

MINUTES

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2007 AT 6:30 PM

RICHARD E. MASTRANGELO CHAMBER

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

1. ROLL CALL: A regular meeting of the Town Council was called to order at 7:15 pm, in the Richard E. Mastrangelo Chamber, Administration Building. In attendance were Councilors Stephen Corbett, Marilyn M. Petitto Devaney, John A. Donohue, Angeline B. Kounelis, John J. Lawn, Jr., Jonathan Hecht, Stephen E. Romanelli, Vice President Mark S. Sideris and Council President Clyde L. Younger. Also present were the Council Clerk, Valerie Papas, Town Manager Michael J. Driscoll, and Town Attorney Mark Reich.

2. EXECUTIVE SESSION – 6:30 PM The Chair stated that the Manager has asked for an executive session in order update the Council on pending litigation. The Chair asked Attorney Reich if there are any other pending cases regarding the police department at this point in time. Attorney Reich stated there was not. The Chair asked for a motion to go into executive session for the above stated purpose. Councilor Sideris made the motion, seconded by Councilor Donohue and adopted by unanimous roll call vote.

3. RETURN TO OPEN SESSION – 7:15 PM

4. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Chair called for a Moment of Silence in memory of George Whittie, Town Engineer.

5. EXAMINATION OF MINUTES: January 4th, January 9th.

Councilor Sideris moved to approve the January 4th and 9th Town Council minutes, seconded by Councilor Romanelli and adopted by voice vote.

6. PUBLIC FORUM

1. Grace Fazzi, Watertown Street – stated that the gate to the Hartz Mason Property was open. She noted that her prior call to the Manager resulted in swift action regarding the poor condition of the property. Ms. Fazzi spoke in concern regarding a police officer's comments to her that she should not be bothering the Manager with the complaint. She spoke against further tax abatements for this property.

7. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- A.** Budget & Fiscal Oversight Committee report on the Development of the Fiscal Year 2008 budget and related matters - Jonathan Hecht, Chair. Councilor Hecht read the Committee report (attached) and noted several revisions to the draft Guidelines (attached). Councilor Hecht reviewed how the policy guidelines should be ranked with the highest priority a (1) and lowest a (6). Councilor Hecht moved to adopt the Fiscal Year 08 Budget and Policy Guidelines as contained in the draft dated January 18, 2007, seconded by Councilor Romanelli and adopted by voice vote.

Councilor Hecht stated that the Council has approved the Fiscal Year 08 Policy Guidelines with 6 items each under section 2, revenues, and section 3 program enhancements/expenditures. He reviewed again the method recommended by the Budget Committee for ranking these items. Councilor Sideris suggested putting a timeline limit on individual Councilors submission of their rankings. Council President Younger stated that individual councilors should submit their rankings to the council clerk by January 30th, 5pm.

Councilor Hecht noted a project deficit in the town's budget for Fiscal Year 2008 and stated that without some containment on healthcare costs, programs within the proposed budget guidelines cannot be funded.

Councilor Corbett moved to accept the report, seconded by Councilor Lawn and adopted by voice vote.

The Chair stated that the Manager should work in concert with the Council President on the planning of Capital Improvement Programs and budget line items.

Councilor Corbett stated that the Council needs to take a proactive approach to the health insurance crisis and lead by example.

Councilor Romanelli spoke in support of a second ambulance in the East End.

Councilor Devaney moved to send the matter of a second ambulance and staff to public safety. Councilor Devaney further spoke against the increase in Councilor's co-pays. She noted that she is not on the Town's health insurance program, but that she does not support an increase for her fellow councilors either and noted how little Councilor are compensated.

With respect to the second ambulance and staff, Councilor Donohue noted that he brought this matter forward to the Budget Committee and noted that in the past, we had to rely on Belmont for ambulance service in the East End.

Councilor Hecht moved to add a sentence to 2A "in recognition of the shared sacrifice to reduce the town's health insurance costs, Councilors will make structural changes to its own health benefits, seconded by Councilor Romanelli for discussion purposes.

Councilor Romanelli stated that he will not vote in support of this motion, noting that increasing five Councilors co-pays will not make a dent in the town's health insurance crisis. He noted that the Manager received a raise which compensated his increase in his co-pay.

The Chair stated that he is not a member of the Town's health insurance program and that the Budget Committee discussed this issue quite a bit. He stated that the proposal is a band aid solution to the problem. He noted that other concessions will need to be made. The Chair stated that in the spread sheet he has received, five councilors going to 80/20% is trivial and that it is not influential nor does it show leadership.

The Chair further stated that he would like additional information on the second ambulance and staff and would like a second on the motion to send it to public safety subcommittee.

Councilor Kounelis stated that she is in favor of Councilors paying their fair share and echoed previous comments regarding the small stipend Councilors receive. She noted that unions have not negotiated this into their contract and believes that the matter should be revisited if and when they do.

Councilor Romanelli stated that this matter was brought up last year when the department heads co-pays were raised to 20% for which they were additionally compensated with salary increasing. If the Council's co-pays are increased to 20% there is no added compensation. Councilor Romanelli stated that the unions are currently negotiating and if their co-pays are increased, then the Council can follow suit at that time.

Councilor Donohue suggested bringing in an insurance advisor for additional information and look to make the change in 2008.

The Chair stated that the School's have already done that and we should use their data and not be re-inventing the wheel

Councilor Sideris spoke in support of Councilor Hecht's mission statement on the health insurance crisis, but noted that the Council should follow increase or changes collectively with the unions.

The Chair stated that the Town should be looking into alternative solutions to the approach to the entire health insurance issue in a logical way, not by making statements.

Councilor Hecht stated that the Town Manager is negotiating with the unions asking for town employees to make a sacrifice and therefore, Councilors should too.

Councilor Lawn stated that he agrees with the motion as a statement, but echoed comments made by Councilor Kounelis and stated that the Council should settle the health insurance issue once the unions have come to an agreement on the matter.

Councilor Corbett reiterated his previous comments that the Council should lead by example. He noted that he is not on the Town's health insurance program and that by its very nature, it is an unfair benefit.

Councilor Romanelli indicated that if this motion is adopted, you are telling the Manager to go ahead with the 80/20 increase.

Upon a roll call vote, the motion was defeated by a 4 in favor, 4 against and 1 Present roll call vote with Councilor Donohue, Hecht, Corbett and Sideris voting in favor, Councilors Romanelli, Devaney, Kounelis voting against and Councilor Lawn voting Present.

With respect to a previous motion to send the matter of a second ambulance and staff to the subcommittee of public safety, the motion was adopted by voice vote.

B. Update by the Charitable Ad Hoc Committee – Mark S. Sideris, Chair. Councilor Sideris stated that his committee met last night and discussed changes to the guidelines which will be further defined at their next meeting. It was noted that the proposed changes will be brought before the Council at its next meeting. Councilor

Romanelli moved to accept the verbal update, seconded by Councilor Devaney and adopted by voice vote.

8. MOTIONS, ORDERS AND RESOLUTIONS:

A. First Reading on an Order setting the Optional Exemptions on Property Tax Assessments for Fiscal Year 2007. The Chair recognized Daniel Loughlin, Town Assessor who provided a brief overview of the proposed first reading and three related resolutions. It was noted that the Order will be advertised in the local paper for a public hearing and vote on February 13th. It was also stated that item 8D, a resolution regarding Chapter 59, Section 41C ½ will be a ballot question for residents at the next local election, and if passed will come with a cost and some State reimbursement.

B. Resolution to Accept Chapter 260 of the Acts of 2006 regarding Veterans Exemptions Benefits. Referred to next meeting in conjunction with item 8A.

C. Resolution to Accept Provisions of G.L. Chapter 59 Section Clause 41A regarding property tax deferral interest rate. Referred to next meeting in conjunction with item 8A.

D. Resolution to Accept Provisions of G.L. Chapter 59 Section Clause 41C ½ as amended by Chapter 139 of the Acts of 2006. Referred to next meeting in conjunction with item 8A.

Councilor Sideris moved to Suspend the Rules in order to take up a late agenda item, seconded by Councilor Devaney and adopted by voice vote.

The Chair introduced and read a proclamation welcoming Staples to Watertown. Councilor Sideris moved to adopt the proclamation, seconded by Councilor Kounelis and adopted by voice vote.

9. PRESIDENT'S REPORT

a. Assistance with subcommittee minutes: The Chair noted that he has two volunteers who will assist with transcribing subcommittee minutes at no cost to the town. The Chair stated that the subcommittee meetings can be a burden to Councilors who are trying to participate in the meeting and act as secretary.

b. Town Hall Parking: The Chair noted that Town Hall workers have been ticketed for various parking violations due to the lack of parking behind the town hall, library and municipal lot. It was stated that due to the expansion of the library, parking spaces were eliminated. The Chair requested that parking be made available in front of the Town Hall for permit parking only and in other locations and asked the Manager to be creative in looking into alternative parking for employees and report back to the Town Council.

c. Update on Munis/Audit: The Chair requested a presentation regarding Munis and the ongoing audit. It was noted that the Chair will not be in attendance at the February 13th meeting and will therefore be placing the matter on the February 27th Town Council agenda.

10. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE TOWN MANAGER

The Manager stated that the matter was reviewed by the subcommittee on Economic Development and Planning for additional parking for the Watertown Square area as well as satellite parking for employees.

11. REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Councilor Kounelis requested an update on the status of the Recycling Ad Hoc Committee and its charge to find a location for a Recycling Committee. She stated that it is her understanding that ongoing conversations have taken place with

department heads and the Chair of the Committee, which is allowable, but that she has not been updated or made privy to the discussions and as a member of the Committee would like to know the status of its charge to find a location.

Councilor Sideris, Chair of the Recycling Committee stated that no solution has been found at this time and that he will schedule a follow up meeting to discuss a plan of action.

Councilor Devaney stated that she had previously sent a letter to the Manager with specific questions regarding a Middle School incident which she would like addressed.

12. ANNOUNCEMENTS – none noted.

13. PUBLIC FORUM – none noted.

14. ADJOURNMENT – 9:30 pm

15. EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Chair asked for a motion to go into executive session to discuss strategy with respect to real property. The Chair noted that the Town Council will not return to open session following the adjournment of the executive session. Councilor Donohue made the motion, seconded by Councilor Hecht and adopted by unanimous roll call vote.

I hereby certify that at a regular meeting of the Town Council for which a quorum was present, the above minutes were adopted as amended by voice vote on February 27, 2007.

Clyde L. Younger, Council President