



**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
MIDDLETOWN CONNECTICUT**

PUBLIC HEARING: FY 2020-2021 BUDGET

**JUNE 4, 2020
6:00 PM**

MINUTES

The Special Meeting of the Common Council of the City of Middletown was held remotely via WebEx and livestreamed on the City of Middletown's Facebook page on Thursday, June 4, 2020 at 6:00 PM.

Present: Councilwoman Jeanette Blackwell
Councilwoman Meghan Carta
Councilman Grady Faulkner, Jr.
Councilman Darnell Ford
Councilman Edward Ford, Jr.
Councilman Anthony Gennaro, Sr.
Councilman Vincent Loffredo.
Councilman Anthony Mangiafico
Councilman Edward McKeon
Councilman Eugene Nocera
Councilman Philip Pessina
Councilwoman Linda Salafia

Also Present: Mayor Benjamin D. Florsheim, Chair
Linda Reed, Council Clerk

Members of the Public: WebEx (12 attendees) and Facebook livestream (unknown number of viewers)

1. Call to Order

Mayor Benjamin Florsheim calls the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

The Clerk reads the Call of the Meeting and the Chair declares the call a legal call and the meeting a legal meeting.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

The Chair asks Councilman Philip Pessina to display the American flag. He invites the Councilmembers to join in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Public Hearing Opens -- FY 2020-2021 City of Middletown Budget

The Chair welcomes everyone to the public hearing for the proposed FY 2020-2021 budget. He explains that, over the past few weeks, the Common Council has held several meetings to review the budget as he proposed. A copy of the proposed budget is available for public viewing on the City website along with his budget address. There have been three (3) very thorough workshops over the past weeks. The recordings of these meetings can be viewed on the City website. The budget was reviewed department by department for this proposed budget. They are proud to have put together a budget that does right by the taxpayers as well as invests in the City. The Councilmembers have been working very hard, noting that both caucuses review the proposed budget – every element – making recommendations and offering improvements. They are proud to work together in this process, adding that it is going smoothly so far. He appreciates the efforts of all parts, especial during these difficult times. Tonight they are here to listen to anyone with comments on the budget, speaking either virtually or by writing in. They are welcome to offer feedback to questions about this budget. It is an opportunity for the public to speak and for both the Chair, as mayor, and the Councilmember to listen. They appreciate the involvement of the public and Councilmember's alike.

The Chair declares the public hearing open at 6:07 PM. Any member of the public wishing to speak may indicate by raising their hand using the WebEx function. When called on, they are asked to state their name and address for the record and their comments are limited to a five (5) minutes

Unnamed Speaker: This speaker asks that the Council waive the requirement to allow members of the public to speak and to remain anonymous as a public safety concern. If there is a fear of dishonesty, the argument against that is (1) those who are dishonest rarely go thru the legal democratic process and (2) they have elected, and rely upon her elected officials, to use better judgment to determine if their testimony is true. This is his first acknowledgement. His main point is that he wishes as do many in the community, wishes to have the Police Department.

Councilman Vincent Loffredo interjects with a point of order.

The Chair calls on Councilman Vincent Loffredo.

Councilman Loffredo states that it is not appropriate. He asks if the Corporation Counsel Daniel Ryan is available.

The Chair states that Corporation Counsel Ryan is not in attendance this evening.

Councilman Grady Faulkner, Jr. moves that the Council does not to receive comments from any anonymous speaker.

Councilman Loffredo concurs, adding that a speaker providing name and address is required by the Council rules.

The Chair states that he leaves it to the Council to elect whether or not they want to waive this rule.

Councilman Faulkner reminds the body that there is a motion on the floor; namely, he has moved that they do not accept any anonymous comments. Councilman Vincent Loffredo seconds the motion.

The speaker agrees to provide his name and address.

Councilman Faulkner withdraws his motion.

Tristan Donaldson (15 Tall Timbers Road): He speaks to his main point: defunding the Middletown Police Department. He asserts that this is a widespread feeling across the community and across the nation. The police department has failed to deescalate any sort of conflict that has been happening in this nation. He asks if not their purpose to deescalate any sort of State-sanctioned violence. They have the unnecessary usage of military grade hardware sitting in the Middletown Police Department. There have armored vehicles close to takes. They have uniformed police with assault rifles. He does not believe that anyone in Middletown would see that here is any call for this in this community. We have no reason to treat our cities like war zones. If the concern is that crime rates and violence would increase from defunding the police department, then it is ridiculous given that we are currently in a global pandemic and that no member of the public wants to be out in public but any are out there protesting and making motions for their on livelihoods., their own lives. The fact that people think crime would increase, especially now and especially when the police are not doing their best effort to decrease violence on a nationwide scale is clearly ridiculous. He believes money could be better spent towards this committee of racial unity that was put forward at the Council meeting on Monday (June 1, 2020) or towards education or towards public safety and public health, preventative measures that would keep people from being sick and keep people from committing crimes. Policing is a reactive measure. If you call the police and there is crime in progress, or a crime that has been done, preventative measure like having employment, having income, reducing poverty, reducing public health issues, increasing mental health availability is a better and more true and more relatable preventative cause towards removing crime from our City. If people think that the dream of not having any policing is a dream, an impossible dream, he was it is better than the nightmare in which we currently live. He yields his remaining.

Stephen Devoto (476 Country Club Road): He thanks the Council for putting together a budget with no tax increases. They have worked in many ways to use the City's resources in new and creative ways, which will help the City. He wants to address the budget. He is not calling for full defunding of the Police Department; rather, he wants to address two (2) things... First, quick and simple: he urges the Council to understand why the Finance Department would propose a budget for next year at \$14,876,067 when the mayor's proposed budget was \$400,000 more at \$15,267,149. The current 2020 budget is only \$12M. He reiterates: the year to date budget is \$12M; Finance has proposed \$14.8M; and the Mayor proposed \$15.2M. Citizens need to understand why that increase happened. One more slightly complicated item, which is not apparent in the numbers, is the question about their military-style assault vehicle the City owns. He thinks it is important to break out the cost of that vehicle. He thinks, if it's needed, adding that he personally does not think it is, it should be studied. The cost of this item to the legislative body should be made clearer than it is. How much does it add for tires, which is \$18,000 in the budget. Vehicle service is \$8,000; SWAT is \$8,000; special operations detail is \$10,300; vehicle modems is \$39,000; and specialized ammunition is \$84,000. He does not know that the City should be spending some of its money on this kind of vehicle. He adds that, as all Councilmembers know he is chairman of the Planning & Zoning Commission, and he appreciates that the budget is hard to put together and increases are very difficult to justify at any time; however, the Comino has discussion for the past three (3) years with the Director e, each year, transitioning to digital formats for their applications, including materials for Commissioners and for people on line. That request is not in this year's budget and he does not blame the Council for not putting it in; however, he regrets that the City is not moving to digital processing and review of Planning & Zoning and land use materials. He thanks the Council for their time and hard work. He adds that, it may be surprise, but having listened to Monday's Council meeting (June 1, 2020), there was discussion of regarding a Commission for Anti-racism. The Mayor's proposal to add \$27,000 for something called Human relations Commission Anti-Racism work. He thinks it could potentially be valuable; however, he wants to echo Sacha Armstrong's comments at the meeting that for no money whatsoever, there are things on the table that are concrete steps that need to be taken. He does not want the Council to feel that creating a commission and providing money is more important than actually taking action on policies of the Police Department. These actions should be a much higher priority and happen first, or at least in parallel, with the spending on money on commissions. Thank you.

The Chair asks if there are any other speakers in the queue. The Council Clerk confirms that there are no other speakers; however, there is a letter from a member of the public submitted with the request that it be read into the record.

-----Original Message-----

From: Julia Dumaine <julia.k.dumaine@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, June 4, 2020 9:04 AM
To: Reed, Linda <Linda.Reed@MiddletownCT.Gov>
Cc: Mayor's Internet Email <Mayor@MiddletownCT.Gov>
Subject: 2020-2021 Budget Hearing Written Comments Submission

Hello,

My name is Julia Dumaine and I am a resident of Middletown, Connecticut. I am unable to attend tonight's public hearing so I am writing this letter to strongly encourage that our city council, mayor and police department actively listen to, and carefully consider the demands that others have submitted to the Council on how to reform our Police Department. Despite having a police force that has a generally good relationship with the community, Middletown is not immune to these problems as recently recounted by our State Representative, Quentin Phipps, in a Facebook Livestream.

Real change comes from real people who are willing to take a stand. By running for these offices, you have pledged yourself to the betterment of Middletown. As you consider the proposed budget, please ask yourselves "how does this proposed budget correlate with these demands and progress for justice and civil rights?" Considering current events, I am not convinced that an addition of one police officer will make a major difference in our community, or that it effectively answers this question in a way that will satisfy the community.

Defending justice and civil liberties begins at the local level. It is your responsibility, in your capacity as local leaders, to uphold this for our neighbors and fellow citizens.

Black lives matter.

Thank you,

Julia Dumaine

P.S.- I strongly support the allocation of a \$50,000 increase towards the tree planting budget.

The Council Clerk states that there is a new speaker in the queue to address the Councilmembers.

Joshua Frey (31 Miller Street): He is speaking on the issue of divesting funds from the Police. He believes that most people have a knee jerk reaction to say, "What about the Murders? What about the crime?" He notes that that is a job that (inaudible) should be doing, adding that, calling the police for domestic disputes or a mental health crisis, or behaving erratically is useless (inaudible) and can (inaudible) very quickly. We can have an urgent respondent, who knows the community and is trained in behavioral and mental health and de-escalation while, most importantly, unarmed, show up to keep that person safe and get them the help that they need. Public safety doesn't have to look like using (inaudible) as a weapon by force. He believes that we ask too much of the police to handle many situations, which require more nuance and stewardship, meeting people where they are at. He challenges the notion that police actually increase safety rather than being an institution of intimidation and (inaudible). Around the country, and around the world, there has been news of the police using excessive force on peaceful protestors. He asks that Councilmembers ask themselves why this is happening. With discussion of a community review board in a meeting earlier this week and with the racial review board, he thinks there should be research as to what efforts the Council wants to take in that measure or if it is something where people feel that comfortable that security exists, but nothing actually happens. He asks that the Council consult Faith Jackson, who spoke last week regarding concrete steps that can be taken. They should also be striving to build a stronger community as many will face an inability to pay rent next month and many are still out of work due to the COVID pandemic. He watched the video clips on Facebook and was impressed how he addressed the voters, express sentiments like, "I can't imagine this happening in Middletown," or "How do we make sure that this doesn't happen here?" He brought a sobering reality to the table, saying it is already happening here and discussed his own personal incidents with racial profiling. He said it wasn't until he proved that he was the one signing the officer's paychecks that he was let go. That happens here and it has to stop. Thankyou. He waives his time.

The Council Clerk verifies that there are currently no other individuals from the public in the queue looking to speak.

The Chair asks if there are any additional comments.

There being no additional speakers, the Chair thanks the public for being involved in this process. They were hoping for a larger participatory process, adding that there have been limitations. They are glad that this form is available to bring this process online. They will continue to take public feedback over the next few weeks as they finalize the budget process. The Chair thanks the Councilmembers for their feedback.

4. Public Hearing Closes

The Chair closes the public hearing at 6:25 PM.

5. Meeting adjourned

There being no further business, the Chair asks for a motion to adjourn.

Councilman Philip Pessina moves to adjourn. Councilman Eugene Nocera seconds the motion.

There being no discussion the Chair calls for a vote. The motion to adjourn is approved unanimously by a vote of 12 to 0. (Councilmembers Blackwell, Carta, Faulkner, D. Ford, E. Ford, Gennaro, Loffredo, Mangiafico McKeon, Nocera, Pessina, and Salafia). The matter is approved unanimously.

The meeting is adjourned at 6:27 PM.

ATTEST:
LINDA S.K. REED,
COMMON COUNCIL CLERK

K: review/ minutes/ 2020 June 04 – budget public hearing – 04 June 2020