is very hopeful that the State's largest utility will be part of that initiative.

Chairperson Adil thanked Senator Fonfara and said that the Town Manager will be in touch with him regarding this initiative.

At 7:40 p.m., Councilor Forrest moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Kirsche.

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

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

APPROVE BY VOTE OF COUNCIL OCTOBER 15, 2007