

TOWN OF WINDHAM TOWN COUNCIL

WINDHAM TOWN HALL MEETING ROOM

JANUARY 19, 2010 - 7:00 P.M.

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Mayor Ernest S. Eldridge called the Town of Windham Town Council meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Town Council members present: Mayor Ernest S. Eldridge, Christel Donahue, Kevin Donohue, Erika Haynes, Jerry Iazzetta, Mike Lessard, Lorraine M. McDevitt, Arnaldo Rivera, Teresa Santucci, N. Joseph Underwood and David Howe Sr.

Staff present: Neal J. Beets, Town Manager

2. Citizens and Delegations

Anthony Kydd, 125 Summit Street, Willimantic, resident, educator for 13 years and is currently a supervisor at Suffield Public Schools. Mr. Kydd stated that he wants his kids to receive the best education and to not build a Magnet School, which will reduce not only class size, but help the children in our community means that the Town Council have failed the students of Windham. He hopes the Town Council does the right thing.

Dennis Cronin, 247 North Street, Willimantic, stated that the Town Council is not obligated to have a revote on the Magnet School. He mentioned that people who signed it were misinformed. There is a lot of depends he said, but it's about whether the State will fund the school. Mr. Cronin asked the Town Council to vote on the letter to OPM.

Tony Fantoli, Tuckie Road, Windham, stated that anyone who signed the petition he circulated was not misinformed and they knew what they were signing. Mr. Fantoli believes that putting up a new school is going to stretch the services we already stretch and as far as the over populated Natchaug School, the Town needs to make the necessary repairs or they will need to replace it in the next five years.

Harry Carboni, Willimantic, stated that 3 years ago we made a decision and today we know more about the Magnet School project. He informed the Council that when the project was approved by vote it was mentioned that the school test scores would improve, better diversity in the schools and quality of life would improve. Mr. Carboni mentioned that the Town built the Windham Middle School and we have not seen any improvements on the test scores and the Magnet School Project will increase property taxes once the State stops funding the Town.

Glenn Chester, Zoldak Drive, Windham, stated he was in favor of the Magnet School Project because his daughter was a good student and passed her classes but didn't receive the best education.

Robert Smith, educator for 40 years, read several sections of articles pertaining to education and legislation. He spoke about property taxes, bankruptcy and foreclosures. He informed the Council that the economy is bad and that if he could move back to Stamford tomorrow he would, after being here in the Town of Windham for 40 years.

Nicole Kraftsman stated that she was in support of the Magnet School and that if we need to stabilize property taxes the Town needs to invest in the community. She mentioned that every year the local colleges and universities hire new staff and they don't move into this community.

Dawn Niles, North Windham, not sure what to say to the Council. She mentioned that because the Town residents took a vote and voted for the Magnet School. She stated that the State does not have a recall on votes. She informed the Council that the Town wants a Magnet School and it is the Council's job to move it forward and stop putting blocks in front of it. Ms. Niles thanked Mr. Eldridge and Mrs. Donahue for participating in the No Freeze Shelter fundraising event.

Kay Haskell, Main Street, Willimantic, stated that her son was a student at Natchaug School and has done well for himself. She requests that the Council invest in the community especially our schools. Mrs. Haskell wants the project to move forward and not go to a revote.

Elaine Rogers, 211 Back Road, Windham, stated that the Town can not fix the schools we currently have now, why build another one that in a few years it will need some type of repair. Mrs. Rogers mentioned that if we believe in good education than we can do it in the school we have.

Jeff Veins stated that last Thursday the Council held a meeting and set some goals and the # 1 goal was economic development. He spoke about gas prices and heating oil going up and said that we need to let the taxpayers keep their hard earned money. He asked that the Council give the citizens of Windham a better quality of living and stop spending their money and to please consider a revote on the Magnet School.

Lynne Ide, Willimantic, mother of 2 recent graduates of Windham High School whom have done very well in the Windham Public School system. Mrs. Ide urges the Council to finish the job and get the job done well. She knows how hard people have worked on the Magnet School Project issue and there is nothing that is going to solve Windham's challenges. We need to promote Economic Development, Ide said, in order to grow our community, but education is part of that puzzle. Ide also mentioned the report on the schools that was worked on by the Tri Board, which list the needs of each school.

Thomas DeVivo, 30 South Park Street, Willimantic, stated he supports the Magnet School Project and would like the Council to support it. Mr. DeVivo asked that the community and the families in this Town never let anyone down grade our schools and we need to make sure we invest in our future.

Pam Wright, Pleasant Street, stated that it is never a waste of money to invest in our school children's education. She mentioned that the Magnet School would make up with the surrounding towns. Mrs. Wright informed the board that all her children substituted in the school system and our teachers and the same people that object to the school, objected to the Garden on the Bridge Project, new middle school and the Windham Mills. She hopes the Town invests in our community and she doesn't mind her taxes' going up if it's to educate our children.

Jeff Smith, Windham Street, Willimantic, stated that education is what causes Economic Development. Mr. Smith would like the Town to keep moving forward and mentioned that the Magnet School is the best thing that ever happened to this Town.

Charles Kratt, Monticello Street, Willimantic, stated that most of the comments he listens to tonight are very interesting. Mr. Kratt mentioned that we need to work on the quality of education for the future of our Town, but we don't need it by building a pretty school. He wants the Council to understand that the State gives us promises, but they can't afford it.

Chuck Pennywell stated that in 2006 things were good, so why not vote yes for a good project. He is concerned that taxes will go up due to the hard economic times we are facing since 2007 and too many people are losing homes.

John Marand, Willimantic, suggest the Council finish the job that was started in order for the Town to move forward. Mr. Marand mentioned that every elementary school age will have an equal opportunity to attend the school because it's a lottery. He wanted everyone to know that we are all taxpayers and we pay local, state and federal taxes and schools are being built in other towns with our tax dollars.

Mark Phelps, Magnet School Building Committee member, feels it's deja vu all over again. Mr. Phelps stated that the Town voted on the Magnet School Project and the project will never get finished if every time a group comes in front of the Council they are going to discuss the issue over and over again. He urges the Council to honor the vote and put the issue to bed now and we need to do this for our students.

Councilman Jerry Iazzetta took leave of the chair to speak as a citizen.

Jerry Iazzetta, South Windham, read an email he received a while ago regarding Citgo Gas Station and its owner Chavez of Venezuela. He informed us that Citgo was changing its name to **Petro** due to the lack of sale in the United States once it was known that Mr. Chavez owned them.

Nancy Petite, 22 High Street, Willimantic, stated that she is in support of the Magnet School Project. Mrs. Petite mentioned that children are part of the school system education, which is part of economic development.

John Monahan, Willimantic, endorsed the Magnet School Project, but said no to off track betting. Mr. Monahan stated that he couldn't believe that after spending \$1 million in renovating the auditorium we were all cramped in the meeting room. He spoke about the Council allowing alcohol in the auditorium and was sad to see that we appointed a criminal to the Economic Development Commission.

Bill, North Windham, stated that the discussion is a repeat. He mentioned that Tuckie Road can't handle more traffic, the economy is no good and is not going to change any time soon. His concern is that our children are not getting a good education and the Willimantic Police is at the middle school everyday. In 2006 he voted yes for the Magnet School, but would like to see a re-vote.

Murphy Sewall, Windham Center, knows economic times are tough and believes that in a couple of years it will be better than today. Mr. Sewall stated that it doesn't make sense for the Council to back off now from moving forward the Magnet School Project. He suggests that the Council approves the letter to OPM, which shouldn't be a problem and not move for a revote because you will kill the project.

Dr. Enrique Torres, Willimantic, resident for 10 years stated he was in favor of the Magnet School Project. He mentioned that Willimantic has a lot of opportunities and the Magnet School will give the Town a chance to attract people to the area.

Lori Jeffers, Windham, stated that we are a divided community and believes that after a revote people will be quiet. She spoke about the federal government printing a lot of money.

Jean Richards, Willimantic, senior citizen, mentioned that she had three children who went through the Windham Public School system including grandchildren and great grandchildren. She has seen the schools go down hill and it's a disgrace. Mrs. Richards believes that \$38 million will do a lot to renovate the schools we have.

3. Adoption of Minutes

a. Discussion and possible action to adopt the January 5, 2010 Town Council meeting minutes

Underwood MOVED, Haynes seconded, to adopt the January 5, 2010 Town Council meeting minutes with the following amendment: The meeting date needs to be changed to January 5, 2010. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. Resignations

The following resignation/s were submitted:

David Howe Sr., HeartSafe Committee- Civic Group Representative
Norman Allard, Planning & Zoning Commission

Resignations were noted.

5. Appointments

Underwood MOVED, Haynes seconded, to approve all appointments listed below. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

- a. Discussion and possible action to appoint the following to the Ad-Hoc Skateboard Park Building Committee
 - i. Timothy DeVivo - Term ending May 1, 2010
 - ii. David M. Walencewicz - Term ending May 1, 2010
 - iii. Jodi A. Walencewicz - Term ending May 1, 2010
- b. Discussion and possible action to appoint Stephen Lyon to the Board of Assessment Appeals with term ending November 22, 2011
- c. Discussion and possible action to appoint Christel Donahue to the Ad-Hoc Senior Center Building Committee as a Town Council Representative
- d. Discussion and possible action to appoint Davie Howe Sr. to the HeartSafe Committee as the Town Council Representative
- e. Discussion and possible action to appoint Erika Haynes to the Ad-Hoc No Freeze Hospitality Center Committee
- f. Discussion and possible action to appoint Shirley Chappell Mustard to the Historic District Study Committee as a full member

6. Presentations & Special Reports

a. Donation by Willimantic Rotary Club of money to the Willimantic Police Department for a second K-9

John Walker, Willimantic Rotary Club President presented a check in the amount of \$12,500 to the Willimantic Police Department for a second K-9.

Chief Lisa Maruzo-Bolduc thanked the community for the fundraising events that took place in order to raise the funds for a second K-9 and informed the public that Officer Javier Mercado has been assigned as the second K-9 Officer.

b. Presentation of and explanation of Magnet School petition by John French

John French gave a brief history about himself. He spoke about his involvement on the Town of Windham Finance Board, WERF and the Town's landfill closure. He also mentioned he was the Chairman of the Windham Middle School Building Committee. Mr. French informed the Council that he submitted a total of 62 pages petitioning to have a revote on the Magnet School Project due to the financial hardship. He explained why it's not a good idea to build the school at this point and requests that the Council leave **their** affiliation out the door and do what is best for the community.

c. Report by State Representative Susan Johnson on upcoming legislative session

State Representative Susan Johnson passed out a booklet addressing the new laws that will be affecting municipalities. She spoke about a new commission called MORE (Municipal Opportunities Resource), which she was appointed to. Mrs. Johnson also spoke about laws that help regionalization, state budget, proposed progressive income tax proposal, SNAP-IT program in Town. She informed the board that the state deficit right now is about \$160 million and it can be worse by the end of June.

d. Presentation by Autotote Enterprises, Inc. regarding proposed OTB Facility at 600 Main Street, Willimantic

Don Barbarino gave a brief history of Autotote Enterprises and gave a brief history of their current location and how well they have done. He mentioned that he is proposing the same type of entertainment here locally at the Thirsty Frog, which will bring about \$64,000 in revenue yearly to the Town. Mr. Barbarino informed the Council that he came in front of the them because the Council will need to approve the project before he can move on to the Planning and Zoning Commission per state statute.

Damian Fox, Thirsty Frog owner, informed the Council that Autotote Enterprise, Inc. is part of the New York Stock exchange and they are nothing like a strip club. Mr. Fox wanted the board to understand that the establishment will be no different than going into a gas station and buying a lottery ticket.

7. Mayor's Report

Mayor Ernest S. Eldridge thanked Mary DeMarco for all the help at the Three Kings Day event. He thanked the Council for the great goals and objectives session. Mr. Eldridge reported on the following: Economic Development Commission meeting on Wednesday, January 20th; Snow Ball; No Freeze Shelter fundraiser; Ribbon cutting Friday, January 22nd for the New Breakfast Place and Frog Bridge Development.

8. Town Manager's Report

a. Update on Magnet School

Neal J. Beets, Town Manager, gave a brief chronological history of the Magnet School Project and explained the documents that were emailed to Council members. He also passed out an updated letter that will need to be forwarded to OPM. Mr. Beets mentioned that he received a draft operational budget for the Magnet School.

Mr. Beets informed the Council that he spoke to Attorney Cody and there are four options the Council could consider. He explained all four options to the Council.

b. Update on Ethics Ordinance

Neal J. Beets, Town Manager, informed the Council that not all employees have signed the document acknowledging that they have received and agree to abide by the terms of the new Ethics Ordinance. Employees want to be ethical, but Mr. Beets reported that all 6 unions have issues with the complaint process in the Ethics Ordinance, feeling that it may be contrary to their collective bargaining agreements. All 6 unions have met with the Town's Labor Attorney. Mr. Beets asked the Council to allow the Town's Labor Attorney to continue to meet with the unions to see if their objections could be addressed. Mr. Beets mentioned that it should take about a month of discussions. At this time, Mr. Beets indicated that he doesn't know if the result of these discussions will be changes to the Ethics Ordinance, changes to the Collective Bargaining Agreements, both, or neither. In the meantime, Mr. Beets indicated that he wanted to preserve the status quo and hold the Ethics Ordinance in abeyance as to Town employees while discussions between labor and management continue in good faith.

It was the consensus of the Council to accept the Town Manager's request to hold the Ethics Ordinance in abeyance as to complaints against Town employees until further recommendations from our Labor Attorney.

9. Discussion and Review of Communications

None.

10. Resolutions and Ordinances

None.

11. Reports of Committees, Boards and Commissions

a. Administration & Finance, Health and Human Services Sub Committee

Chairman Kevin Donohue reported that the committee met and elected officers and is looking forward to the next meeting.

b. Public Safety, Recreation and Public Works Sub Committee

Mayor Ernest Eldridge reported that the committee would be meeting next Wednesday, January 27th.

c. Board of Education report by Diane Rayhall

Diane Rayhall, Board of Education member thanked Mayor Eldridge for presenting a proclamation to Windham High School for all the fundraising and projects that they have accomplished during the current school year. She gave an invitation to the Council members for an event at North Windham School. Mrs. Rayhall mentioned that she would periodically report to them and give them updates pertaining to things that are happening within our schools.

d. HeartSafe report by Dawn Niles

Dawn Niles and Diane Rayhall gave a brief report on the different types of project that the HeartSafe Committee has done. They informed the Council how they formed and reported on the number of hearts the Town has. The HeartSafe Committee put together several training sessions for Town employees and/or

residents to get CPR and ADD certified at a very low cost. Ms. Niles mentioned that they have come up with a list of locations where they would like to see defibrillators be installed. They thanked Ms. DeVivo for donating \$2,000 earmarked for a defibrillator to be installed at St. Mary's St. Joseph School.

12. Old Business

a. Discussion and possible action regarding petition submitted to the Council regarding the Magnet School

Santucci MOVED, Underwood seconded, that we as a Council proceed and show our support moving our community forward and reject the petition.

Underwood MOVED the question, Santucci seconded. MOTION PASSED with all in favor except Iazzetta, Howe and Lessard who opposed.

MOTION made by Santucci and seconded by Underwood PASSED with all in favor except Howe, McDevitt, Iazzetta and Lessard who opposed.

b. Discussion and possible action regarding a letter to OPM to modify the State Plan of Conservation and Development to allow Town sewer service to the proposed Magnet School site on Tuckie Road

Underwood MOVED, Haynes seconded, to authorize Town Manager Neal J. Beets to forward the letter to OPM on Magnet School. MOTION PASSED with all in favor except McDevitt who opposed.

13. New Business

None.

14. Future Agenda Items

Noted.

15. Citizens and Delegations

Victor Rayhall informed the Council that the check from Willimantic Rotary to the Willimantic Police Department was for \$12,750 not \$12,500.

Mark Phelps thanked the Council for supporting the Magnet School Project. Mr. Phelps was surprised that there was no point of order to the individual that presented the petitions since he spoke regarding his resume.

Councilman Jerry Iazzetta took leave of the chair to speak as a citizen.

Jerry Iazzetta, South Windham, spoke regarding off track betting. He mentioned that people will use their last \$5.00 gambling and gambling is not family oriented.

Tony Fantoli, Tuckie Road, Windham, stated that the Magnet School doesn't have square footage numbers to show OPM. He also mentioned that no drawings are in place or a budget for the school.

Dennis O'Brien thanked the Council for their courage and vote.

16. Adjournment

Santucci MOVED, Haynes seconded to adjourn the Town of Windham Town Council meeting at 10:15 p.m. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Submitted By:
Neida I. Rosado, Clerk of the Council