

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

SPECIAL MEETING AUGUST 25, 2003

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on August 25, 2003 at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall.

Present: Councilors Cascio, Flynn, Gardow, Hemmann, and Chairperson Czernicki.

Absent: Councilors Fitzpatrick, Morin, Sassano, and Deputy Mayor O'Connor.

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

Chairperson Czernicki recognized the many members of Boards and Commissions and Town Staff in the audience and thanked all in attendance for coming to this special meeting for the presentation of the Strategic Plan by Town Manager Bonnie Therrien. On behalf of the Council, she thanked the members of the Boards and Commissions for volunteering their time and expertise. Their efforts are greatly appreciated.

All stood for the pledge of allegiance to the flag which was led by Councilor Flynn.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien introduced Wethersfield's new Finance Director Rob Buden and new Town Planner & Director of Economic Development, Peter Gillespie.

Presentation of the Strategic Plan

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that as part of the goal-setting plan, Council suggested there be a Strategic Plan update. This plan is important as it finds out what has transpired for the Town, what is the future for the Town, and what some of the issues are that need to be tackled as a departmental team.

There are three documents relating to the Strategic Plan. There is the original Strategic Plan from 1995, the Update of the Plan from March 2001, and an Economic Development Strategy from December 2001. The document to be concentrated on this evening is the Strategic Plan Update of March 26, 2001.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien began the presentation with the Economic Development section of the Strategic Plan. Some of the key points are creating the plans of development, the Town becoming business friendly, attracting and retaining business and increasing tourism dollars. The list of underutilized parcels needs to be updated. The Economic Development Committee has set up a subcommittee to work on this. The Connecticut Economic Research Center (CERC) will also be utilized. Through CERC, sites will be able to be marketed not only State wide, but nationally and internationally as well. The Tourism Commission's new brochure will be marketed as quickly as possible. Wethersfield is networking with other communities in the area. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien has already been working with Barbara Gilbert, Town Manager in Rocky Hill to develop a plan for the Silas Deane Highway. The zoning regulations are being updated and there is still talk of possibly doing the State public boat launch. There was a referendum vote on the recreational purposes of land on Elm Street and this item may not be pursued in the future. Part of the plan of Conservation and Development includes the consideration of the creative and sensitive use of land. The continued development of the GIS will be extremely helpful to Boards and Commissions. The new Zoning regulations encourage multi-parcel development.

Councilor Gardow commented that the referendum for the use of land on Elm Street for recreational purposes regarded the commercialization of the land.

Mr. George Oickle said that the Town voted not to develop it for recreational purposes. The land could still be up for development.

Betty Rosania said that different times call for different actions and results and she believes that the land on Elm Street is still up for discussion for recreational purposes, but Wethersfield does not need any more passive recreational areas.

Anne Kuckro said that we have to look carefully at the boat launch parcel of land.

Paul Courchaine said that a lot of people felt that there have been economic periods that addressed development of the Silas Deane Highway and Berlin Turnpike before addressing development in the wetlands.

Betty Rosania commented on the economic development of the Connecticut River area possibly tying into Hartford's development. She asked Town Manager Bonnie Therrien what her timeline is for expected results on these goals. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she has noticed that there is no timeline for the Strategic Plan. Once goals are determined, a timeline will need to be developed.

Anne Kuckro said that development along the river will be difficult unless the Town can obtain the Department of Motor Vehicles property.

Mr. Oickle asked if the development of underutilized properties refers to larger parcels of land. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this is correct.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien continued that if Wethersfield should ever receive the Department of Motor Vehicles property, it would be considered as a location for a hotel/conference center. It is not anticipated that the DMV building will be vacated any time soon. This facility has also been proposed as a new Town Hall. Chairperson Czernicki and Town Manager Bonnie Therrien will be meeting with Newington, Rocky Hill and Berlin on a mid-Connecticut regional approach to land use. The first meeting is scheduled for mid-September. Consolidation of Town services is ongoing. The sale of the existing Town Hall would require a Plan B for a location of a new Town Hall.

Bev Pierz said that the DMV building is perhaps the most desirable property in Town. She also believes that the best way to further develop the Silas Deane Highway is to create a Town Center district. She urges Town Manager Bonnie Therrien and Council to look at the Council's adopted plan and the TPZ's approved plan for the Silas Deane when considering development.

Betty Rosania supports Bev Pierz in beseeching the Town Council not to forego any part of the potential Town Center plan.

Paul Courchaine asked if there will be a review of the Plan of Conservation and stated that he agrees with the comments made by both Bev Pierz and Betty Rosania.

Mr. Oickle said that unless the traffic can be reduced to 20-30 m.p.h., the Town should not be getting too excited about a Town Center on the Silas Deane Highway. The traffic is the real issue.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien continued that an office of Development has been created. A written guide as to process has been developed and needs to be updated. There has been a big change in review teams to respond to applicants as soon as possible. Follow up is ongoing, but a software program needs to be developed to track this better. The EDIC and GIS will be working to develop and catalog infrastructure resources. Maps will be updated to show potential for development. The present Town Hall redesign does not look at the creation of a reception area in the Building/Engineering Department, but this can possibly be looked at in house. Brochures need to be updated and mailed out to target business sectors. The Town needs to identify what businesses it wants to attract. The Town Council is working on tax incentives for developers. The Town Manager, Chairperson Czernicki and members of EDIC have been out to visit various businesses and will continue to do so. Wethersfield is currently involved with Metro-Hartford and the CEDS program and is hoping to be involved with CERC. A business survey is currently out in the mail and returns are starting to come in. Focus groups will be developed to enhance Town/business relationships.

Paul Courchaine said that there should be a formal objective stating that the Town must have a valid marketing plan. There must be an implementation plan, including tasks and dates, that is adhered to. He said that a very small

percentage of business surveys are actually received back each year. He'd like to see a greater involvement of a member of the Chamber of Commerce in the regular meetings of the Mayor, Town Manager, and Economic Development Coordinator with Town businesses.

Betty Rosania agrees with Mr. Courchaine that the business surveys indicate not much of a change in ratings and comments from year to year. We have to have better follow up to the survey.

Councilor Gardow commented that Town Staff needs to be more focused on completing the goals of the Strategic Plan. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she is trying to regroup to make sure that everyone is going down the same path.

Councilor Flynn said that this plan has been revised substantially and that some of the comments heard tonight were considered in the revised plan.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Town continues to work with Connecticut Transit for other transportation alternatives. Shuttle services around Town are being discussed on an ongoing basis. Much of the signage program has been completed and a new sign will accompany the revitalization of the north end of the Silas Deane Highway. The Design Review Subcommittee is currently being discussed by the Planning & Zoning Commission. The criteria defining the types of businesses that are deemed desirable needs to be updated to 2003 terms. Implementation of a marketing and public relations plan needs to be updated as well. The Town Hall Staff is going to form a subcommittee to beautify the Town Hall hallways.

Betty Rosania said that the Beautification Committee has done a wonderful job outside the Town Hall. She said that communication is the key to accomplishing goals.

Mr. Oickle said that he is disappointed with the conditions of the Town Hall. The building must be updated.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that a concern with design review is that it can slow down economic development.

Anne Kuckro said that we need to make sure that we hire top-notch designers in order to come up with a quality result.

Betty Rosania said that in order to increase the grand list and have more businesses in Town; we need to spend more money which will raise taxes.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien continued with packaging Wethersfield as a unique crossroad in order to increase tourist dollars. We have tried to create one-stop shopping to establish a partnership between the business community, the tourism community, and Town government. Intratown transportation has not been established; however, the Tourism Commission is investigating some type of trolley service. In order to clean up unsightly areas, a Blight Ordinance has been established. To expand the number and nature of events, the Tourism Commission distributes a quarterly calendar. The Scarecrow Contest in Old Wethersfield encourages pedestrian activity. The Concert Series encourages use of the Cove. Wethersfield has not recently hired a consultant to develop a marketing plan for the tourism industry. The marketing plan for the tourism industry is being worked on by the Tourism Commission.

Chairperson Czernicki said that visitors to the Keeney Museum, which is open on Tuesdays, would like to also visit the Webb Deane Stevens Museum as well, but the latter is not open on Tuesdays. She'd like to see the Museums both open on the same day of the week.

Anne Kuckro said that this is being worked on by the Historical Society.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien continued with the Environmental Concerns section of the Strategic Plan. These include achieving a balance between all types of properties, promoting historic preservation, funding the public tree program, improving the appearance of the Town, preserving open space and wetlands, protecting the Town's natural resources, and eliminating pollution of the Cove. A Town Planner has been hired which is the first objective of achieving a balance between all types of properties. Planning and Zoning is involving other Boards and Commissions

in the review of the Master Plan. Planning and Zoning's work on workshops to solicit public input is ongoing. Budget concerns are prohibiting the funding of ongoing professional economic development services to market the Town. Tax incentives currently before the Council will be reviewed by the new Town Planner. The Town currently has established land trusts to preserve open space. It will be important for the Town to acquire as many of the open space and agricultural lands as possible. There is a lot more that can be done to publicize and encourage donations to the Town's agricultural land preservation fund. There are also many tax incentives of which the public is unaware. This information needs to get out to the public. The Historic District Society has updated its rules and regulations and is trying to make its guidelines more user-friendly to live in the historic district of Town. It is difficult to identify areas in Town which are amenable to expansion into the historic district, as the public is not very open to this. A new part-time Grants Administrator has been hired and she will be looking to obtain funds for economic development as well as other areas.

Anne Kuckro said that the Historic District Society received a Grant from the State to make available on the Wethersfield website information about the historic district. This information will be on the website at the end of this year.

Mr. Courchaine, Anne Kuckro and Councilor Gardow agreed that it would be good to discuss and spot survey homeowners in potential historic district areas to know if there is interest or not in creating a district. Councilor Gardow also noted that the Master Plan of Conservation and Development has already been completed.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien moved on to the Public Tree Program. An inventory has been performed and may need to be updated. Most important would be the development of a software package of the inventory. There is still a need for local interested groups and the Board of Education to develop an education program. Mr. Lepper, Wethersfield's Tree Warden, will be working on increasing the publicity for the existing program. The Town of Wethersfield has been designated as Tree City USA for seven years.

Mr. Lepper said that the tree inventory has been done by volunteers and there are some inconsistencies. The inventory really needs to be professionally conducted. There is currently no management plan in place as there is not sufficient staff to do so.

Mr. Courchaine said that the Village Improvement Society would not mind taking over the public education relative to trees.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien continued with the maintenance and improvement of the appearance of various types of properties. The Blight Ordinance covers most of these objectives. The current maintenance standards to address specific areas of Town have not yet been done. An inventory needs to be developed. The Wethersfield Beautification Committee has done a wonderful job throughout Town. The budget has been very tight and funding for pavement maintenance needs to be looked at. Sidewalk maintenance also depends on budget considerations. Between the Village Improvement Association and EDIC there are a number of award programs ongoing for businesses and homeowners in the historic district area. The neighborhood cleanup was held in the Spring and is anticipated for next Spring as well.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien moved on to the preservation of wetlands, open space, bodies of water, and animal habitats. There is a review of existing regulations performed annually. Mr. Turner, Town Engineer, verified that the local regulations are modeled after the State regulations. Changes are made when appropriate. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien has had requests to have candidates for Boards and Commissions fill out an application so that candidates are appointed to the appropriate Board or Commission depending on their knowledge and strengths. Commissioners are always encouraged to participate in training programs. The Town has three environmental contractors on call for reference. The Town has funds received from the State as drainage money and the Flood and Erosion Control Board in conjunction with Mr. Turner and the Council is working to complete drainage problems in Town. The study recommendations have been reviewed and prioritized recently. Parks & Recreation has done a lot to connect wetlands, open space, and ponds with Greenbelts. They have established bike trails and are hoping to expand them to other areas.

Councilor Gardow asked Town Manager Bonnie Therrien to explain the process of the State funding for drainage. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that there must be a local match for the State funding. With the number of

outstanding drainage problems in Town, the subcommittee of the Drainage Committee met to prioritize and passed the list along to Flood and Erosion Control for further prioritization. The utilization of as much of the State bonding money as possible was a goal to get the drainage projects completed. The consultant has gone out of business and Mr. Turner is in the process of doing an RFP to acquire another consultant to finish the job.

Betty Rosania is pleased to see the objective regarding commissioners and their expertise. She'd like to see the appointments to Boards and Commissions taken out of the political arena. Town Clerk Sassano said that her office has established a list of Boards and Commissions which includes the requirements by State Statute or Town Charter. She also has application forms which ask for pertinent information of any applicants. There are residents who call expressing interest in sitting on a Board or Commission and she forwards their names to either Councilor Gardow or Mr. Bradley who contact them. All of the Boards and Commissions are listed on the Wethersfield website. Ms. Rosania is concerned that many responsibilities are falling on Town Staff which has been reduced. The Town needs to attract and retain good employees by means of rewards.

Mr. Oickle said that there needs to be more diversity on the Boards and Commissions; as well as members with good knowledge of the matters at hand.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien moved on to the preservation and protection of the Town's natural resources. The flood plains are being incorporated into the computer system through the GIS. There has not, as yet, been an education program developed to increase public awareness of the importance of Wethersfield's natural resources. Funding will be necessary to accomplish this. The mid-Connecticut Group may be currently addressing the planning and development of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. Once the national designation was given to the Connecticut River, the group pushing for the Refuge fizzled. Wethersfield continues to provide support to the Wethersfield Cove Clean-up Committee. The Health District investigates any complaints and enforces the regulations. There have not been many requests for the establishment of a dump station at Cove Park. It is not really needed.

Betty Rosania said that with regards to the Community Development Action Plan, the Department of Community Affairs assisted the Town in 1968 to codify such a plan to cover every area of government and education. The Plan should be on a shelf somewhere.

Councilor Gardow asked if the public has access to the Town's GIS system. Bill Holler, GIS Administrator, said that nothing has been done to-date to have the GIS information accessible to the public. Councilor Gardow also indicated that the Town website does not seem to list all of the Boards and Commissions. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she will have Tom Hemphill, Information Specialist, check into this.

Mr. Courchaine said that the goal of preserving the Connecticut River and flood plains flies in the face of the Council looking into potential development. The Council needs to indicate which is the priority.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien continued with the Government Process and Structure segment of the Strategic Plan. The key items are increasing influence at the State level, promoting and strengthening the financial health of the Town, the Town's ability to pay, maximizing skills, etc. of Town employees, negotiating more effectively and consistently with the Unions, and developing better communication between government and citizens. The Town Council holds a public forum with the State representatives and senators who represent the Town at least twice per year. They are currently in close contact regarding the issues of the Cove. The Town is in touch with State legislators regarding any actions either harmful or beneficial to the Town. The Town Council is currently a member of CCM and CRCOG. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien does not see the need to explore the feasibility of a private lobbyist to address the Town's concerns and interests at the State level as CCM and CRCOG tend to these needs.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that a five-year forecast is important to provide information to the Council. The Council will need to review the Town's sound financial policies with the new Finance Director. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien does not recommend that the Town pursue a credit rating upgrade at this time. The Town currently has a very good bond rating. A five-year capital improvement plan is currently established. An inventory of Town facilities is being developed so that costs for renovations can be more easily established. The only way the Town Manager can see to rely less on State and Federal revenue sources is to continually increase users fees.

Betty Rosania concurred with the increase in user fees, and along with this she proposes that those who take advantage of Senior services in Town should pay on a sliding scale basis or charged appropriately. Not all seniors in Town are poor.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien continued that the Charter Revision Commission will be reviewing the budget development time frame. As a part of the Budget document, there is a listing of mandates for present and new services in the Town. Core services will have to be identified and the cost of those services. A new budget format will be looked at for the most cost effective way to deliver these services. Before developing and maintaining a comprehensive plan for all information systems, our current system needs to be updated to the proper efficiency. A report of costs to update the system will be sent to the Council.

Mr. Courchaine advises that it would be beneficial for the Town to look at purchasing an inexpensive scanner. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Town Clerk currently has a scanner and the problem is allowing for staff time to scan some of the larger documents.

Councilor Gardow suggested a Xerox center that will copy, fax, e-mail and scan.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that all Town Department Heads possess human resource abilities such as leadership, communications, motivational, and personnel management skills. Training is a top priority for Department Heads. The Council has requested the Town Manager change the performance evaluation system for Department Heads. The Town Council has recently approved a program to reward employees for great ideas to save money. The Town Manager does most of the negotiating with the Unions. The Town has an outside labor negotiator who is called upon in the event of arbitration. The coalition bargaining has all contracts beginning and ending at the same time.

The development of effective, systematic, regular, and ongoing communications is a priority of the Council. The Council members do currently hold weekly office hours in the Council Chambers. The annual opinion surveys have been done every three years, but being that they are very expensive, most communities can no longer afford them. The Town has an excellent web-site that is very interactive. It includes the Council agenda and minutes as well as the Town Manager's Weekly Management Report. The public is encouraged to register their comments on the customer service forms. New volunteers are allowing that the Town Council meetings continue to be broadcast on Channel 16. All Staff and Commissioners are encouraged to share positive news about the Town. The Town Manager needs to examine how many Boards and Commissions are still needed and how many can be eliminated.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Town has an active Capital Improvement Advisory Committee (CIAC) which takes part in the budget process and makes a presentation to the Town Council during the budget presentation.

The Town Manager moved on to the Public Services segment of the Strategic Plan. The objectives are to understand all of the public facilities, empower the Town Staff for decision making, and recommendations for Youth Services and Recreation & Parks. The CIAC is addressing current priority needs as well as a long-term capital improvement plan. An ongoing schedule of updates to the Physical Services department is being developed. Presentations are being offered more often in order to educate and communicate with the public any key items within the Town. A better budget document will be developed so that the document is more user friendly. Students are being used more often as important resources to the Town. Trust is key in creating an environment of respect for all Town Staff. The last employee survey was in 2001 and there should be another conducted in the near future. Department heads encourage decision-making within their department. Employee recognition is held twice per year. Wethersfield, Rocky Hill and Newington are discussing regional training. The Shared Services Committee helps to enhance interdepartmental communication between the Town and the Board of Education. Work is in progress to expedite the move of the Nature Center into the Moeller Home. The use of Council Chambers as office space has been introduced; however the move will cost money. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien and Superintendent of Schools are working together to utilize more effective methods to foster collaboration and cooperation. A report will be presented at the second Council meeting in September. There is school representation on the Library Board through retired teachers. Accounting principals, policies and procedures will be reviewed by the new Finance Director. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that we need to look at having fees collected for programs and users fees going back to the actual program rather than the General Fund. Dr. Stillwell currently matches residents' needs with available volunteers. Volunteer recognition is held

each year. The community calendar provides information to encourage volunteerism. Wethersfield is well on the way to fostering voluntary inter-town cooperation and collaboration. Programs are developed that can benefit more than one department. The use of the Library has skyrocketed and the Director is doing all she can to include the use of the library into the educational curriculum. The Senior Citizen Advisory Committee has just put out a new report and Senior programs have been well received. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien does not see the need for a Youth Services job fair. The Town has a very active Juvenile Review Board which meets twice per month. Youth programming, which includes parental education programs, continues to thrive. Many Parks & Recreation facilities have been updated due to funds received through bonding. A part-time Senior Citizen Coordinator has been hired. Parks & Recreation now has a shared van with Social & Youth Services. A Community Volunteer Coordinator is not deemed necessary at this point.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien continued with the Social Concerns segment of the Strategic Plan. Key items include volunteerism, autonomous Town government, access for all persons, housing opportunities, human resources, increasing the tax base, recognizing the importance of open space, improving Town facilities, public safety, and the collection and dissemination of information. The Department of Social and Youth Services acts as a clearinghouse for information. Volunteer training needs to be done within particular departments and it is very specific to certain areas. Many regional programs are being developed within the Health Department that can be utilized throughout Town. Many improvements have been made to Youth and Parenting programs. An area that still needs updating is the full range of housing opportunities for Wethersfield citizens. The MDC conducts periodic Hazardous Waste Disposal dates. The hours of recycling have not been changed and the Transfer Station is utilized often by citizens. Kathy Bagley and Nancy Stilwell are looking into the Town's need for a Teen Center. Wethersfield scored very high on the last survey of its public safety department which included both the Police Department and Fire Department. The community is very satisfied with each group. A pension plan and tax relief plan have both been areas reviewed for these departments. New motorcycles have been purchased for the Police Department. The possibility of a school resource officer is currently being considered. The Town Manager does not foresee the provision of a live operator to process phone calls to the Town Hall as most businesses have gotten away from this and there is not funding for it. The website has become a wealth of information to provide information to the public. The local public access television has also contributed in getting information out to the public. A Communications Committee has yet to be established, but may be looked into for the future.

Anne Kuckro commented that the Town has to be much more creative in expanding our tax base. We need to be much more aggressive in looking at empty properties and the redevelopment of certain parcels along the Silas Deane.

Councilor Gardow asked what the next step taken will be on the Strategic Plan. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the next step will be to put the Plan into a typed format and talk again with Town Staff. She recommends that, after the November elections, a new Strategic Plan be formalized.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:10 p.m., Councilor Cascio moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Gardow. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 5-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

Unapproved