

TOWN OF WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
Robert F. Parisi Council Chambers
February 11, 2025
6:30 P.M.
AMENDED RECORD OF VOTES & MINUTES

The Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, February 11, 2025 was called to order at 6:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was said. Councilors in attendance were Autumn Allinson, Thomas Laffin, Christina Tatta, Samuel Carmody, Vincent Testa, Christopher Regan, Jesse Reynolds, and Chairman Joseph A. Marrone. Mayor Vincent Cervoni, Town Attorney Gerald E. Farrell Sr., Comptroller Tim Sena and Town Clerk Kristen Panzo were also present. Councilor Craig Fishbein was absent.

1. Pledge of Allegiance
2. Roll Call
3. Consent Agenda
 - 3a. Consider and approve Tax Refunds totaling \$7,710.82 (#632-669)
Acct. #1001001- 41020 - Tax Collector
 - 3b. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$12,000 from Contingency-Misc. Exp, Acct. #10019000-58820 to Social Services Exp. - Contribution-Emergency Shelter, Acct. #10040150-58230 - Mayor
 - 3c. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$1,000 from Regular Salaries, Acct. #10010550-51000 to Continuing Education & Training, Acct. #10010550-55700 – Building Dept.
 - 3d. Consider and approve Appropriation of funds 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.
 - 3e. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$13,000 – Public Works
 - \$9,000 From: Regular Salaries and Wages Acct. #10030000-51000
 - \$4,000 From: Automotive Scanning Tool Acct. #10030000-57000-01347
 - \$13,000 To: Tilt-Deck Trailer Acct. #TBD Capital Acct.

- 3f. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$10,000 from State Grant, Acct. #2501002-45114 to Street Sweeping Expenses, Acct. #2501002-58830-10233 – Public Works
- 3g. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$55,000 to Revenue-ARPA, Acct. #TBD and to Exp-PW-Capital Town Hall Roof, Acct. #10030000-57000-TBD – Public Works
- 3h. Acceptance of Local Prevention Council Grant and consider and approve Appropriation of funds in the amount of \$7,142 to Revenue, Acct. #2324002-45100 and to Expenditures, Acct. #23240150-58830-10014 – Y&SS
- 3i. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$1,115 from Office Expenses and Supplies, Acct. #10010650-56100 to Maintenance of Equipment of Equipment, Acct. #10010650-54325 – Town Clerk
- 3j. Consider and approve FY 2024-2025 Budget Amendment and consider and approve Appropriation in the amount of \$60,000 from Cash, Acct. #N/A to Liability Insurance, Acct. #43100925 – Water Div.
- 3k. Consider and approve request from the First Congregational Church to use the Parade Grounds on May 4, 2025 – Chairman Marrone
- 3l. Approve Minutes of January 14, 2025 Town Council Meeting.

MOTION WAS MADE to approve Consent items 3a, 3c-3l.

MADE BY: TATTA

SECONDED BY: LAFFIN

ALL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE IN FAVOR

4. Items Removed from the Consent Agenda

Item 3b was removed from the Consent Agenda.

- 3b. Consider and approve a Transfer in the amount of \$12,000 from Contingency-Misc. Exp, Acct. #10019000-58820 to Social Services Exp. - Contribution-Emergency Shelter, Acct. #10040150-58230 - Mayor

MOTION WAS MADE to approve item 3b.

MADE BY: MARRONE

SECONDED BY: CARMODY

Councilor Carmody asked Mayor Cervoni to elaborate on this item.

Mayor Cervoni stated that they became aware sometime between Christmas and New Year's that Columbus House was not going to open the emergency shelter. They made efforts to contact Columbus House to discuss with them, how and why this was not happening. They ended up in a meeting with them in the middle of January where they went through what their process is to deal with someone in need of shelter on an emergency basis. They were advised that someone in need of shelter from the cold should call 211 to arrange placement and transportation to shelters in either Middletown, Meriden or Hamden. He stated that their Emergency Management Team, which include the Fire Chief, Deputy Director had made provisions for transportation and should that be necessary and that if some town vehicle was not ready for that, that they would put aside some funds to create an Uber opportunity to drive those people to shelters. They had a follow up meeting with Columbus House to find out what it would take open the emergency shelter. The budget they were given with staffing was \$18,000 a month. He stated they thought they should try to fund six weeks to try to catch the balance of the season. They had the Director of the United Way present at the meeting and for some of the discussion they talked about splitting the funding between the town funds and private support funds. He mentioned to get to \$28,000 they had \$2,000 available from the Emergency Management Budget. He said that the \$12,000 that has been moved from contingency to be for operating the shelter. They have also been speaking with private partners to come up with the balance. With the \$12,000 he believes that they will be able to open up the shelter for the 6 weeks.

Vice Chair Tatta asked how many beds are in the shelter and how many are used in the colder months. Mayor Cervoni stated that the shelter has 15 beds and it is used to capacity but that can vary. She wanted the numbers so that maybe a more cost effective solution is possible instead of paying the \$18,000 per month with only a few people using the shelter daily. She asked about the \$30,000 Columbus House was given during the budget season and asked what was that money used for.

Councilor Laffin did the calculation and it came out to \$40 a person which is not bad. He thanked the Mayor for his efforts in trying to re-open the shelter.

Chairman Marrone has concerns that the council gives money to the Columbus House Thinking that they will be running their shelter and then come to find out they did not. He thinks that going into the new budget season the council should attach some strings to some of the money being handed out.

Councilor Testa asked if it is still a good idea to have Columbus House run the shelter. He discussed a time before Columbus House ran the shelter, that the town actually ran the shelter. He expressed that he was un happy that the shelter was not open. He wants to reconsider the whole relationship now. Mayor Cervoni stated it was a non profit group that operated the shelter and not the town. When they turned over the operation to Columbus House they Quit Claimed the property to them so Columbus House owns the property where the shelter is located now.

Matthew Cammarota of Maplevue Drive stated that he was part of the original

organization in 2009. He said the biggest problem is funding from public and private and has been for quite some time. More donors are spending the money on affordable housing and not on emergency services anymore. He stated that the Department of Housing used to fund the shelter. In 2016 the shelter's funding was pulled from the Department of Housing.

ROLL CALL

ALLINSON: AYE

CARMODY: AYE

FISHBEIN: ABSENT

LAFFIN: AYE

REGAN: AYE

REYNOLDS: AYE

TATTA: AYE

TESTA: AYE

MARRONE: AYE

8- AYE

0- NAY

1- ABSENT

MOTION: PASSED

5. PUBLIC QUESTION & ANSWER PERIOD-

John Bau of Perkins Drive stated that the council should have received in December or January, Information about Wallingford Project Graduation for 2025. Project Graduation is a post graduation put on by volunteers for seniors. There is approximately 400 high school seniors that will be graduating from Lyman Hall and Sheehan High School. Each year they raise around \$25,000 to \$30,000 to put this together. Last year there were three people who made this happen. This year they are seeking to raise \$26,000 to host the event for all of the students, to bus them to the event. He wants the council to get the word out to people to help raise the money.

Natalie Malma of Center Street discussed the Local Prevention Council Grant that was on the Consent Agenda. She wants to make sure that when the Town Council appropriates money for the Coalition for a Better Wallingford that they use that money appropriately.

6. Discussion of old business – Chairman Marrone

(a) Update on Hidden Brook Lane

Attorney Farrell stated that Corporation Counsel Small has set up a meeting with the developer's new attorney and she hopes that progress will be made.

(b) Update on Community Pool

Mayor Cervoni stated that the architect's work is done and the purchasing agent has asked for

a meeting with the architect so that they can prepare the bid specs and put it out to bid. He said that meeting should take place next week.

(c) Update on Town Building Maintenance Assessment

Mayor Cervoni stated last he was informed the Director of Public Works was making his final comments on the draft report.

(d) Update of Fire Department Study

Chairman Marrone stated that the council funded this item in the last meeting and Mayor Cervoni and he had a brief exchange regarding the status.

Mayor Cervoni stated that it is in purchasing and should go out shortly.

7. Executive Session pursuant to CGS1-200(6)(B) with respect to the Workers' Compensation claim settlement of Thomas Ruggiero – Human Resources

**MOTION WAS MADE to go into Executive Session at 6:56pm.
MADE BY: TATTA
SECONDED BY: ALLINSON**

In attendance was Joseph Passaretti, Attorney, Kurt Trieber, Risk Manager, Gerald Farrell Sr, Town Attorney, Tim Sena, Comptroller, Mayor Cervoni, Allinson, Laffin, Regan, Tatta, Marrone, Carmody, Reynolds and Testa.

8. Discussion and possible action regarding the Workers' Compensation claim settlement of Thomas Ruggiero – Human Resources

**MOTION WAS MADE to come out of Executive Session at 7:15pm.
MADE BY: TATTA
SECONDED BY: ALLINSON**

**MOTION WAS MADE to authorize the Worker's Compensation Claim Settlement of Thomas Ruggiero as discussed in Executive Session.
MADE BY: MARRONE
SECONDED BY: CARMODY**

9. Executive Session pursuant to Section 1-200(6)(D) of the Connecticut General Statutes with respect to the purchase, sale and/or leasing of property – Mayor

**MOTION WAS MADE to go into Executive Session at 7:04pm.
MADE BY: TATTA**

SECONDED BY: ALLINSON

In attendance was Gerald Farrell Sr, Town Attorney, Tim Sena, Comptroller, Allison Kapushinski, Town Engineer, Mayor Cervoni, Allinson, Laffin, Regan, Tatta, Marrone, Carmody, Reynolds, and Tetsa.

10. Discussion and Analysis of the 2024 budget year-end audit (CAFR) – Vice Chair Tatta

Vice Chair Tatta went over in detail the audit budget year ending 2024. She discussed the Comptroller's Summary Letter. She discussed local economy and real estate increase in the letter.

Mayor Cervoni stated that the town will budget for what they need and not anymore than that. He stated that the mill rate is a calculation based upon the value of property to meet the town's total budget needs. The mill rate gets adjusted every year. It is incredibly rare that Wallingford has had the same mill rate from budget year to budget year. There is always some variation depending on if the budget goes up or if property values go up. It is likely that the mill rate will be reduced in the coming budget.

Mr. Sena said that a revaluation was done and the good thing is that everything went up which is good for the town and that should bring the mill rate down.

Vice Chair Tatta discussed the town's unemployment rate at the end of the fiscal year. It is 2% which was less than last year. Last year was 3.2% for unemployment. She discussed the Grand List growth of 1.08% over the prior year. She discussed the primary goal of the town is to maintain and expand a diversified and industrial real and commercial tax base. She discussed the town utilizing the remaining CRRA funds for capital or emergency needs.

Mr. Sena stated that the remaining balance of the CRRA funds is \$106,572.51.

Vice Chair Tatta spoke about the Police Headquarters and how it would affect the bonding. She also discussed the town's approach when paying cash for things to reduce debt and taxes. She thought that was a good approach. She discussed how much the town has had in reserves in the past and asked if there is a way to have a set amount detailed in the budget to have a good bond rating.

Mayor Cervoni said the town is always looking to keep the reserves at 10%.

Mr. Sena stated that the 10% is of the expenditure budget for the reserve fund. The 10% is what the town wants in un-designated of the total fund balance.

Chairman Marrone wanted to clarify that the line item on the budget of undesignated is where that 10% would come from.

Vice Chair Tatta wanted to congratulate Mr. Sena for getting an award for the audit. She discussed the Financial highlights of the audit. She mentioned the confusion with the surplus amount and wanted Mr. Sena to explain a little more in detail.

Mr. Sena stated that what councilor was looking at as far as numbers were all accounts for the town including utilities. He explained that the net change surplus was \$1.9 million in the general fund.

Vice Chair Tatta spoke about unassigned money that is in the general fund. Mr. Sena talked about the breakdown in fund balance from the audit report. She discussed the sections of the general fund from the audit report. She discussed the surplus each year and why there is one and what can possible be done for the next budget so there is not money in the general fund that just sits there. She discussed how to get the surplus money back to the tax payers. Mr. Sena stated that the budget each year is the road map for what the town is allowed to spend. He said the audit is the general overall health of the town. He used the Town of Southington as an example of their reserve funds.

Councilor Reynolds wanted to know if Mr. Sena knew the debt percentage that Southington was carrying. He talked about how much debt the town is allowed to carry. Mr. Sena stated that Wallingford's debt is lower than most towns but it will not be for long. He mentioned a few bonding projects that will increase the debt. The budget was discussed in further detail in terms of why there is a carryover amount of money each year.

Councilor Testa said if the carryover money was taken out of the equation then the budget would be easier to understand. He said that the budget needs that carryover money to balance the budget. He said you would have to go line by line of the budget to see who didn't spend all of the money they had asked for to see where the overage is. That is a daunting task. Mr. Sena said he can send the final expenditure report that explains where people did not spend their money. He also explained that if the carryover number was taken out of the budget the town would have to tax people more each year then they are doing now.

Chairman Marrone stated that salary is the number one thing that drives the surplus. He said filling the positions that you budgeted for would make the most sense. He asked why that carryover number fluctuates sometimes. Mr. Sena suggested that it is what the administration wants the mill rate to be as, is why that number fluctuates. The services the town provides was discussed.

Vice Chair Tatta discussed her suggestion for the previous budget which was to increase the carryover amount to justify not increasing taxes. The reduction of the contingency account was discussed. Mr. Sena stated that the town's contingency is very low for the budget. He said there are two components to the contingency fund. Salary from the Human Resources Department for contracts to move money around and the other for emergency use.

Councilor Allinson thinks the spreadsheet is great and does a good job of telling the story

of the budget for the town. She talked about the cost of living each year. She talked about the increase percentage employees get in town and how they have been low in the past at 1.9% for example. She also talked about the health insurance costs and how they have increased.

Councilor Laffin talked about the budget and how there is an active watch on spending. He talked about the 2021 budget and how it got vetoed. He stated that the budget is watched by the departments and by the Mayor and Finance. The bonds for the town was discussed.

Chairman Marrone talked about the 1%-2% accuracy and how the BOE spends their money differently than the town does. He talked about the unfilled positions and how that would play a role in the 1%-2% accuracy. Mr. Sena stated that if the departments don't spend the money they asked for it goes back and that is one of the reasons why the carryover money is never touched.

Councilor Reynolds talked about the debt for the town. The water treatment plant money was discussed.

Councilor Tatta discussed bonding for the town. Mr. Sena stated that if the town bonds a project they do have to raise taxes to pay the principal or interest. She highlighted the demographic pages in the audit. The BOE school bonds were discussed. She discussed the principal businesses in town. She discussed the public safety items in the audit.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen Panzo
Town Clerk

Meeting digitally recorded

Joseph A. Marrone III, Chairman

Date

Kristen Panzo, Town Clerk

Date

for effective communication in programs and services of the Town of Wallingford are invited to make their needs and preferences known to the ADA Compliance Coordinator at 203-294-2070 five days prior to meeting date..