

[NOTE: These minutes are made available to the public prior to Town Council acceptance.]

SPECIAL MEETING

May 5, 2003

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on May 5, 2003 at 6:15 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall.

Present: Councilors Cascio, Fitzpatrick, Flynn, Gardow, Hemmann, Morin, Deputy Mayor O'Connor and Chairperson Czernicki.

Absent: Councilor Sassano.

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

Chairperson Czernicki announced the purpose of the meeting is to gather information and develop a position on the proposed State boat launch at Putnam Bridge.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that Representative Doyle would be attending the meeting and is due to arrive at approximately 6:30 p.m. She had not heard from the other State Legislators.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Paul Courchaine, 481 Main Street, President of the Wethersfield Preservation Trust, commented that the Department of Transportation (DOT) has said that the reason they are putting in the boat launch is because the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has told them to. The DEP has said that they have finished their study and people are clamoring for this boat launch. The study was initiated 8-10 years ago. That is a long time to complete a study. Mr. Courchaine has seen no proof of anyone clamoring for the boat launch. His concern is how Wethersfield would benefit from the launch. He does not see much benefit. The Town will now have to provide services to the launch. The Town will lose any revenue derived from the launch. We can't keep accepting what the State does to us. The DEP reported on the Channel 30 news tonight the reasons why there will be no toilets at the State parks and why there will be increased fees at the State parks. Their answer to these questions is that they just don't have the budget to do it. The \$3+million going into this boat launch could help to cover these costs. Mr. Courchaine has not gotten a positive response from many residents regarding this boat launch.

Wesley Sargent, 39 Randy Lane, said that he is one of those clamoring for the boat launch. He has a canoe that he puts in the Cove and he would like access to the river. The river is an asset to the Town and he believes that people ought to have access to it. The boat launch won't use up any flood storage capacity. Traffic will get right off I-91 and back on; therefore causing no extra traffic in town.

Jim Woodworth, 5 River Road, current President of the Great Meadows Conservation Trust, said that the Trust opposed the boat launch proposal in its earlier incarnations. They question how strong the need is for an additional boat launch on a stretch of the river that now has five municipal launches between Hartford and Rocky Hill? What is the State plan for managing the launch? There is no such plan. Also, would there be added erosion from the boat traffic? There will be an issue with the drains in the parking lot and how often the DOT would clean the trapped oil and sand. Right now on this site we have a genuine meadow. If the parking lot must be, the Trust challenges the DEP to turn it into a demonstration of how to build an environmentally friendly lot which does not pollute or add to flooding.

Captain Charles Hart, 448 Main Street, has been boating in and around the Cove for fifty years. At this time of year, the launch at the Cove cannot be used because of the typography of the land. The river is high and the launch ramp is unusable. The launch ramp built under the Baldwin Bridge in Saybrook is a state-of-the-art ramp. It can be used any

time of the year. He would be in favor of a launch ramp under the Putnam Bridge.

Leigh Standish, 278 Hartford Avenue, said that the construction of a boat launch under the Putnam Bridge is a serious threat to the flood plain at the most logical, catastrophic, alternate course for the river to pursue in the event of a major flood. Erosion will increase in this area as well. The launch will provide the first inroad into the development of one of the most precious flood plains, open space meadows areas and natural treasures in the region. Why would this be permitted when the revenue-producing Cove launching area is currently underused? We have a responsibility to history and the future when we oversee a natural treasure and resource of this significance. There is no turning back once we open the gate to the meadows. There is no way to restore a pristine, seventeenth century condition to the area once development has been permitted. Mr. Standish urged the Council to act with care and reject this proposal in any form.

Rocco Orsini, 95 Broad Street, spoke on behalf of the Wethersfield Taxpayers Association, Inc. He stated that if one is an environmentalist, this proposal is looked at as a degradation to quality of life. If one is a boater, this proposal would be an improvement to quality of life. It really depends which side you're on. The Wethersfield Taxpayers Association, Inc. doesn't understand how in today's environment with huge deficits, how the State comes up with the money to build this launch? Calls will be made to State representatives to obtain an answer. Mr. Orsini wants to know what the recurring costs of the boat launch are. There will be costs for maintenance and security. Will the town receive any remuneration from the State for these costs? There is a concern for flooding in the area. If this launch is built, will the launch in the Cove be shut down? We don't need two boat launches in Wethersfield. The Wethersfield Taxpayers Association, Inc. is not in favor of piling on incremental costs to the residents of Wethersfield. If this occurs, the Wethersfield Taxpayers Association, Inc. is not in favor of the proposed launch.

Maureen Hayes, 29 Hartford Avenue, is a meadow walker who is concerned for the meadows themselves. During the summer, boats traveling up and down the river are not monitored and sometimes they travel at excessive speeds. She is also concerned about the access to the meadows. She urges everyone to witness for themselves the dumping grounds that the meadow has become. The Game Club cleans up every year and the launch will be an added burden to them.

Anne Kuckro, 471 Main Street, Chairman of the Tourism Commission, said that the Commission is trying to market Wethersfield as a tranquil, restful place to come and live and have our businesses. The first thing seen for those traveling north on I-91 is a 148-car parking lot. The plan will pave paradise and put in a parking lot. This is not creating a good image for our town.

John Miller, 375 Pine Lane, said that no one seems to disagree on the facts, but we surely disagree on the conclusion. The boat launch is a no-brainer. We seem to want to insure that only a few people have the keys to get to the river and the meadows. This launch will not hurt the meadows. The commuter lot is a tremendous plus. We need a commuter lot from this direction. Mr. Miller fails to see what is wrong with providing parking for people to come and go into the meadows. The boat launch is all graded. Most of it will be under water. It will not have an impact on flooding. In terms of access, this launch would be much better than the access to the launch at the Cove. Mr. Miller wonders if there has been any comment from the Fire Department and their opinion of the boat launch. Chairperson Czernicki said there has been no feedback from the Fire Department. In an emergency on the river, the area behind Putnam Park is used to launch boats. The Cove is not a particularly good spot for an emergency launch. Mr. Miller suggests getting a report from Wethersfield fire officials. Mr. Miller feels we should just say "thank you" to the State and get the launch built. We're out of our minds to reject it.

Senator Fonfara joined the meeting at this time.

John Lepper, 932 Ridge Road, has been involved with this issue for the past thirteen years. He said that there was a study done in 1992 on the velocity of the water that flows into the drainage ditch (put in by DOT when the Putnam Bridge was built) between the Great Meadows Trust parcel and the boat launch. There was evidence of erosion and scouring by the water. The Physical Services Department said that the cost to repair the roads in the meadows that year was over \$10,000. One road does wash out as a result of the drainage ditch. The town proposed to the DEP to put a berm across the end to keep the water out. The height of the river bank has been lowered which allows water to flow in at an earlier stage. Farmers in that area are two of the town's biggest business enterprises and they will incur

agricultural costs. This launch could be detrimental to some businesses in town. Parking is limited in Old Wethersfield and boaters who visit would have to park somewhere with their boats and trailers. Lastly, the cross-town traffic will be an issue.

Eugene Bartomioli, a Newington resident, spoke of the beauty of Old Wethersfield. He used to use the Cove boat launch and stopped using it because of the pollution and sewage. The site of the proposed launch is .4 miles from I-91. To get to the proposed site, you simply get off I-91 and take a left onto a big, wide road. The distance to the Cove is 1.2 miles. To get to the Cove, you go past 75 homes, 6 businesses and 2 churches. Mr. Bartomoli has observed snow being dumped into the Cove by dump trucks. There is salt and dirt and pollution in this dumping. As a non-resident, it costs \$20 to launch his boat into the Cove. He supports the new boat launch.

COUNCIL

Chairperson Czernicki explained to Senator Fonfara that the Town Clerk has taken what has been submitted in writing and he will have an opportunity to review it. She said that one reason the legislative delegation was invited is to get an idea of where you stand on the unfunded mandates and binding arbitration. Town costs are fixed and we're looking to talk about binding arbitration and its effects. She asked Senator Fonfara to give an overview of where he stands on these issues.

Senator Fonfara said that he has consistently opposed any changes to the binding arbitration process and will continue to take that position. There are issues in the process for how a decision is made by an arbitrator that he would be willing to discuss this and be helpful in any way he can. With respect to unfunded mandates, Senator Fonfara would be happy to discuss any particular mandates impacting Wethersfield.

Councilor Fitzpatrick said that over the years, there have been several mandates which he is unprepared to discuss at this time. One of these deals with the issue of prevailing wage. Because of a State mandate, we are forced to bids from companies that are going to pay a union wage rather than possibly the market wage. There are a lot of mandates the town faces and there are a lot of costs over the next few years that are the result of legislation passed since the 1980's. Times have changed, and the State delegation needs to go back and look at past mandates imposed on the towns and are now either under-funding or not funding at all.

Senator Fonfara said that in respect to prevailing wage, it is a fair wage and one that enables workers to support a family and the town ends up paying for this. He feels very strongly that this issue needs to be addressed in the broader sense which is property tax reform. The heart of the question is how can we keep paying for these things without driving people out of Wethersfield? Wethersfield competes with Glastonbury, Newington, Rocky Hill and other surrounding towns for residents who wish to live in a community like Wethersfield and we don't want to lose that competition. We need to stay competitive. He encourages the Council to be vocal on this issue. The legislature on a whole is not on board with the reform issue.

Representative Doyle arrived at this time and Chairperson Czernicki informed him that the Town Clerk has taken what has been submitted in writing and he will have an opportunity to review it. She thanked both Senator Fonfara and Representative Doyle for making the effort to attend.

Town Clerk Dolores Sassano noted that correspondence in favor of the boat launch was received from the following:

Jay C. Amoruso	30 Main Street
Martin DeFilippo	97 Waters View Drive

Town Clerk Dolores Sassano noted that correspondence in opposition of the boat launch was received from the following:

Kelly Weinberg	480 Brimfield Road
Jeraldine R. Prisbie	480 Brimfield Road
Laura Fanelli	282 Silas Deane Highway

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:00 p.m., Councilor Flynn moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Cascio. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk