

JANUARY 18, 2005 SPECIAL MEETING

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on January 18, 2005 at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall.

Present: Councilors Adil, Cascio, Czernicki, Forrest, Fortunato, Hemmann, Montinieri, Deputy Mayor Karangekis and Chairperson Morin.

Also present: Town Manager Bonnie Therrien, Senator Ciotto, Senator Fonfara, Representative Guerrero, Representative Doyle, Superintendent of Schools Patrick Proctor, Board of Education Chairperson Gerri Roberts, Board of Education Vice-Chairperson Stacey Hodges, Board of Education member Raul Rodriguez, and Town Clerk Dolores G. Sassano.

All stood for the pledge of allegiance to the flag which was led by Senator Fonfara.

Legislative Agenda

Chairperson Morin announced that this meeting is held each year to provide a "wish list" of sorts to the State delegation. He said that the State delegation does their best to address the requests. Chairperson Morin thanked the State delegation for assisting the Town of Wethersfield in the past year in acquiring STEAP Grants, other funding, and legislation put forth regarding the volunteer firefighters. Chairperson Morin said that the Mid State Collaborative group, consisting of Wethersfield, Newington, Rocky Hill and Berlin Managers and Mayors meet on a monthly basis and are in contact with the State Legislatures.

Senator Ciotto thanked the Council for the opportunity to join them tonight. He said that the State Legislature is dealing with many difficulties this upcoming year. He said that the Governor has told them that there will be a budget deficit of between \$1.2 and \$1.6 billion. Senator Ciotto said that it is the duty of the Legislators representing Wethersfield to do the best possible for all the Towns they represent. He said that he cannot promise anything. Taxes may need to be increased, and he is not looking to raise any tax right now. He said that all needs and issues will be looked at, including transportation, education, and ECS. In addition, the Legislators are elected to help the mentally ill, mentally retarded, and senior citizens. All will be taken into consideration and the Legislators will hopefully come up with the best type of recommendation and budget possible.

Senator Fonfara congratulated Representative Guerrero on his appointment as Co-Chair of the Transportation Committee. He said that two Legislators from Wethersfield chairing the committee puts Wethersfield in a great spot with respect to transportation issues. Also, Representative Doyle has been reappointed to the Banks Committee. Senator Ciotto interjected that Senator Fonfara is Chair of the Energy Committee. Senator Fonfara said that, after a number of years of deficit situations, the Legislature is hopeful of turning the corner. He said that Wethersfield's State delegation is not any less focused on the issues and how they impact the Town. Senator Fonfara said that he is a firm believer that Wethersfield needs the help of the State with respect to property tax revenue in order to maintain roads and also the quality of education offered in Town. He said that his colleagues from Wethersfield are in a good place to help the Town in the legislative process. He said that Wethersfield takes a backseat to no Town in Connecticut when it comes to having a delegation that has the ability to work with the leadership at the LOB, and has a good relationship with the Governor's Office.

Representative Guerrero said that Wethersfield is very well represented at the Capitol. He said that he has been fortunate to serve with the Mayor and Town Manager in the meetings of the Mid State Collaborative group for the past several years. Representative Guerrero said that the top three priorities of the Towns involved are the conveyance tax, fire volunteerism, and binding arbitration. Town Clerk Sassano has informed him that \$250,000 has been raised through the conveyance tax. Representative Guerrero said that this is something that will be brought back to State leaders as an item to be kept intact. He said that binding arbitration is a whole different ballgame, and Senator Ciotto and Representative Doyle have put forth a bill regarding fire volunteerism. Representative Guerrero commended

Senator Fonfara for being in the forefront when it comes to Property Tax Reform. He said that a Millionaire's Tax has been discussed; however there is some question as to where the money will go. Representative Guerrero said that if this should occur, some feel that the money should be designated strictly to ECS.

Representative Doyle pointed out that all four delegates introduced the Volunteer Firefighter Ordinance and legislators from many Towns are joining in to establish a broader based bill. He said that the State's financial situation is frustrating; however the economy will hopefully take a turn for the better. If not, the Legislature has to assume the worst and proceed accordingly. Representative Doyle said that the four delegates will work together on legislation regarding the Webb School project. The proposed bill deadline was missed; however the delegates can work together with the Finance Committee to get this passed.

Councilor Adil thanked the delegation for coming and said that, thanks in part to them, the Town was fortunate last year to receive \$250,000 for Cottone Field and \$100,000 for a skateboard park. He asked Senator Fonfara what Wethersfield's chances are regarding help with the Cove issue. Senator Fonfara said that Chairperson Morin could speak to this better than he can; however he thinks that the Town is closer today, than ever before, to realizing the dream or hope that in the near future there will be a solution resulting in the Cove being removed from the waste stream permanently. He said that the MDC and their consultants have presented information within the last week stating that this can be done with a cost nowhere near that originally feared. Councilor Adil asked Representative Doyle what he feels the possibility is of the Town gaining funds for Open Space. Representative Doyle suggested that a list of priorities be submitted; however, in the past, surplus funds have been used to fund this and he doesn't think this will happen this year.

Chairperson Morin said that this is the purpose of tonight's meeting; to bring these suggestions and priorities to the State delegation and make them aware of them.

Councilor Czernicki thanked the delegation for attending tonight's meeting and asked that they support the Governor's efforts in her new ethics agenda. Councilor Czernicki said that she'd like to see that Connecticut has one of the strongest ethics rules and that all elected officials in every instance abide by them. She asked Senator Fonfara to obtain additional copies of the MDC's long-term plan, since only one was provided to Town Manager Bonnie Therrien. Councilor Czernicki said that she has concerns about the recent sewage backups in Town, as well as in Hartford. She asked if, possibly, solutions for this could run parallel with those regarding the Cove cleanup. Councilor Czernicki asked the delegation to take into consideration no unfunded mandates when reviewing programs for the less fortunate.

Representative Doyle said that he feels that the Ethics laws are already pretty tough with the State and that last year there was a proposal, which he voted against, that impacted all municipalities. He said that he would like feedback on the proposal that the State will mandate every municipality to create their own Ethics Commission. Representative Doyle said that this is a really comprehensive plan, basically imposing the Ethics Commission the State has on every municipality. He said that this will be an unfunded mandate which he voted against last year.

Senator Fonfara stated that there is a perception that if certain laws are passed, some of the corrupt actions will be prevented. He said that a lot of the things that happened weren't necessarily because there is not a law in place. He said that in the past eight years, approximately \$2.3 billion has been passed in support of the University of Connecticut and its branches and \$750 million for Adriaen's Landing. He said that in both of those cases, legislation was also passed to circumvent several environmental and bidding provisions which may cost the State more in the end. Senator Fonfara said that often proposals come before the Legislature requesting that they be fast-tracked and there are consequences for this. He said that the State of Connecticut already has some of the strictest ethics rules in the country, yet this does not mean that there will not be unethical occurrences.

Councilor Fortunato thanked Representative Doyle for his advocacy on behalf of the Town and the Webb School and the rest of the delegation who supported the initiative to acquire additional funds. She asked Representative Doyle to provide an approximate timeframe for the funding. Representative Doyle said that this will unfortunately not occur early on in the session. Senator Fonfara agreed that this will probably occur later in the session and that the Council will be kept up-to-date on the progress. Councilor Fortunato said that the Board of Education and the Building Committee would appreciate an answer as soon as it is available since the project is nearing completion.

Gerri Roberts, Chairperson of the Board of Education, thanked the delegation for all they do on behalf of the Town of Wethersfield. She said that many of the needs of the Town have to do with education, unfunded mandates, the funding of the ECS Grants, and keeping the State's commitment on excess costs for Special Education.

Representative Guerrero said that he was recently at a breakfast for members of CABA and Board of Education members where he was made aware that one of the main concerns is the unfunded mandates.

Councilor Montinieri addressed Special Education funding, which requires five times the regular per pupil expenditure be spent before any State reimbursement is received. She suggested that this requirement be reduced to three or four times the regular per pupil expenditure in order to provide relief in the Education Budget. She also suggested that the amount over the five times per pupil expenditure amount be funded at 100%, rather than 70%. She said that the efforts of the delegation are greatly appreciated and stated that she appreciates how accessible the delegation make themselves.

Stacey Hodges, Vice-Chairperson of the Board of Education, thanked the delegates for their hard work and dedication to the Town of Wethersfield. She also thanked the Council as well.

Chairperson Morin said that the requests are fairly consistent with past years and that he appreciates all in attendance taking the time to meet tonight.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:10 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk