

SPECIAL MEETING

February 1, 2006

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on February 1, 2006 at 6:30 p.m. starting at Company 1 on Main Street, moving to Company 2 on Griswold Road and ending at Company 3, Kelleher Court.

Present: Councilors Adil, Drake, Forrest, Kirsche, Walsh, and Chairperson Morin attended.

Also present: Rae Ann Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Fire Chief Chuck Flynn, Assistant Chief Richard Bailey, Deputy Chiefs: Brian Schroll, Gordon Harris, and Mark Guerrero; Captains: Art Abronzino, James Hughes, and Anthony Dignoti; Fire Marshal Gary Santoro.

Fire Chief Flynn welcomed the Town Council at Company 1. He said that Wethersfield has an all volunteer fire department which is the oldest continually run volunteer organization in New England. He stated that the major issues facing the Fire Department are the following: 1. Need for a full time Administrative Assistant. 2. Issues and incentives. 3. Equipment replacement, 4. Space requirements and limitations, and 5. Apparatus replacement/purchases. Chief Flynn said that although there is a part-time Administrative Assistant to the Chief, he and the other officers spend an enormous amount of time doing paper work. He said they do the work after they return from a call and debrief the incident but there is more paperwork required than ever before, and they would like to have a full time Administrative Assistant to process some of it on a daily basis.

Company One

Chief Chuck Flynn greeted the Council along with Captain Abronzino of Company 1, Main St. in the Day Room explaining that this area is where they gather to debrief immediately after responding to a fire call. The Station is small and requires the rescue boat to be garaged off site. The homes and buildings in Wethersfield, like everywhere else, are larger and taller requiring different size equipment to reach the rooftops and higher floors. Truck cabs are now required to be enclosed for the safety of the firemen. They wear and carry more equipment partly because of the hazardous materials they may encounter. Interstate 91, the Cove, the Connecticut River and the tank farm all situated in town require special equipment. Wethersfield was the first fire department to purchase, train and use the jaws-of-life equipment. Due to larger, heavier equipment the bays at the fire stations are unable to house as much equipment. We have some equipment garaged off site. Fire Marshal Gary Santoro explained some of the specialized situations that are unique to Wethersfield. Councilor Drake asked if they could add a bay to this station. Chief Flynn said it might not be the area to do it. Councilor Adil asked if there were land available at Company 2 for additional bays. The Chief spoke of a public safety complex. In the very least they need a staff room outside of fire stations where everyone works together in the same command post. They can then use that office space for the firefighters. They need to have the administrators all working at the same level. Their goal is to have every firefighter to be certified. They are part of a five town task force. If they are National Incident Management System compliant it opens up federal grants. Currently the Wethersfield Volunteer Fire Department has a class 3 rating. Because this is a high rating, businesses in our Town benefit on their Insurance policies. The late Chief "Jiggs" Hughes and Fire Marshal Santoro introduced the Sprinkler Alarm Ordinance now mandated by OSHA, State and Federal laws. Training is directed by Deputy Chief Mark Guerrero and maintenance is done by Deputy Chief Brian Schroll. The trucks carry so much equipment that inspections now take up to 3 hours to check and these checkups are often. We would like to get accreditation (there are only four volunteer fire departments nationwide) which will assist to justify budgeting and to access federal monies. Councilor Forrest asked the cost for the self-evaluation module. Chief Flynn responded \$3500 for each of 3 years to get into position to go for accreditation.

Company Two

Fire Chief Flynn introduced Captain Jim Hughes. He explained that the Councilors were in the office beneath the area where heavy apparatus (50 tons) is stored and where they have a small area for a part time secretary. The conference area is very small and open without an area for private conversations. With HIPPA/personnel rules on privacy they

need to have a space to use. All of the stations need to have more room for debriefing, meetings and training, especially courses offered online. They are running a full time business on a part time basis. The Chief and assistants are more involved with the Town on a daily basis. He feels fortunate to have dedicated people but as they spend more and more time at the station, they have less free time for their families. They would like to share a full time Administrative Assistant with the Fire Marshal. Councilor Drake asked what the first thing they would like done. Chief Flynn said it would be for space. Space for the administration for the Fire Chief, deputies and the Fire Marshal. Fire Marshal Santoro said that the administration needs its own environment to work together. Build a new building, training classroom as we are outgrowing our spaces. Councilor Kirsche asked if the accreditation will get them funding. They will be speaking to Representative Paul Doyle. Councilor Drake asked if they had someone to champion their cause. Chief Flynn said the fire department works together to provide the best service to the townspeople. Captain Hughes said the time demands are growing, yet doing mandatory training, computerized classes and inspections and care of equipment does not count as time spent towards their pension funds. Technology forces them to gear up but fire facilities are not up to date.

Company Three

Captain Anthony Dignoti showed his large ladder truck and how they had to make a cut to accommodate it. He has equipment sitting on the floor which should be on the trucks but it does not fit as the truck had to be ordered smaller to fit into the station, not only adding to the cost but eliminating space needed for additional equipment to be used as needed. Chief Flynn explained that regulations now call for the gear worn to be washed every 6 months. Soot covered clothing has been listed as a health hazard. For years volunteers have kept it in the trunk or back seat of their cars for quick access when needed, unknowingly exposing themselves and their families. They now have a washer and dryer. The town crew will install it. He also asked Chairperson Morin and those Councilors present if they could sell an air compressor. It was to be a spare [they have another] but there is a lack of space and inadequate electrical power available in the fire stations. Councilors agree if they did not need or use it they should sell it and use the money for other things the department needs. Chief Flynn stated that none of our fire stations are large enough to be self-sustaining in the event of a major disaster. They do not have room for their families to be at the station while they handle a disaster. They are all volunteers. They now are required to have more training, spend more time on inspections of equipment, facilities in town and on paperwork in shrinking space and are looking at a staff that is thinning. Recruitment is ongoing just as the demands of the volunteer firefighter are increasing. All Wethersfield firefighters are certified to the Federal mandate of Presidential directive #5 to be NIMS IS (National Incident Management System IS 700) compliant. We are in the process of certifying all interior firefighters to Firefighter 1 standards, we have approximately fifteen certified instructors within the department ranks, and many members have certification over and above that of career departments.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:10 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Kirsche. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 6-0-0.

Dolores Sassano,
Town Clerk

Approved by vote of Council 3/6/06