

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 3 PRIMROSE STREET, NEWTOWN, CT
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12, 2020**

MINUTES

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE: Jordana Bloom, Alison Plante, Chris Smith, Phil Carroll, Ryan Knapp, Paul Lundquist, Chris Eide, Dan Wiedemann, Cathy Reiss, Andy Clure, Dan Honan

ABSENT: Judit DeStefano

ALSO PRESENT: First Selectman Dan Rosenthal, 3 public, 1 press.

CALL TO ORDER: Mr. Lundquist called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:32 pm.

VOTER COMMENT: None

MINUTES: Mr. Wiedemann moved to accept the minutes of the July 15, 2020 Legislative Council Regular Meeting. Seconded by Ms. Reiss. All in favor. Motion passes (11-0).

COMMUNICATIONS: One email was received by Council members referring to letter from Ms. Reiss to The Bee.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Education Committee – None

Finance Committee – None

Municipal Operations Committee – None

Ordinance Committee – None

FIRST SELECTMAN’S REPORT: First Selectman Dan Rosenthal began his report by thanking our emergency management team for their hard work in getting through the recent tropical storm. These included our volunteer fire department, dispatch, DPW, ambulance services, etc. The First Selectman asked the law firm of Cohen & Wolf to file a brief jointly with Ridgefield, which had similar results in terms of outages and restoration times. We were the second or third in the state in terms of most outages over the weekend and into final restoration. This brief will get filed with PURA for the town to join the investigation.

The Selectmen will be taking up year-end transfers at their next meeting. On a budget standpoint, we're north of \$700,000 in unspent funds, some of which will be requested to be moved to the new budget year. There will be some adjustments made as a result of things that didn't take place this budget year. One thing the First Selectman is looking into is upgrading technology and seating in the Council Chambers including new chairs, updating the camera system and upgrading the overhead. Net-net we should have a transfer into capital and non-recurring to either reduce bonding or reduce capital in future budgets. Assuming the Selectmen agree, we can expect to make a transfer of about \$530,000. However, we also may need to address storm cleanup using these funds, but overall we had good budget results this year for a variety of reasons including money not being spent due to Covid and unfilled positions.

The Selectmen did approve the Park & Rec retainer contract, which has a similar wage profile as the police contract. This one is a 3-year contract – 2.25 on wage each year; the first 2 years are 15% in terms of their contribution to insurance, and goes up to 16% in year 3. Their work hours have been modified to a change in half hour in both directions. There were no major changes on a pension standpoint.

In regards to the Sandy Hook Memorial Project, we have hired a construction manager. With the present funds available for the planning and design of the project, we carved out enough money to bring them on board to do

the pre-construction work. The final project has not been approved yet. The sum total of the current contract is about \$38,000.

The Police project is moving ahead on time and on budget. The hardscapes have been poured outside, the binder code for the parking lot and access road will come later this month, and some interior carpet and tiles have been laid down.

Under the previous Council, there was a grant secured and money appropriated to preserve property at Castle Hill Farm located at the corner of Sugar Street and Sugar Lane. That grant was restrictive and the Paproski family decided to step away from that. We applied for a new grant through The Connecticut Farmland Trust which has been selected. We are in the final stages of working out an easement for that. There currently is an active appropriation for it so the money is available. The original grant would have had a town contribution of \$450,000, but this one will now be a town contribution of about \$300,000 and the rest will stay in the debt service fund. This will help to preserve the developable land there which is about 31 acres.

OLD BUSINESS

Discussion and Possible Action

- Discussion of potential referendum question to consider allowing housing within existing buildings at the Fairfield Hills campus as part of Fairfield Hills Master Plan Review Committee recommendation

See attachment A. Mr. Lundquist shared different variations of the question. Mr. Smith commented that he is concerned about using the terms “renovation” and “restoration” in the proposed question because they are very specific construction terms and may limit what a potential developer may want to do. He feels a term like “renovation/development” or “development” would give someone the proper perspective. Ms. Reiss prefers the term “renovation”, but feels variation 1 is the better option in that it takes out the statement “consistent with the vision of the property” in that the vision would be assumed given the look of the remaining buildings. She also feels the revised proposed question is too wordy. Mr. Lundquist spoke on the statement “consistent with the vision of the property” and the intent of it are to help put the public's minds at ease so they don't feel there could potentially be strange, odd-fitting buildings – it would keep with the look of the campus and existing buildings. The First Selectman agrees that putting it simply as “commercial development” would prevent people from getting too hung up in specific terminology, but that it should specify that it will only be two existing buildings consistent with the architectural vision of the property. Mr. Wiedemann asked to confirm whether these renovations will be kept within the current footprint of the buildings and nothing is to be added onto the buildings, and whether a comment about this should be added. Mr. Smith feels we should keep it very limited - those buildings were originally built as a mental institution so he thinks the footprint will need to be altered at some point. Ms. Reiss added that one of the takeaways from the survey that went around was the resident's concern about not wanting to spend more money on adding developments and/or demolishing the buildings and whether we should add something within the question addressing this concern. Mr. Lundquist stated that this would be something to add in the explanatory text rather than the question itself. The First Selectman agreed – the question should be specific but short and to the point. Mr. Lundquist stated that we will circle back on this subject during next week's meeting and possibly take a motion on it.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion and Possible Action

- Acceptance of Affordable Housing Plan Technical Assistance Grant

Mr. Smith moved to accept the grant award of the Affordable Housing Plan Technical Assistance Program in the amount of \$6,500. Seconded by Ms. Reiss. All in favor. Motion passes (11-0).

- Letter of concern regarding Eversource electrical service delivery charges

Mr. Lundquist explained that Mr. Clure brought this to him because of the outrage brewing over a substantial increase in delivery charges to people's electric bills. The idea was that we can help raise concern on behalf of Newtown residents. Since then we have learned that PURA has suspended these new delivery charges and holding them to June levels while they investigate. Presently, there is even more concern being raised over Eversource's response to the storm damage and outages. We are pursuing legal action as a town and taking positive tangible steps towards a resolution. Mr. Clure explained that these bills have two major components – supply and delivery charges which comprise of a transmission fee which went up 46% from the June bill; and an FMCT delivery charge which went up 92% from the June bill. Mr. Clure continued by applauding the First Selectman's efforts and hard work in dealing with this issue. First Selectman Rosenthal commented that Mr. Clure is on the right track. As he understands it, the rate increase has been suspended, but is not certain how the suspended rate and/or crediting will be handled. He urged customers to pay their bill and it would either get credited back to you or catch up in future payments – this is to be determined. He feels it would be worthwhile to send a letter but would like to follow the State Delegation as to when this matter will be taken up and try to time sending a letter around that. Mr. Knapp stated that Representative Mitch Bolinsky confirmed that there will be a hearing on August 24th in regards to the rate increase. We should submit letters as a Council group, and even as an individual level. The First Selectman suggested that we should submit a letter before this hearing. Mr. Clure agrees that a letter should be drafted, and whatever will be the most impactful will be the best course of action to represent the residents of Newtown. Mr. Eide understood the rate hikes were derived from the purchase of nuclear power plants by Eversource to keep them afloat as they were not able to compete with fossil fuels on the market. He urged that we keep in mind the context of the letter and the protestation is on behalf of our constituents who are impacted by this negatively. He doesn't believe this is a cost that should be passed directly onto them but we should keep in mind the price increase is really being done to mitigate the effects of climate change. Mr. Knapp wanted to clarify that Millstone is one of the things Eversource pointed at initially behind the reasoning, but our Representative Allie-Brennan clarified that it's more complicated than that. There is a FERC transmission rate increase and previous rate recovery settlement which had implications. Mr. Eide believes we should be looking for market based solutions and doesn't necessarily think the government should have a say in picking the winners and losers. We shouldn't be subsidizing alternative energy sources or renewables and it's just to protect the Newtown residents from these rate increases. The First Selectman's position on it is that the residents of Connecticut, who already pay one of the top three highest energy prices in the U.S., to receive such a significant rate increase in just one month is just not sustainable. Mr. Wiedemann would rather see the letter first to authorize it before it being sent out. Mr. Carroll says we just send the letter

Ms. Reiss moved that we delegate our Legislative Council Chairman to sign a letter to Eversource. Seconded by Mr. Carroll.

Mr. Knapp confirmed that PURA is actually the party holding the hearing, not Eversource.

Ms. Reiss withdrew her original motion.

Ms. Reiss moved to authorize our Legislative Council Chairman to sign a letter to PURA regarding the energy costs. Seconded by Mr. Carroll. All in favor. Motion passes (11-0).

Mr. Lundquist stated that he will show all Council members a copy of the final letter before being sent out.

VOTER COMMENT: None

ANNOUNCEMENTS: None

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, Mr. Wiedemann moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 pm. Seconded by Mr. Clure. All in favor.

*Respectfully submitted,
Rina Quijano, Clerk*

**THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
AT THE NEXT MEETING.**

DRAFT

LOCAL QUESTION WORDING FOR REFERENDUM:

REVISED / PROPOSED:

Should the town of Newtown consider commercial **renovation** proposals at the Fairfield Hills campus that include a housing component, provided that any given proposals specify a **housing component** would be limited to no more than two of the existing buildings and that development is consistent with the **architectural vision** for the property?

Yes

No

ORIGINAL:

Should the Town of Newtown consider commercial **development** proposals at the Fairfield Hills campus that include a housing component, provided that any given proposal is for no more than two existing buildings and that development is consistent with the **vision** for the property?

VARIATION 1:

Should the town of Newtown consider commercial **restoration** proposals at the Fairfield Hills campus that include a housing component, provided that a housing component would be limited to no more than two of the existing buildings?

[NO STATEMENT RE "CONSISTENT WITH THE VISION FOR THE PROPERTY"]

VARIATION 2:

Should the Town of Newtown consider commercial **development** proposals at the Fairfield Hills campus that include a housing component, provided that any given proposal **specify renovation of** no more than two of the existing buildings and that development is consistent with the vision for the property?