



**SPECIAL COMMON COUNCIL MEETING
QUESTIONS TO DIRECTORS WORKSHOP**

**TUESDAY, JULY 5, 2022
6:00 PM**

MINUTES

A Special Meeting of the Common Council of the City of Middletown, Questions to Directors, was held on Tuesday, July 5, 2022, beginning at 6:00 PM. This meeting was a hybrid meeting with in-person participation in the Common Council Chamber and remote access via WebEx. The meeting was also simultaneously livestreamed on local cable access television, on the City's webpage and on the City's Facebook page.

Present:

Councilwoman Jeanette Blackwell	Councilman Anthony Mangiafico
Councilwoman Grady Faulkner, Jr.	Councilman Edward McKeon
Councilman Anthony Gennaro, Sr.	Councilman Eugene Nocera
Councilman Vincent Loffredo	Councilman Philip Pessina
	Councilwoman Linda Salafia

Mayor Benjamin D. Florsheim, Chair
Linda Reed, Clerk of the Common Council
Officer Silvestri, Sargent-at-Arms

Absent: Councilwoman Meghan Carta; Councilman Darnell Ford; and Councilman Edward Ford, Jr.

Also Present:

City & Town Clerk – Ashley Flynn-Natale, CCTC
Communications – Robert Grauer, Deputy Director
Economic & Community Development – Barbara Knoll Peterson, Acting Director
Fire Department – Chief John Woron
Police Department – Officer Silvestri
Public Works – Christopher Holden, PE, Director
Recreation & Community Services – Catherine Lechowicz, Director
Recycling Coordinator – Kim O'Rourke
Technology Services – Brianna Skowera, Director
Water & Sewer Department -- Joseph Fazzino, Director

Absent: Arts & Culture – Kisha Michael, Coordinator; Assessor -- Damon Braasch, CCMA II; Equal Opportunity & Diversity Management – Faith Jackson, Director; Finance – Carl Erlacher, CPA, Director; General Counsel – Brig Smith, Esq; Health Department – Kevin Elak, Director; Human Resources Division – Justin Richardson, Division Director; Land Use – Marek Kozikowski, Director; Library – Ramona Burkey, Director; Youth Services – Justin Carbonella, MPA, Coordinator

Public: online: unknown WebEx: 7 Facebook: unknown

1. Call to Order

Mayor Benjamin Florsheim calls the meeting to order at 6:02 PM. He welcomes everyone to the Special Meeting of the Common Council, Questions to Directors. The Chair asks Councilman Philip Pessina to lead the Common Council in the Pledge of Allegiance

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

2. Questions to Directors Workshop Opens – Question of Regular Meeting Agenda Items

The Chair opens Questions to Directors at 6:05 PM.

The Chair calls on Councilman Vincent Loffredo.

Councilman Loffredo calls on someone to speak to the resolution on the partnership program. He asks if there is anyone present to speak to this matter, having comprehensive knowledge of the proposed MOU.

The Chair notes that Public Works Director Christopher Holden is present and would probably be best to speak to this item.

Councilman Loffredo asks Director Holden if the City has done this in the past. Is this a new arrangement with Eversource or is it something that we have done traditionally over the past several years.

Director Holden replies that he does not believe that they have done this in the past. It is a new program that we are teaming up on. They provide the funding and the City provides, essentially, an outreach program to better educate Middletown residents on energy efficiency program so that funds can get out to the community.

Councilman Loffredo asks, at the end of the day, if they are giving us anything in particular financially.

Director Holden replies, "Yes," noting that the grant is up to \$55K. The City is off to a late start with the program. It was originally to have started in January. It runs to the end of the year. The City can get up to \$55K, adding that he believes it will be something less than that.

Councilman Loffredo asks how the community will be made aware of the program.

Director Holden replies that the funding is based on getting the word out. There is an educational campaign to get information into the community. They will develop a plan, working with Kim O'Rourke in his office to develop how they will get that information out. They are helping people convert from fossil fuels to heat pumps, more insulation, and other home improvements for energy efficiency, including how they might go about getting Eversource funding or other available programs. He states that is the HESIE: Home Energy Solutions Income Eligible. This is for medium to low income household, noting that there is more funding available for those.

Councilman Loffredo asks if it will be extended so that they get a full year or is it a half year.

Director Holden notes that the program will run to the end of this year. They do their best they can to expend the funds and get the information out during that time period.

Councilman Loffredo notes that the Clean Energy Task Force, which he serves on with Councilman Ford and which Director Holden staffs, has the Task Force been part of this.

Director Holden replies, "Yes," that it is actually back when Michael Harris was with the City. He applied for this funding about a year ago for this funding he prepared the grant application.

Councilman Loffredo asks, as a follow-up, he knows that Mr. Harris is no longer with the City. He asks where things stand in terms of replacing, finding someone available to do the work that Mr. Harris did? Is something being worked out?

Director Holden states that it is in the budget, the Public Works budget. They are working on the job description to get that flushed out, that person will be hired eventually.

Councilman Loffredo asks what was budgeted. What will the remuneration be?

Director Holden replies that it will be about \$55K. He is not 100% sure.

The Chair calls on Councilwoman Jeanette Blackwell.

Councilwoman Blackwell has a follow-up on the home energy program. She asks what the income level is. She does not see it in the materials.

Director Holden replies that he does not know that off the top of his head, the cap for household income.

Councilwoman Blackwell adds that she believes that a lot of people will be interested in that program. Thank you.

The Chair states that they will get the details on that. The Chair calls on Councilman Philip Pessina.

Councilman Pessina states that, along with Councilwoman Blackwell's question, he asks if it is Director Holden's plan to work with the Ministerial Alliance and . . . They were instrumental in getting inoculations out for Covid at that level. He suggests that Director Holden contact them as well as "Gary" with Community Health Center as they have the contacts. He is glad for the income level that they are addressing for the same opportunities as all of us. Thank you.

The Chair adds that developing partnerships is what this is all about, continuing work. The Chair asks if there are any additional questions for Director Holden. He adds that as for the Councilman's question about the budget number, he believes that it was in the budget salaried at about \$85K - \$90K There was also a separate line for use towards that and clean energy projects. They will get the details. In terms of the hiring process, that is where we are.

Councilman Loffredo thanks the Chair.

The Chair asks if there are any additional questions. The Chair calls on Councilman Edward McKeon.

Councilman McKeon states that he is not sure if his question goes to a specific director he has a question, in the past week, there has been information about the State fair rent statute. Middletown has to respond to that. He asks if there is someone designated to respond to it and what the status is.

The Chair replies that he can speak to that because it has been a subject of discussion among multiple departments. It has not yet been decided if one department will own it or if it will be directed through the Mayor's Office and throughout the City. He adds that the new law, which Councilman McKeon is referring to, is a law written and introduced by our State Representative Q. Williams. This law requires that all municipalities with populations of 25,000+ establish a Fair Rent Commission to hear complaints, from tenants and landlords, with the hope of being able to resolve rental rates and that sort of thing. Although it is a little bit limited in terms of our understanding of any enforcement actions that the City would be able to take, gives some ability to that Commission to take action and to overturn decisions made by landlords for rental increase that are shown to be unjustified or capricious. That is something that we welcome and are excited to be able to set up, something that we could not have before, it is something that we need around the State, but is now being required. We want to make sure that, in light of that requirement; we set up a commission that is empowered to do good work. We have been working with Economic & Community Development, General Counsel Office, Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Management, the Jones Fund and a number of other departments to try to wrap our hands around the best fit moving forward. The hearing, as he imagines, from some of the same people, who desire to have something that is going to be effective. There is a housing crisis all over the State, a housing affordability crisis all over the State. We are no stranger to it here, especially moving toward developing new housing to try to alleviate that. We are going to have to make sure that the City is set up to hear those complaints, these issues, and resolve them before they become issues. One thing that Representative Williams has been talking about with the City -- that we have been hearing from housing advocates around the State -- is that, in general, the disputes that these Commissions resolve do not lead to enforcement. They resolve them as sort of similar to how the Board of Assessment Appeals can sometimes work with both parties to come to an agreeable outcome. The goal here as the legislation was written, as is their understanding, will also give us that enforcement power where it is needed. It is a nascent process and we are taking it very seriously, he hopes that Middletown can be a leader as we set these up around the State.

Councilman McKeon thanks the Chair.

The Chair calls on Councilman Vincent Loffredo.

Councilman Loffredo states that, as a follow, every municipality with a population of 25,000 or more is involved. He asks, since the Mayor's Office is familiar with this new requirement, has the State providing any financial assistance to implement . . . staffing, requirements, and all the rest. He asks if the Chair knows if there is any money with this new requirement.

The Chair replies that they have not. One of the things that they are trying to figure out how to handle effectively is that we don't believe that this can be an effective commission as all volunteer. We have seen, have attempted things along these lines in the past, and especially given the nature of the issues involved, the professional support to achieve the mission that it is set up to support. They are anticipating that the costs to the City will be and are trying to prepare for that as part of the process. Part of that will be working with the State to see what types of support they may be able to provide.

Councilman Loffredo asks what the timeline is for municipalities of our size to implement.

The Chair replies that it is June or July 2023, which, in many respects, is a sort of, to ensure that municipalities are getting underway and taking this seriously. It is a deadline that Middletown met, but many municipalities did not meet. It relates to the newly required affordable housing plans that are required.

Councilman Loffredo states that, on the average, we are doing more than our fair share community wise, noting that there is always more to be done. Unfortunately, when we look at the reports and such, it is sort of looking at that other communities are doing little or nothing. He does not know why 25,000 is the magic number population, why not 20,000, 10,000, or 15,000, noting that is for some other argument. What is very disturbing to him, given the need that is there and in this community, can shape up and willingly be a part of doing this in an appropriate way, but clearly not the kind of thing where comments are well taken. He believes that just a bunch of volunteers can show up and be trained to understand the responsibility and parameters and all the rest. He thinks that we need to talk to the legislative delegation that they need to provide financial assistance and training and whatever that would help to make this a venture, a service that is needed. Thank you.

The Chair agrees with these comments, adding that they want to make sure that it is effective as it moves forward and these partnerships and funding are important. The Chair calls on Councilman Philip Pessina.

Councilman Pessina states a little help here. He believes that there is a housing coalition in the City and we should not have the burden on us alone. We have done well in the history of the City with the public and private partnerships. He respectfully suggest that they contact the Chamber and see if they can get the banking institutions on board. He notes that he was on a committee in early . . . at the end of last term and beginning of this term . . . involving the housing coalition, involving Liberty Bank and the banks. As a respectful suggestion, that may be something that the Mayor can turn to and do a total community collaboration of this new law. Maybe we can be a model for the rest of these communities because we can do it. We have a track record. Thank you.

The Chair notes that this reminds him of something worth mentioning in these conversations. While it is a Fair Rent Commission set up to handle issues that arise between renters and landlords, the solution for housing, more broadly, in making it more affordable in Middletown and Connecticut has to do with home ownership and first-time home ownership. He knows that there are partnerships between realtors, banks, and businesses that have happened in Middletown in the past. He notes that Councilman Pessina mentioned that he was involved along with others, as this process is taken underway. First time ownership and affordable owner, you are right, we have to look at all of the above. This is one of the ways that we can.

3. Questions to Directors Workshop Closes

There being no further question, the Chair closes Questions to Director at 6:20 PM.

4. Meeting adjourned

Councilman Vincent Loffredo moves to adjourn. Councilwoman Jeanette Blackwell seconds the motion.

There being no discussion, the Chair calls for a voice vote. The motion to adjourn is approved unanimously by a vote of 9-0 (AYE: Councilmembers Blackwell, Faulkner, Gennaro, Loffredo, Mangiafico, McKeon, Nocera, Pessina, and Salafia; ABSENT: Councilmembers Carta, D. Ford, and E. Ford). The matter is approved.

The meeting is adjourned at 6:20 PM

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

K: review/ minutes/ 22 July 05 – Ques to Directors – 5 July 2022