

TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC SPEAKING MEETING

DECEMBER 15, 1998

6:30 P.M.

A meeting of the Wallingford Town Council held specifically for the purpose of offering the public an opportunity to speak on topics of concern to them was held on Tuesday, December 15, 1998 in the Robert Earley Auditorium of the Wallingford Town Hall and called to Order by Chairman Robert F. Parisi at 6:29 P.M. Councilors Centner, Knight, Parisi, Rys, Renda & Zandri were present. No Roll Call was taken. Mayor William W. Dickinson, Jr. was also in attendance. Town Attorney Janis M. Small and Comptroller Thomas A. Myers were absent from the meeting.

The Pledge of Allegiance was given to the Flag.

Reginald Knight, 21 Audette Drive was the only speaker to sign up to address the Council with his remarks.

Reginald Knight stated that he was disappointed that Mr. Farrell was unable to attend this meeting for he wished to thank him for assisting him with the motor vehicle assessment issue. He received a letter from Gerald Labriola, a member of the Board of Assessment Appeals stating that Mr. Farrell has contacted him and he will ask Robert DeMarco, Chairman of the Board of Assessment Appeals to place Reginald Knight's request for a hearing on the next meeting of their board scheduled for March of 1999.

Reginald Knight stated, at the October 20, 1998 Town Council Meeting Mr. Rys stated that he had spoken to a member of the Board of Assessment Appeals who stated that the board was only committing to one meeting and that they would not hold additional meetings. Mr. Farrell apparently took the issue further and was successful in getting some results and I wanted to thank Mr. Farrell personally for that.

Next Reginald Knight discussed the practice of posting trees to be removed in town. He referred to a tree that has been posted in front of a small store near the intersection of East Main Street and Durham Roads (Sala's Corner Store) stating that the tree had been posted forty-five (45) days before the tree had been cut down.

Councilor Knight stated, I followed up on your comments from the last meeting and called Henry McCully, Director of Public Works. Mr. McCully stated, the people who are contracted to cut the trees down do so at an unbelievably, unbelievably low price per tree; it is somewhere in the order of \$350 per tree. If that had been bid out, with any other tree removal firm, that would have cost at least

000 or more. There are times when we cut this firm a little slack when they run behind in this tree cutting for that reason. You may notice, as you just made note that you said at the last meeting that the tree had been posted for forty-one days, it came down at forty-five days. The fellow re-arranged his schedule to make sure that tree came down. I wanted to put forth some explanation which Mr. McCully would have been very happy to provide to you as well that we have a very, very, very favorable bid from a firm that is doing this work as quickly as they can. There are times, however, when they do get behind.

Reginald Knight stated, I noticed that an out of town firm was taking the tree down, don't we have any in town firms that would put up a decent bid?

Mr. Parisi stated, it is not up to us to go around looking for them. The Town posts the jobs and firms bid if they want to.

Next, Reginald Knight pointed out how signs are erected between North Main Street and North Elm Street (on Christian Street) which read, "No parking except admissions" in the Choate School area. Why did the Town put signs up like that?

Mayor Dickinson stated, undoubtedly it was at the request of Choate, I would assume. In order to facilitate the access to the Admissions Office; they must get quite a bit of traffic with people visiting the school and attending the school. I assume that it was at the request of Choate so that parking spaces would be made available for people who need to visit the Admissions Office.

Reginald Knight stated, what it did was give them a private parking lot. Townspeople who want to take their children to Moses Y. Beach (school) cannot park their cars their because Choate has it for their own private parking lot. The funny thing about it now is that the Town has taken the signs down. There was no real need for it in the first place or else they should not have taken them down.

The next topic of discussion Reginald Knight addressed was with regards to Mr. Barta, Assessor. He stated, the newspaper printed that, by the way things looked, these gentlemen (Assessor and Appraiser) were likely to get accelerated rehabilitation and after one or two years their record would be wiped clean. In that case, is the town due for any monies back; any reclamation for the amount of money that they were paid while they were in suspension and the amount of money that was paid by the Town for others to be hired to do their job? The Town has taken quite a hit on that; the taxpayer is getting hit. Here, if they get accelerated rehabilitation, then they are having no punishment and the taxpayer takes the whole brunt of it.

Mayor Dickinson replied, I don't think we would have any claim to receive funds back while they were employees of the Town. Once terminated, then of course, we don't owe them any salary.

...hile they were employees, they are entitled to their salary. We would be looking for re-payment for any money they might owe us on taxes that had not been paid over previous time but I do not believe that we have any claim to salary paid to them. My understanding of the law is that we do not have a claim for recovery of that money.

Reginald Knight next spoke to the issue of the open space recently purchased on Whirlwind, Durham and Cooke Roads. It is his opinion that the Town does not need any more open space on the east side and the gentleman who benefited from the purchase makes out the best all around. The map in the newspaper shows there is a great deal of greenery (open space) area on that side of town already. With the gun club and trap rock ridges, there is plenty of green in that area; it is a lop-sided situation.

Mayor Dickinson explained, that map is the Conservation Commission's plan for the town. They have slated the areas indicated on the map as appropriate for the Town to create conservation....to purchase areas for conservation. That is the Conservation Commission's view. Other people can have other views but the map you are referring to is from the Conservation Commission. The green area on that map is what the Conservation Commission is saying we should try to acquire. It does not mean that we own all of what that dark green is.

Mr. Centner commented, we are looking at this as what we think the town is going to look like in fifty to one hundred years. The center of Wallingford may not actually be in the center anymore. That east/west balance may be skewed by quite a bit as land is sold and developed and businesses come in. We are trying to keep that in mind as well.

Reginald Knight stated, it all comes down to, what is open land; what is green land; what is the purpose of what we are doing? Are we trying to hold down the population per square mile or what? Are we trying to hold back industry so that we don't have pollution? It seems the Cooke property was an unnecessary buy.

Mr. Centner stated, we did also try to secure land on the west side but that failed. We were trying to balance it around the town but the west side parcel failed with the two other parcels on the east side.

Reginald Knight stated, the gentleman seems to be getting a lot of money for land that is graded for \$600,000 homes on three acres.

With regards to the Patriots' Stadium issue, Reginald Knight stated that he agreed with the Mayor's comments made recently in the newspaper; that he had some reservations about the matter. Reginald Knight stated that the average taxpayer should not be paying for a ballfield. If McDonalds wanted to open up a franchise downtown, they would have to build it themselves. Why should the taxpayers pay for it? Why should the taxpayers pay so that one segment of the population can stand there and

cheer on a lot of overpaid athletes and give huge incomes to managers and owners of stadiums? I hope you keep fighting against that.

Reginald Knight invited the Councilmembers to take a walk around town and check out the condition of the streets. The downtown looks nice but there are streets in town along with several areas that are a disgrace. When I came here one night and talked about the tarmac and pitch that is stuck in between pavings, etc., I was told that it was temporary. Believe you me, I have been roaming these streets on foot for a good twenty-five to thirty years and some of those.....even the patches have patches; they are that old. They are up hill and down dale because of town trees that are located between the roads and the sidewalks. Is there a present sidewalk inspector?

Mr. Parisi responded, no.

Reginald Knight asked, why?

Mayor Dickinson stated, the individual who was the sidewalk inspector has left town employment. It is an open position that has to be filled. That was Joel Cassista who performed the work; he has been removed from town employment.

Reginald Knight stated, I am surprised that we had, up until one year ago, a sidewalk inspector and he has done nothing or reported nothing on the conditions of the sidewalks. Some of them are appalling. It is all right to drive down into town and get out of your car and walk to the store, that is very pretty. I heard the talk of what kind of impression people get when they exit the Wilbur Cross Parkway and enter town from that direction and how much better it will look when the work is done but that is not the whole town. The shopping area and what not is not the whole town; there are taxpayers out there who should have a right to a decent sidewalk and not trip and fall on them where it is heaved and or dropped and is patched, etc. How can our sidewalk inspector not see these things? Where does he walk?

Mayor Dickinson stated, what you have to keep in mind is that every year, this year for instance we have \$260,000 in the budget for sidewalk repair. Previous years had anywhere from \$200,000 to \$250,000 in the budget. That money is spent every year and it is not money for the downtown, it is funded in another place. This is all just repairs. Significant work is done every year in repairing sidewalks. Wherever it is occurring does not happen to be the place that you are familiar with but significant money is spent every year on repairing sidewalks.

Reginald Knight stated, if you knew me better you would know that anywhere east of Main Street I am familiar with. It (the work) must all be over on the west side someplace. Maybe he has been inspecting Cheshire or someplace.

Reginald Knight next stated that he would like to put his two cents worth in on the cellular tower issue that was voted down by the Planning & Zoning Commission.

Mr. Parisi stated, that issue has nothing to do with the Town Council.

Reginald Knight stated, Mr. Farrell commented that he had a cellular tower outside of his window which is, to say the least, stretching it a little bit. It is more like one-quarter to one-half a mile away. It is the one that is at the intersection of I-91 and East Center Street. That is quite a distance from his apartment. We seem to have this situation of "not in my backyard". This happens in a lot of things.

Mr. Parisi stated, that has been happening for years around here.

Reginald Knight stated, it seems to extend into the green areas around here.

Mr. Parisi answered, that is very normal.

Reginald Knight stated, a few weeks ago you had a meeting and there was no question what so ever raising by ten or fifteen feet the communications tower over on the west side for the police because there were "dead" spots. No one, no one commented about that at all. It is funny that everybody seems to want a cellular phone to get their business done but nobody wants it in their backyard. The strange thing about it, I have at the end of my driveway the ugliest looking telephone pole you ever saw and it had that electrical box with the PCBs in it. I am from Europe and I know it is very costly to go underground everywhere you would like to go so it is cheaper to go overhead, but they are ugly; there is nothing pretty about the telegraph poles with all the wires. And they are costly as well. Every time we have ice we have to call crews from out of state in to help us with them. So what is the big deal about the cellular towers?

Mr. Parisi stated, you don't have to see it. Everyone is entitled to their opinion and if there is a group of people that feel they do not want this in their neighborhood, it is their right to speak up for it.

Reginald Knight stated, I'll bet you that half of them have cellular phones.

Mr. Parisi stated, I have a cellular phone too but I don't want the tower where it is; down by the Junior Achievement either.

Reginald Knight stated, I don't think the towers are that ugly, not compared to some other ugly things around here.

Reginald Knight spoke briefly on the mayor's statements that the youths who had vandalized a number of cars uptown had been caught. He pointed out that the police did not catch the youths;

neone had spotted them in action and had called the police. He commented negatively about the paper and their reporting of events in Wallingford. It is his opinion that the Hartford Courant and New Haven Register do a much better job of covering Wallingford news.

Next Reginald Knight spoke on the issue of a few Town employees who were accused of skinning a deer on town time. He mentioned that Philip Wright, Sr. had spoke recently at a meeting about the practice of Town employees clocking each other in and out of work. He mentioned that any where he has worked in the past, if any employee clocked another out, both would be dismissed simultaneously. There would be no discussion of the matter. The Mayor seemed to hedge on the subject at that time as to what disciplinary action would be taken with those employees. Now we have them taking time to take a deer, gut it out, take it home and butcher it up, all on company time, he stated. That is theft. What is going to happen here?, he asked.

Mayor Dickinson answered, there will be discipline. I believe this occurred on a lunch hour which raises other questions about it but it is still inappropriate use of Town equipment as well as perhaps down time depending upon the exact amount of time that elapsed for it. There will be discipline.

Reginald Knight stated, every two minutes the town seems to be hiring an attorney that is a specialist something. We seem to have lawyers all over the place; Mr. Farrell, Jr., Mr. Farrell, Sr., two or three others who sit there; Mayor you, yourself, are an attorney.....

Mr. Parisi stated, Mr. Farrell, Jr. is an elected official.

Reginald Knight explained, yes, but his mind is there; he has his mind on what he is doing, that is why I had the good fortune to have this (letter from the Board of Assessment Appeals.) We have these people and yet, when we come to rules and regulations with regards to employees, things go on that would never be tolerated in the private sector. Every factory I worked in, and I have worked in a few, if you darted off and started taking time and sneaking around or doing anything of that nature or clocking someone else, they would not ask you if you were going to your grandfather's funeral or what have you, you were out.

Mr. Parisi asked Reginald Knight, didn't you work at International Silver Company?

Reginald Knight responded, with your father, sir.

Parisi reminded Reginald Knight how the employees had a lot of fun while working there.

Reginald Knight remembered positive and negative experiences while employed at International Silver Company. I don't think it is right what the employees are doing, clocking each other in and out and other incidents mentioned earlier.

Mayor Dickinson responded, we agree with you that these things are not right and there is discipline in the process and there will be discipline.

At this time Reginald Knight stated that he had concluded his remarks.

Mr. Parisi wished all present a happy holiday season.

Motion was made by Mr. Knight, seconded by Mr. Centner.

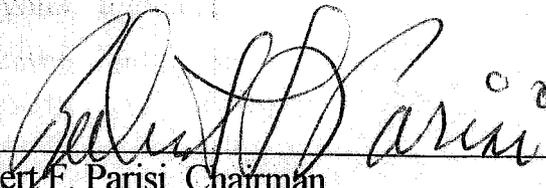
VOTE: Farrell, Papale and Zappala were absent; all others, aye; motion duly carried.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 7:00 P.M.

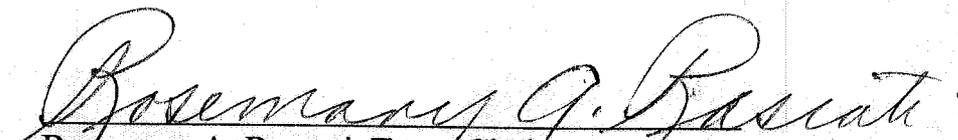
Meeting recorded and transcribed by:


Kathryn F. Zandri
Town Council Secretary

Approved by :


Robert F. Parisi, Chairman

1-12-99
Date


Rosemary A. Rascati, Town Clerk

Public Speaking Meeting

- 8 -

December 15, 1998

1-12-99

Date

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