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Kristen Panzo TOWN CLERK

TOWN OF WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
Robert F. Parisi Council Chambers
April 8, 2025
6:30 P.M.
RECORD OF VOTES & MINUTES

The Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, April 8, 2025, was called to order at 6:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was said. Councilors in attendance were Thomas Laffin, Christina Tatta, Samuel Carmody, Vincent Testa, Christopher Regan, Jesse Reynolds, Craig Fishbein and Chairman Joseph A. Marrone. Mayor Vincent Cervoni, Town Attorney Gerald E. Farrell Sr., and Town Clerk Kristen Panzo were also present. Councilor Autumn Allinson was absent.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Roll Call

Presentation of Certificates of Recognition for CT STEM Academy Wallingford Team

3. Consent Agenda

- 3a. Consider and approve Tax Refunds totaling \$5,511.18 (#739-#756)
Acct. #1001001- 41020 - Tax Collector
- 3b. Acceptance of Donation and consider and approve Appropriation of funds in the amount of \$250 to Revenue Donations – Police, Acct. #2502002-47152 and to Expense Donations – Police, Acct. #25020050-58830-10127 – Police Dept.
- 3c. Acceptance of WECARE Playful Cruisers program fees and consider and approve Appropriation of funds in the amount of \$890 to Revenue, Acct. #2134002-47152 and to Expenditures, Acct. #21340100-58830 – Y&SS
- 3d. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$5,000 from Contingency-Misc. Exp., Acct. #10019000-58820 to Probate-Office Exp., Acct. #10010850-56100 – Probate Court
- 3e. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$10,296 from Regular Salaries/Wages, Acct. #10010550-51000 to Secretarial, Acct. #10010550-56702 -Building Dept.
- 3f. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$20,000 from Rev-Town Recovery Demo/Enforcement, Acct. #1009052-46310 to Exp. – Building PS – Demolition, Acct. #10010550-56770 – Building Dept.
- 3g. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$3,564 from Office Furniture, Acct. #10010150-57000-01301 to Office Renovation, Acct. #10010150-TBD – Mayor

- 3h. Consider and approve a request from the First Congregational Church to use the Parade Grounds for a Carillon Concert on July 13, 2025, and for the annual Catch the Spirit Event on September 14, 2025 – Mayor
- 3i. Approve Minutes of March 25, 2025, Town Council Meeting.

MOTION WAS MADE to approve Consent items 3a-3i.
MADE BY: TATTA
SECONDED BY: FISHBEIN
ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR

4. **Items Removed from the Consent Agenda**

There were no items removed from the Consent Agenda.

5. **PUBLIC QUESTION & ANSWER PERIOD-**

Bill Comerford of Broadview Drive asked Mayor Cervoni for an update about the crack in the foundation of the basketball court at Doolittle Park. Mayor Cervoni stated that he has looked at it several times. He said there is a hairline crack, and it barely disturbs the surface. He said the Park & Rec Director has been in contact with the vendor regarding the warranty. Mr. Comerford asked Mayor Cervoni if he knew that the basketball court was built in a flood zone, and he stated that he did not know. Mr. Comerford stated that the basketball court in question was built in a flood zone, and he provided a map for the Town Council and stated that the map was done 8 months prior to the basketball court being built. Mr. Comerford asked Mayor Cervoni if a follow-up meeting about the sidewalk inspections had taken place and Mayor Cervoni said it had not.

John Beecher of Seiter Hill Road talked about the increase that the Record Journal posted in the paper. He wanted clarification on it. Mayor Cervoni stated that the tax increase would be 5.9%. The impact on the residential homeowner is 19% because of the home revaluations. Mr. Beecher explained how their income has changed over the years. He spoke about the veteran exemption he gets and how it has not been increased in a very long time. He wants the council to really think about the increase in taxes before passing the budget. He mentions that there are uncertain times we are all living in.

Paul Ciardullo of Bayberry Drive asked if the town will be doing a public hearing for the budget. Chairman Marrone stated that yes, a public hearing for the budget is scheduled. Mr. Ciardullo asked if they will also be doing the workshops as well. Chairman Marrone stated that there will be a workshop on Thursday for the BOE and a few other workshops followed by the public hearing. Mr. Ciardullo talked about the budget he had received this morning. He discussed the population of Wallingford and how it is down. He talked about the growing expenses for the town. He discussed the high school situation. He discussed the town's revenue. He does not think that the council should support a tax increase for this year.

Steven Miller of Fair Street Ext. spoke about the tax increase. Mr. Sena explained the reason for the tax increase and broke it down, so hopefully people can understand it better. Mr. Miller discussed how these are uncertain times and a tax increase of almost 20% would hurt the taxpayers in town.

Jason Michael of Meadow Street discussed how the Town Council members get a different budget packet than what is posted to the town website. He feels that the public should get the same copy of the budget that the council does. Chairman Marrone stated that the Town Council budget packet will be on the town website under the Town Council tab. Mayor Cervoni stated that they tried to upload the entire budget packet to the Facebook page as Mr. Michael suggested they do and it is too large to download, and hope by tomorrow morning they have away to upload the budget packet for the public to view. He said a link to the budget will be on the town Facebook page and not the actual budget packet. Mr. Michael wanted to know how to ask questions to departments or non-profit organizations if the public has questions. Chairman Marrone stated that Mr. Michael can submit questions to him, and he can get the answer.

6. Discussion of old business – Chairman Marrone

(a) Update on Community Pool

Mayor Cervoni stated that the bids are being collected, and his understanding is that they will be open next week.

(b) Update on Town Building Maintenance Assessment

Mayor Cervoni stated that he will be reviewing the copies of the assessment with the Director of Public Works and at some point, they will come to the council with a plan to address the issues that are discussed in those reviews.

(c) Update of Fire Department Study

Chairman Marrone stated that the Fire Dept. study is under way.

(d) Update on Hidden Brook Lane

Attorney Farrell stated that the town has obtained an easement and has a meeting with Planning & Zoning on April 14, 2025, to discuss possible options. He also mentioned that that will be in the Executive Session.

7. 6:30 p.m. To Conduct a Public Hearing and Consider and Act on the following:

AN ORDINANCE APPROPRIATING \$1,500,000 FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF BOILERS AT E.C. STEVENS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, COOK HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND SHEEHAN HIGH SCHOOL AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS OF THE TOWN AND NOTES IN ANTICIPATION OF SUCH BONDS IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$1,500,000 TO FINANCE SAID APPROPRIATION.

Paul Ciardullo of Bayberry Drive asked if the BOE has their own budget, why do they need to come to the Town Council for approval on capital items. Chairman Marrone stated that this money is not coming out of the BOE budget. The town will be bonding this capital item. He also stated that long term capital projects are not put in the BOE budget. Mr. Ciardullo recommends that the process be changed.

Bill Comerford of Broadview Drive discussed the boilers that must be replaced. Marc Deptulo, Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds for the Wallingford Public School System. He discussed the boilers and how many have been repaired and how many still need to be repaired. He said that the boilers at Moses Y Beach Elementary School had their boilers fixed then moved on to Pond Hill Elementary School who also had their boilers fixed. He stated the reason for the bond is after looking at the boilers at Cook Hill and E.C. Stevens and the fact that the parts are not available, all boilers will have to be replaced at some point. They are starting with these two schools along with Sheehan High School. The new boilers will be more efficient. Mr. Comerford asked how many boilers need to be replaced. Mr. Deptulo stated that they will replace all the boilers except at Mary Fritz Elementary School, seeing how those are the newest boilers. Ms. Bellizzi explained that everything was done to try and maintain the boilers and keep them running for as long as they could. She mentioned that the boilers are all kind of going at the same time and are not serviceable anymore. Mr. Comerford feels that the BOE should bond for the replacement of all the boilers instead of bonding a few at a time.

Councilor Tatta asked what the cost is for the boilers at each of the three schools. The Sheehan High School boilers are \$644,000, Cook Hill Elementary School boilers are \$349,000 and E.C. Stevens Elementary School boilers are \$349,000. She asked about the current condition of the Sheehan High School boilers. Mr. Deptulo stated that one of the boilers must be retubed and that will cost \$40,000 but have no effect on the liability of that boiler. He stated that because the boilers at Sheehan high school are manufactured differently, they are very hard to repair. He suggested purchasing boilers that are more reliable so they can have qualified repair people fix them in the future. She does not believe she can be in support of spending this kind of money on boilers for a high school that might not be in use, if the one high school project goes through. She would be willing to support paying for the other boilers at the elementary schools but not at the high school.

Councilor Reynolds asked how long ago the BOE received these prices. Mr. Deptulo stated that these prices are bid pricing. He asked if the bond amount is enough to cover all the boilers in the bond ordinance. The question was asked, if the town had all the money to fix every boiler it still could not be done because there are not enough people qualified to fix these boilers all at once.

Councilor Regan asked when would be the first year that a new high school would take occupancy, if a new high school is indeed being built or if the two high schools would remain. Ms. Bellizzi stated that it would be the fall of 2031. She stated if a new high school is to move forward then they would apply for a grant in 2026 and it would be five to six years after that, that the school would be occupied. Councilor Regan stated that the spending \$40,000 on spare parts instead of just getting new boilers does not make much sense.

Councilor Testa stated that if the BOE came to the council and asked for additional money to fix the boilers in the schools on top of their initial budget that would certainly raise taxes. Bonding is a way for the BOE to replace the boilers in the schools without having to raise people's taxes. He mentioned a committee years ago that was formed for the purpose of identifying the needs for boiler and tank replacements in the schools. He talked about the roof replacement project that the BOE bonded to have the roofs fixed at certain schools. He mentioned that bonding a few boilers at a time instead of bonding all boilers at once is a better way to keep our

debt down. The boilers at Sheehan High School still need to be replaced even if a new high school is built. Sheehan will still be a high school for at least the next five years, if the new high school plans move forward. He thinks the BOE is asking for something reasonable.

Vice Chair Tatta asked Mr. Sena how long the bonds are bonded for. Mr. Sena stated that they are bonded for 20 years. She asked what the approximate interest rate is on those bonds. Mr. Sena guessed about 3.5%-5%. Councilor Tatta mentioned that if you took that price of \$40,000 to rebuild a boiler and multiplied that by six years it would only be \$240,000 spent. She stated she will most likely be voting no for the bond ordinance just because the council does not know what will happen with that building moving forward.

Chairman Marrone stated that when he went on his high school tour at Sheehan one of the boilers was not working and someone was there trying to fix it. He stated that even if there is no high school there, the upkeep of the building is important. He mentioned the deferred maintenance in other buildings in town and he does not want Sheehan to be one of those deferred maintenance buildings.

Councilor Regan asked what the cost of a temporary boiler would be for the winter if the boiler at Sheehan fails. Mr. Deptula said retrofitting the temporary boiler at Sheehan would be very difficult. It would affect the entire operation of the building. It would have to go where the loading and receiving bays are. To rent a boiler they start at \$10,000 a month and go up to \$30,000 a month. It would cost in the long run to rent a boiler for one year at Sheehan compared to bonding for a new boiler.

Vice Chair Tatta asked if \$10,000 a month equates to hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Mr. Deptula stated that the boilers at Sheehan would run all year because of reheating coils. So, the cooling system relies on tempering that air back to a useable temperature. It also eats at the swimming pool.

**MOTION WAS MADE to approve AN ORDINANCE APPROPRIATING \$1,500,000 FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF BOILERS AT E.C. STEVENS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, COOK HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND SHEEHAN HIGH SCHOOL AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS OF THE TOWN AND NOTES IN ANTICIPATION OF SUCH BONDS IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$1,500,000 TO FINANCE SAID APPROPRIATION
MADE BY: MARRONE
SECONDED BY: CARMODY**

ROLL CALL

ALLINSON: ABSENT

CARMODY: AYE

FISHBEIN: LEFT MTG. AT 7:28PM

LAFFIN: AYE

REGAN: AYE

REYNOLDS: AYE

TATTA: NAY

TESTA: AYE

MARRONE: AYE

6- AYE

1-NAY

2-ASBENT

MOTION: PASSED

8. Discussion and Update on Hidden Brook Lane – Vice-Chair Tatta - *Withdrawn*
9. Discussion and possible action regarding Simpson Court outdoor dining – Councilor Carmody

Councilor Carmody expressed his support for outdoor dining in the downtown area. He thinks it is a great way to bring the community together and get foot traffic downtown. He stated that during the pandemic, restaurants thrived, people gathered, and the downtown area became the place to be. He explained that this year the merchants are proposing a scaled back version of the outdoor dining. They plan to use only six parking spaces, which increases the number of usable spaces for vehicles, compared to prior years. They are also committed to covering the full cost of installing and removing the concrete barriers. He mentioned Heather, who owns Mr. D's was at the meeting and was willing to speak on behalf of this.

Chairman Marrone spoke about how the council has already turned this item down and is essentially the same plan coming back but modified a little.

MOTION WAS MADE TO allow for expanded outdoor dining in Simpson Ct., utilizing six parking spaces with the condition that the participating merchants cover the full cost of installation and removal of the concrete barriers as determined by the department of Public Works.

MADE BY: CARMODY

SECONDED BY: TESTA

Heather Williams, owner of Mr. D's Restaurant. She wanted the opportunity to work with the council on an updated outdoor dining plan. She stated that her business took a big hit last year by not doing the outdoor dining in Simpson Ct. Every summer she hires about seven to ten extra kids and last summer she had to let go of everyone she had hired because of the lack of business. She stated that it brought the town alive, and it brought out-of-town people into Wallingford. Her revenue grew immensely between 23-24 because of all the out-of-town people who came to dine outdoors in Wallingford. She discussed the new plan for the parking spaces that would be used for this. She explained that there would still be plenty of parking spaces for businesses' clients.

Ray Ross of Center Street thinks this proposal is good for the town. It is good for the people and for the businesses. He was able to take advantage of this when it occurred, and he stated that he saw a lot of out-of-town people coming to Wallingford because of the outdoor dining.

Anthony Dorcie of South Main Street and who works at Knuckleheads. He stated that as an opposed business, they still think it is a good idea, with them taking full financial responsibility because it is only fair.

Steve Belli who is representing Body & Soul Day Spa. He stated that he was at the meeting last year when this item was brought up and was not in favor of the outdoor dining. He stated that something that started out to keep social distancing while dining, now has turned into a business model and the businesses think they are intitled now. He discussed how sidewalk dining in other towns is sufficient. He mentioned that his business and others who do not benefit from outdoor dining should not have to lose parking spaces. He said this idea should

not take away the parking spots for some of their customers who need the close parking spots and cannot walk very far. He went into detail of how his wife's business did not get any help during the pandemic and had to shut down for three months because of it. They are just one business that does not benefit from outdoor dining. He proposed maybe the first and third weekend of the months during the warmer months have some type of outdoor dining and give surrounding businesses notice that it will be happening so they can make accommodations.

Heather Williams, owner of Mr. D's Restaurant, mentioned that there is a diagram that shows the six parking spaces that would be used and all the extra space the businesses would have for clients to use that parking lot. She said it leaves 10 extra parking spots.

John LeTourneau of Regent Ct. is in favor of the outdoor dining. He mentioned that people in town and outside of town really enjoy the outdoor dining. He said most customers he has in his store are out-of-town customers. People are really impressed with the outdoor dining experience they get in Wallingford. He discussed how people say there is a lack of parking spaces in the downtown area.

Bill Comerford of Broadview Dr. discussed Councilor Carmody's backup to his agenda item and how it mentioned uptown quite a lot. He discussed how the merchants downtown might be a little upset about not being able to be a part of the outdoor dining. He believes that all businesses should be able to have outdoor dining and not be left out because of where their business is located. He asked if the businesses would be paying for the cement blocks. Chairman Marrone stated that some might have been donated to the town at one point. Mayor Cervoni stated that they were purchased during COVID and last he knew they might be in the Public Works yard. Mr. Comerford said they might want to investigate that to make sure that Public Works still has them.

Sheila Delmonico who is also representing Body & Soul Day Spa. She discussed how they are not in favor of the outdoor dining because of the lack of parking spaces for the older clients who need to be able to park right in front of their door. She talked about how the restaurants made money during the three years of having outdoor dining. She does not agree with having to take parking spaces away to expand the outdoor dining. She mentioned how when they get to work in the morning and walk through the alley way, they see garbage everywhere from people who do not pick up after themselves. She mentioned how she found beer bottles and actual drinking glasses from other restaurants in the flower planters.

Heather Williams, owner of Mr. D's Restaurant, stated that because of the bank closing on the corner there are enough parking spaces on Simpson Ct. She said she is not looking for any special privileges and to Mr. Comerford's point about keeping it fair for all businesses, she mentioned possibly opening the back parking lot so people on Center Street can enjoy the outdoor dining as well.

John LeTourneau of Regent Ct. stated that if the town does not have the cement blocks anymore, he will purchase them with his own money to help with the outdoor dining.

ROLL CALL

ALLINSON: ABSENT

CARMODY: AYE

FISHBEIN: ABSENT

LAFFIN: NAY

REGAN: NAY

REYNOLDS: AYE

TATTA: NAY

TESTA: AYE

MARRONE: NAY

4- AYE

3- NAY

2-ABSNET

MOTION: FAILED

The meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen Panzo
Town Clerk

Meeting digitally recorded

Joseph A. Marrone III, Chairman

Date

Kristen Panzo, Town Clerk

Date