

DECEMBER 20, 2004 SPECIAL MEETING

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on December 20, 2004 at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall.

Present: Councilors Adil, Cascio (6:50), Czernicki, Forrest, Fortunato (6:35), Hemmann, Montinieri, and Deputy Mayor Karangekis.

Absent: Chairperson Morin.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Strategic Plan Update

Ralph Karanian, member of the Strategic Planning Committee, said that the committee has updated the Strategic Plan and sought input from the stakeholders of each part of the Plan. He said that a Public Hearing has been held, feedback has been collected and the Committee is now ready to develop a new Strategic Plan starting in January. The result of this will be presented to the Council in February. Mr. Karanian said that he is looking to receive feedback from the Council regarding the objectives, goals, and strategic initiatives assigned to the Council.

Councilor Adil asked what type of feedback was received from groups working on economic development in Town. Mr. Karanian said that he cannot speak specifically to this, but that all feedback will be reviewed by the Committee. He said that many individual groups are actually developing their own strategic plan which will feed into the overall Strategic Plan. Councilor Adil asked how the categories for the status of projects were developed. Mr. Karanian said that the Town Manager was asked to update all of the various components of the plan. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she met with staff, department heads and any pertinent boards and commissions to provide information on the status of projects.

Councilor Montinieri asked if the information provided from the public hearings is reflected in the report that the Councilors have. Mr. Karanian said that it is not and that the information provided by the public has been sparse. He said that he does not expect much public feedback until something is actually put out to the public to which they can respond.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Committee is looking for any and all input from the Council.

Deputy Mayor Karangekis said that he would prefer to study the report further and then provide comments to the Committee. He said that he is particularly interested in the Public Safety items which are long overdue.

Councilor Fortunato asked Mr. Karanian to outline the process being used by the Committee. Mr. Karanian explained that the Committee is a fairly diverse group that is reasonably representative of the population in Town. The Committee addressed two main topics; the status of the current Strategic Plan objectives, goals, and strategies, and the provision of a public hearing to obtain public feedback. The Committee is currently in data collection mode and will not get to the meat of their task until January, 2005. Councilor Fortunato said that she is concerned that the stakeholders are not certain of what is being asked of them. She suggested that guidelines, expectations, and a time line be provided to them in writing. Mr. Karanian said that an advance request for information relative to the Strategic Plan was provided to the leader of each group. He said that the Council can request that the time for the delivery of the Strategic Plan be extended to allow for greater feedback from stakeholders. Councilor Fortunato said that she'd like to see an improvement to the communication between the Strategic Plan Committee and the various stakeholders. She asked when, for example, the workings of the Shared Services Committee and the Library Board would become part of the Strategic Plan. Mr. Karanian said that the time frame within which the Strategic Plan Committee is working is really short for the type of initiative sought. He said the Committee is trying to work within this time frame without watering down the result. Councilor Fortunato asked the Town Manager if the time line is set in the Town Code or if

there is flexibility. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that there is some flexibility; however she has asked that information pertaining to the budget be provided in time for budget preparation.

Mr. Karanian asked the Town Manager if there are funds to support additional mailings should the time line be moved out further. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that there has been no funds budgeted for this, but that the Council can approve this if need be.

Councilor Forrest commented that there does not appear to be much financial strategic planning provided on the report. He said that it is critical to understand the Town's debt load and the size of the General Fund. Mr. Karanian verified that Councilor Forrest is suggesting that as an initiative, the Strategic Plan include an assessment of the appropriate level or make up of the General Fund and what, specifically, has to be done financially to obtain a desired result. Councilor Forrest said that this is what he is suggesting. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien clarified that Councilor Forrest is actually talking about the Town's Fund Balance rather than the General Fund.

Councilor Czernicki said that both she and Councilor Cascio attended one of the public hearings and she was dismayed to see that there was very little public input. She said that the some of the goals set by Town Department Heads indicate a substantial increase in Town staff. Councilor Czernicki said that she questions how the Town will be able to afford this. She asked Mr. Karanian if there has been any reluctance to serve and be involved in the Strategic Plan process. Mr. Karanian said that he is unaware of any reluctance and that the Committee is made up of members who represent the populus of the Town.

Councilor Cascio stated that the Strategic Plan Committee has approximately ten meeting dates before the May 15 budget deadline to develop a final Plan. He asked how well the meetings are attended. Mr. Karanian said that there has been virtually 100% attendance. Councilor Cascio stated that the Council should consider agenda items pertaining to common Strategic Plan initiatives to present at the upcoming joint Town Council/Board of Education meeting.

Deputy Mayor Karangekis thanked Mr. Karanian for attending the meeting.

Hennen Report - Library Board of Directors

Greg Curtin, Chairman of the Library Board of Directors, provided an overview of the Hennen Report which gathers statistics from various libraries and objectively compares scores of peer libraries. He explained that the Report rates the Wethersfield Library with a score of 628 which puts it in the 69th percentile. In comparison, Newington, Glastonbury, West Hartford, and Rocky Hill are all in the 90th plus percentile. This indicates that Wethersfield is behind in various categories. Mr. Curtin then introduced Gene Grayson, Vice-Chairman of the Library Board of Directors. Mr. Grayson explained that the budget per capita and the materials budget per capita are what drive the numbers for the Hennen Report scoring. Mr. Curtin introduced Library Director Laurel Goodgion. Ms. Goodgion said that the effort to improve the Hennen Report scores is a partnership between the Town and the Library. She provided a summary sheet of what the Library is doing to improve its score. These items include a better after-school atmosphere, greater awareness of library services, added services, getting more mileage out of budget dollars, improved care of the collection, and education initiatives.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:15 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Fortunato. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk