

MINUTES SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE AND STRATEGIC PRIORITY MEETING AND TELECONFERENCE OF THE WINDHAM TOWN COUNCIL,



INVITEES INCLUDE WINDHAM STATE REPRESENTATIVES, BOE, AND BOF

Windham Town Hall Bellingham Auditorium, 2nd Floor
Thursday, December 11, 2014 - 7:00 P.M.

1. Welcome and Call to Order.

Tom DeVivo called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M. He introduced State Representative Susan John and State Senator Elect Mae Flexer. Mr. DeVivo announced that State Representative Linda Orange would be joining the meeting via speaker phone as she is out of State. State Representative Linda Orange was present via telephone.

There was no Quorum of the Town Council when the meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM. A quorum was later met at 7:30 PM with the arrival of Mayor Eldridge and Mike Lessard.

Town Council Members Present: Tom DeVivo, Lorraine McDevitt, James Flores, Tony Fantoli, Christel Donahue, Mike Lessard (arrived at 7:30 PM) and Mayor Eldridge (arrived at 7:30 PM)

Town Manager Beets was also in attendance.

2. Pledge of Allegiance.

Ton DeVivo lead all in the Pledge of Allegiance

3. Citizens and Delegations: Public Comment.

James Flores Town Council member shared his concerns regarding the services we provide to our Veterans and the need for Transportation.

Kevin Hoxie, Ridgewood Road, Willimantic, is concerned with the Board of Education's lack of transparency when hiring and how money is being spent.

Mary Gallucci, Willimantic, spoke about the Board of Education and doesn't believe the Town supports the schools. She also doesn't agree with offering college courses in high



school and having temp programs. She would like to see the schools updated and bullying stopped.

Henry Crane, Windham Street, Willimantic, believes every student should have the opportunity to take AP classes in high school.

4. All Elected Officials Introduce Themselves.

Town Council Members: Tom DeVivo, Lorraine McDevitt, James Flores, Tony Fantoli, Mike Lessard and Mayor Eldridge

Board of Education Members: Tracy Lambert, Luz Osuba, Murphy Sewall, Jaime Gomez, Juan Montalvo and Paul Kalajian

Board of Finance Members: Tyler Griffin, Anita Sebestyen (arrived at 7:30 PM) and Paula Haney

State Representative Susan Johnson thanked the Town for organizing the meeting. She also provided the members with information regarding some of the issues raised in advance.

5. Discussion and Possible Prioritization of the Strategic Issues Facing the Town of Windham. Priorities could include:

a. Construction funding for a downtown parking garage at Walnut and Meadow.

State Representative Susan Johnson noted a design plan will be addressed in August. She explained that in the last legislative session this was put in the legislatures bonding package and explained the two approaches to getting it funded. State Representative Johnson stated they are continuing to try to have it put on the Governor's agenda when the Bonding Commission meets.

b. Renovation of Windham High School.

Paul Kalajian, Board of Education, gave an update on the status of the Windham High School renovations. A brief discussion ensued. State Representative Johnson suggested a letter be written to OPM outlining in detail the problems the Town and Board of Education face when applying for funding for building projects and meeting grant requirements. Town Council Member DeVivo and Town Manager Beets explained the challenges and frustrations in meeting the State requirements when rehabilitating buildings or building new buildings.

c. Phase 1 development of Noznick Park.

Director of Recreation Tara Risley-Marquez and Asst. Superintendent of Public Works Scott Clairmont gave a short presentation on Phase 1 of the development of Noznick Park. They explained the 32 acres of land was purchased 9 years ago strictly for recreational use and described the planned layout for the park including the entrance, soccer fields and walking trails.

d. Seek legislation that makes it illegal for anyone to remove the orange tag on toy guns for children.

Police Chief Maruzo-Bolduc requested legislation be passed to prohibit the removal of orange tags on toy guns for children making them permanently fixed to the gun and also prohibiting the sale of replicas that are black in color.

e. Seek legislation providing that distressed communities receive a larger portion of local police fines.

Tom DeVivo explained the inequity the Town faces with regards to funding our Police Department and noted the State receives most of the revenue collected from tickets and other motor vehicle violations. Mayor Eldridge also noted the cost to transporting prisoners back and forth to court. Police Chief Maruzo-Bolduc agreed and noted the State generally funds only DUI and Seat Belts. State Representative Johnson stated State Representative Orange sits on the Public Safety Committee and has heard the request and believes it is a good idea to bring forward.

f. Seek legislation that a percentage of state economic development revenues are dedicated to job training initiatives. FINISH

A short discussion followed. State Representative Johnson noted a number of programs have been put forward by the Department of Economic Development which some of our Main Street businesses have taken advantage of. The Connecticut Maid Program and Tax Credit for Veterans Program are available as well as help with loans through DECD. In addition State Representative Johnson noted several apprenticeship opportunities are also available and SAMA has been very instrumental with helping small businesses. It was also noted by the group that having a State highway running through our Main Street causes difficulties for small businesses there. State Senator Elect Flexer stated it may be easier for the Town to contact their State Representatives or herself with questions concerning Main Street and they may be able to reach out to the DOT and get quicker results.

g. Seek state assistance in making state building rehabilitation grant programs more transparent and understandable.

Town Council Member DeVivo and Town Manager Beets explained the challenges and frustrations in meeting the State requirements when rehabilitating buildings or building new buildings. It was stated requirements sometimes change during the process making it hard to meet the criteria originally outlined for the project. This was also noted in Item 5b.

h. Would like our State Reps to speak to how State aid to Towns may be affected by the current State budget difficulties: ECS, PILOT, other School funds, Bonding packets, (i.e., Senior Center).

State Senator Elect Flexer stated that although the State is dealing with current budget deficits for this fiscal year Towns should not anticipate any cuts to Municipal Aid. She explained there have been rescissions the Governor has made but the changes do not affect Municipal cuts in any form. Brief discussions took place on the cuts to the Regional Fire Schools, how cutting ECS will affect our schools, time line grant funding and decreases to PILOT funds.

- i. **Is there any protection at the State level that we can get to prevent or at least discourage other Police & Fire Depts from recruiting our employees?**
State Representative Orange stated the Governor had vetoed the bill brought forth however she noted another one could be brought back again if the Town requested. Police Chief Maruzo-Bolduc and Fire Chief Scrivener explained the challenges they face with recruiting and training new officers and firefighters including the cost and time. Tracy Lambert, Chair of the Board of Education also stated they face the same challenges with teacher retention. State Representative Johnson suggested having a non-compete clause agreement.

- j. **Would like our State Reps to chair some meetings with other local officials to discuss possible regionalization opportunities.**
Town Council Member Tom DeVivo explained the changes for the Town by losing WINCOG and moving to SCCOG. He also explained there are regional opportunities for Windham, one of which includes working with the Town of Chaplin with tax collection. State Representative Johnson explained the difficulties in regionalization however noted many Towns are not interest in doing so. She noted they are continuing to work toward regionalization and believes it would be very beneficial to share our resources.

- k. **Public Transit and Transportation funding and programs. Bus route connections within regional transit districts and from one regional transit district to another regional transit district. Service gaps. Frequency of trips.**
Town Council Member James Flores shared his concerns with the lack of transportation and the hardship it causes our residents especially our veterans. He urged our State Legislatures to make this a priority. State Senator Elect Flexer noted there is transportation available to veterans through Disabled American Veterans, AmVets and the American Legion. She also acknowledged the problem with public transportation to larger cities such as Hartford and Manchester and noted this is a huge issue that needs to be focused on. In addition State Representative Johnson suggested more work be done to try to coordinate and connect with Towns to resolve some of the transportation issues.

6. Wrap-Up and Summary of Consensus Points.

Board of Finance Member Paula Haney thanked our State Representatives and State Senate Elect for their work in Public Health and requested as we move forward access and cost be monitored as Healthcare Networks narrow. State Representative Johnson shared her concerns and explained they are trying very hard to make sure access is the same and not diminished by the changes being made.

7. Citizens and Delegations: Public Comment.

Kevin Hoxie thanked our State Representatives and State Senate Elect for their work. He also questioned how the Path Academy was funded and shared his concerns with the State supporting Charter and Magnet Schools and not our Public Schools.

Board of Finance Member Luz Osoba would like to see the ELS program extended to 5 years and asked that State Representative Johnson work to support this goal.

State Representative Johnson noted she has been working hard on this for the past few years and explained the different proposals that have been made. She stated the Latino Puerto Rican Affairs Commission is holding a Forum on January 13th and she encouraged everyone to attend and share their concerns.

Henry Crane stated he appreciated the meeting and is happy to see it was mainly about education which he believes is the answer to all of this.

8. Adjournment.

Town Council Member Tom DeVivo adjourned the **SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE AND STRATEGIC PRIORITY MEETING AND TELECONFERENCE OF THE WINDHAM TOWN COUNCIL**, at 8:59 P.M.

Submitted By:

Barbara J. McKinney
Clerk of the Town Council