

ADJOURNED BUDGET MEETING APRIL 29, 2004

An Adjourned Meeting of the Town Council (adjourned from Tuesday, April 27, 2004) was held on Thursday, April 29, 2004 at 5:30 p.m. in the Conference Room of the Town Hall with Chairperson Russell A. Morin presiding.

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

Also present: Bonnie Therrien Town Manager, Dolores Sassano Town Clerk, and Lisa Hancock, Finance Director.

CENTRAL CONNECTICUT HEALTH DEPARTMENT - 610 (C-95 to C-97)

Health Director Paul Hutcheon said that the Central Connecticut Health District is comprised of three Towns, Wethersfield, Berlin, and Rocky Hill, who together offer local public health services. Each member Town pays the same per capita rate to be a member. The proposed rate for 2004-2005 is \$3.90 per capita. This could decrease to \$3.69 per capita depending on the outcome of the State budget. The District recently launched a website at www.ccthd.org which gives an overview and information on services offered. Mr. Hutcheon said that a grant has been awarded which will aid in the fight of bio-terrorism. The funds were used to hire an Emergency Response Coordinator for the Health District who started on April 1. Mr. Hutcheon said that the proposed budget is very close to prior year's figures.

Councilor Czernicki said that there is concern about the Health District being housed at the Wethersfield Town Hall rather than at a more neutral site. One of the concerns is that Mr. Hutcheon's availability is limited due to other tasks here at the Town Hall. Councilor Czernicki said that the time has come for consideration of the Health District being located elsewhere. She said that the enforcement of the Blight Ordinance has put added responsibility of the sanitarian of Wethersfield. She suggested that when a new sanitarian is hired, part of the job description would include enforcement of the Blight Ordinance. Mr. Hutcheon agreed that enforcement of this ordinance is demanding work and what suffers is routine inspection work.

Councilor Hemmann asked if an Emergency Response Coordinator has been assigned to each of the three Towns in the Health District. Mr. Hutcheon said that this has been coordinated with all of the three Towns using one coordinator. Councilor Hemmann asked what the length of the grant is and what happens after the length of the grant. Mr. Hutcheon said that it is August 1, 2003 to August 30, 2004 and it is anticipated that the grant will continue. At this point, the Coordinator's job ends August 30, 2004 as the position is completely grant funded.

Councilor Adil asked if it is anticipated that the Blight Ordinance will generate as much work in the years to come. Mr. Hutcheon said that the Ordinance has been on the books for many years. The Council amended the Ordinance to include and provide a definition for the term "blight". The amended Ordinance also gives a process by which to go after blighted properties.

Councilor Cascio understands that the Emergency Response Coordinator position is only for one year in order to put together a plan for each community. Once the plan is established, a State Statute indicates that the Chief Medical Examiner of Connecticut is the chief operator in the case of an emergency. Mr. Hutcheon said that the Coordinator for the Health District is working on the Health District's plan and not the Town of Wethersfield's. Mr. Fippinger is in charge of the plan for the Town.

Deputy Mayor Karangekis asked if any of the services provided by the Health District require fees to be paid and if the fees are significant. Mr. Hutcheon said that permit and licensing fees represent 9% of the District's income.

Councilor Forrest asked if the 9% mark could be raised. Mr. Hutcheon said that it could be raised and that the Board sets the fees for licenses and permits. He said that there was a fee increase last year of approximately 25%. Councilor Forrest asked if the Council can change this budget at all. Mr. Hutcheon said that the Council cannot alter the budget and that once a municipality decides to become a member of the Health District, it chooses to abide by the Statutes that

exist. Mr. Hutcheon said that there are no Health Districts in the State that are less expensive than the Central Connecticut Health District. Mr. Hutcheon said that the Health District pays rent to use Wethersfield Town Hall space.

Councilor Fortunato asked about the insurance coverage and if the District's policies are separate from the Town's. Mr. Hutcheon said that as an independent organization, the Health District is responsible for obtaining its own insurance coverage.

LIBRARY - 710 (C-101 to C-106)

Greg Curtin, Chairperson of the Library Board of Directors, spoke of the Library's 20% growth over the past year and with this growth comes an increase in demand of staff and services. The Library does not want to lose the momentum it has gained. The Library needs to retain a very strong and dynamic materials budget.

Gene Grayson, Vice Chairperson of the Library Board of Directors, gave a comparison of funding, service, usage, and effectiveness of the Libraries in Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill, and Wethersfield. Mr. Grayson found a high correlation between the amount of money spent on materials and the effectiveness of a Library. He feels that new materials are the lifeblood of a good Library.

Lucille Plouffe, a member of the Library Board of Directors, spoke of the Library and its vital relationship with the Wethersfield school system. She requested that the Council add the needed \$40,000 back into budget #2.

Library Director Laurel Goodgion said that the Library hours are directly related to staffing. She reported that to keep the Library at its current schedule, the budget required would be \$729,963 with no salary increases. She said that the Library staff is not unionized and any salary increases have to be built into the salary account. She gave an overview of the two budgets requested by the Library. Request #1 includes no salary increases, closing Friday mornings and Sundays, and remaining closed on Wednesday evenings and Friday afternoons for a budget amount of \$719,719. Request #2 includes an increase of thirty hours of staffing, the maintenance of current hours, and no salary increases for a budget amount of \$770,444. These amounts do not include any additional funds for staffing due to the Library's expansion.

Councilor Cascio said that the Board of Education reported a per pupil cost of \$9,000 and the Library is reporting a per capita cost of \$41.54. He asked what percentage of the Town's budget funds the Library.

Ms. Goodgion said that 1.7% of the 2004-2005 proposed Town budget is for the Library. Councilor Cascio asked what percentage of fines collected goes into the Town's General Fund. Ms. Goodgion said that 100% go into the General Fund. She said that last year's fines totaled \$13,000. Councilor Cascio stated that the Library is a core service to the Town of Wethersfield and should be compared with Public Safety and Education.

Councilor Cascio left the meeting for the night at this time (7:00 p.m.)

Councilor Czernicki asked the Library Director to provide the Town Manager with the projected staffing and materials costs associated with the Library renovation. Councilor Czernicki stated that there should be a small fee charged for Library programs. Ms. Goodgion said that the Board is reluctant to charge a fee as the Library is viewed as an equalizer in the community. She said that crafts are not a major portion of the programming and the major cost of programming is staffing. Ms. Goodgion said that it is important to look at what other area libraries are doing so that Wethersfield does not lose patrons of programs. Councilor Czernicki asked if the Library works cooperatively with the Senior Net so that computers can be used there instead of the Library. Ms. Goodgion said that the Library is a feeder program to the Senior Net program. Councilor Czernicki asked if there is a way to encourage people to use the computers at the Senior Center. She said that she doesn't have a problem with residents going to the Libraries of neighboring Towns, and does not see this as a bad reflection on Wethersfield. Councilor Czernicki said that people will just have to understand that the staffing problems are caused by budget restrictions and that they will be required to be more patient when visiting the Library. Councilor Czernicki said that she's rather see the Library open on Friday afternoon and evening and closed during the morning and that the closing times could be coordinated with surrounding Towns.

Councilor Montinieri said that she can appreciate the suggestion of regional cooperation amongst Libraries.

SOCIAL AND YOUTH SERVICES - 625 (C-98 to C-100)

Director of Social and Youth Services Dr. Nancy Stilwell said that her Department was short-staffed for part of the year due to the retirement of a staff member. She said a part-time social worker has been hired and is working twenty-two hours per week. She said that there is currently an incredible demand on the food bank and for utility payments because many people are getting shut-off notices now that winter is over. Dr. Stilwell said that the demand for elderly services is very high due to the new Medicare card system which is very confusing. The department is working on a volunteer driver and peer counselor/information services with Newington. Also, through the CREC workforce development project, eight youths will be working with the Department for six weeks this summer. Dr. Stilwell said that the staff member on maternity leave will be resigning and she plans to fill the position at the end of the summer for a salary cost savings of approximately \$15,000. Dr. Stilwell has submitted a budget that will run at the bare minimum and with significant cut backs in all areas. The Social and Youth Services budget's main issues include the Dial-A-Ride program, the Senior Center, and the ROPE program. Other issues include no money for Department brochures, and a reduction in funds for both office machinery and office supplies.

Councilor Czernicki raised again the possibility of a more confidential process of applying for financial assistance for programs throughout Town. Dr. Stilwell said that the confidentiality is of the utmost importance. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she will review this with the appropriate Department heads.

Councilor Fortunato said that she sees ROPE as an essential part of the school program. She suggested to Dr. Stilwell that a donation be suggested for participation in the program. Councilor Fortunato suggested that an external evaluation of Social & Youth services take place to get an objective opinion of the programs offered and possible enhancements of them.

Chairperson Morin said that parents often pay for "extra" programs during the school year and it would be interesting to get a feel for the response to a suggested donation.

Councilor Czernicki asked about the revenue for counseling services. Dr. Stilwell said that she would like to revisit the fees charged for counseling services to possibly increase them at the high end. Councilor Czernicki said that the evaluation could entail a look at the possible privatization of some of the services offered. Dr. Stilwell said that privatization could discourage some children from seeking help. The current system of kids going to a ROPE guide doesn't feel like going to a "shrink".

Councilor Hemmann asked Dr. Stilwell for the percentage of families involved in counseling who do not have insurance. Dr. Stilwell said that approximately 70% is under or uninsured.

Councilor Forrest questioned how the Social & Youth Services Office can function without the funds for toner and paper for the fax and copier machines. Dr. Stilwell said that they cannot and need the \$600 put back into their budget. Councilor Forrest asked Dr. Stilwell what the most essential service is that her office provides to the Town. Dr. Stilwell said that the most essential services provided are the elderly case management services, ROPE, and youth and family counseling. She said that the Dial-A-Ride program is also very important.

Deputy Mayor Karangekis asked what is required in order to utilize the Special Needs funds. Dr. Stilwell said that the funds are used for basic human needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and medical. These funds are all donated. Dr. Stilwell said that she may need to dip into the fund for letter head and envelopes to send out fund-raising letters and if this occurs she will not be able to say that none of this fund goes to overhead costs.

Councilor Czernicki said that if Dr. Stilwell does dip into the Special Needs fund for letter head and envelopes, she will need to issue a press release to inform the public that she is using this fund for items well outside the realm of the fund. Dr. Stilwell said that the supplies would be for fund-raising letters only.

RECREATION AND PARKS - 810 (C-107 to C-112), COMMUNITY CENTER - 820 (C-113 to C-114), NATURE CENTER - 821 (C-115 to C-116), BUILDING & FACILITY MAINTENANCE - 825 (C-117 to C-

118)

Recreation & Parks Director Kathy Bagley said that she has four different budgets: Recreation & Parks, Community Center, Maintenance for Rec. & Parks facilities, and Nature Center. Ms. Bagley compared the cuts and restorations of the two Manager's Proposed Budgets for each of the four of her budgets.

Councilor Czernicki asked which pool would be kept open for any extended days. Ms. Bagley said that it would be the Mill Woods pool as it is less costly than Willard.

Councilor Adil asked if someone monitors the Cove boat launch area during off hours to insure that those who launch have a pass. Ms. Bagley said that in the past, a Park & Rec. staff member has been at the launch from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. seven days per week. This summer would be the first that someone would not be there for all of those hours if the budget is cut.

Councilor Fortunato said that the Town pays the Board of Education for the use of the indoor pool and she asked if there will be a deficit on the Board of Education's budget if the Town is not paying to use the pool as much. Ms. Bagley said that a flat fee subsidy of \$21,000 is paid for the usage of all school facilities such as the pool, youth basketball, little league, etc. and this amount would not change.

Councilor Forrest asked if the fees could be raised to bring the programs back on line. Ms. Bagley said that many of the Parks & Rec. program fees have been raised recently and a further rate hike could deter people from participating in programs.

Councilor Czernicki asked if it true that only one other Town in Connecticut in addition to Wethersfield provides Therapeutic Recreation under the Parks & Recreation. Ms. Bagley said that they provide programs, but they do not have a full-time person assigned to the programs. Councilor Czernicki asked how many certified TR Coordinators are on the Wethersfield staff. Ms. Bagley said that there are two staff members, one of which is not in a TR position any longer.

Councilor Adil asked why advertising is not allowed in the Little League fields. Ms. Bagley said that this has come to the Recreation & Parks Board a number of times and the issue is what sponsors will be allowed to participate at different baseball and soccer fields. She said that this is something that can be pursued further.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she was approached by Tower Ventures to install a lighted flag pole/phone tower to replace the present flag pole at Mill Woods. She said that the phone carriers are installed inside the 120' flagpole and the company will pay a monthly management fee of \$1,000 plus percentages of the four carriers on the pole. It could be recommended that a portion of the revenue be designated to the Mill Woods Master Plan.

Councilor Czernicki asked why this type of pole could not have been installed at Kelleher Court. Deputy Mayor Karangekis said that this type of pole cannot accommodate police radios. This type of pole is strictly for cellular phones.

Martha Mayer, Griswold Road, said that she would like to see the Mill Woods Master Plan funds to match sports group's donations reinstated into the Manager's Proposed Budget #2.

Ms. Bagley noted that the budget does not include any raises for part-time staff for the second year in a row.

Ms. Bagley said that the Community Center budget reflects the elimination of two programs in the Activity Room and Teen Center. The Teen Center attracts an average of 25 to 30 kids on a Friday night and the Afternoon program gets an average of 30-40 kids who pay a fee for the program.

Councilor Fortunato asked what other programs are available if the Teen Center is eliminated. Ms. Bagley said that she has not done enough research on this topic to answer this. Councilor Fortunato said that it would be useful to obtain feedback from the teens.

Ms. Bagley said that the Nature Center move is on schedule and the cuts for the new building for four months are made because it is anticipated that the new location will be ready in March, 2005 but it will not actually open until July 1.

Chairperson Morin asked if the Nature Center has taken initiatives to increase their funding. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Friends of the Nature Center Committee is aware that they need to increase funding for their new facility and programs.

Councilor Fortunato suggested that communication be made with the Lutz Children's Museum in Manchester for funding ideas for the new Nature Center.

Ms. Bagley said that the Maintenance budget includes the maintenance costs for the parks, the pools, and other Parks & Recreation facilities.

Councilor Czernicki asked if Farms Village is one of the playgrounds anticipated to be open this summer. Ms. Bagley said that it is. Councilor Czernicki is concerned that the budget reflects no funds for a water fountain for this playground.

Councilor Adil mentioned the in-kind donations relating to the grant for the bike trail.

Ms. Bagley said that her Department has been creative with the funding for the Skate Park's budget of \$125,000. The equipment for the park will cost approximately \$50,000. A cost of \$25,000 would be required for the base of the Park and Public Works Director Mike Turner said that this is something that his crew could do. The materials for fencing are approximately \$10,000 and the Public Works staff could install the fence. This total of \$85,000 from the Town added to the kid's current fund-raising total of \$12,000 is \$97,000. Ms. Bagley said that a State grant is being sought for \$20,000, but this is tied up in getting on the bond agenda.

Councilor Fortunato said that it is beneficial to ask for a specific amount of money when fund-raising and suggested that larger corporations in Wethersfield be approached for donations from their corporate headquarters.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:00 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN TO THE BUDGET WORKSHOP SESSION ON MAY 4, 2004 AT 5:30 P.M. IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM OF THE TOWN HALL**" seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores Sassano
Town Clerk