



**COMMON COUNCIL
MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT**

**SPECIAL MEETING
QUESTIONS TO DIRECTORS**

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2021
6:00 PM**

MINUTES

A Special Meeting of the Common Council of the City of Middletown, Questions to Directors, was held as a hybrid meeting on Monday, December 6, 2021, beginning at 6:00 PM. In-person participation was held in the Council Chamber at the Municipal Building, and remote participation was held via WebEx. The meeting was also livestreamed on the City of Middletown webpage and the City's Facebook page.

Present:

Councilwoman Meghan Carta	Councilman Edward McKeon
Councilman Grady Faulkner, Jr.	Councilman Eugene Nocera
Councilman Darnell Ford	Councilman Edward McKeon
Councilman Anthony Gennaro, Sr.	Councilman Philip Pessina
Councilman Vincent Loffredo	

Mayor Benjamin D. Florsheim, Chair
Linda Reed, Clerk of the Common Council
Officer Nettis, Middletown Police – Sargent-At-Arms

Absent: Councilwoman Jeanette Blackwell; Councilman Edward Ford, Jr.; and Councilwoman Linda Salafia

Also Present:

Arts Coordinator – Kisha Michael
Assessor – Damon Braasch, CCMA II
City & Town Clerk – Ashley Flynn-Natale, CCTC
Communications – Wayne Bartolotta, Director
Economic & Community Development – Joseph Samolis, Director
Finance & Revenue Services – Carl Erlacher, CPA, Director
Fire Department – Jay Woron, Fire Chief
General Counsel – Brig Smith, Esq. & Christopher Forte, Esq.
Health Department – Kevin Elak, Acting Director
Human Resources – Justin Richardson, Director
Land Use – Marek Kozikowski, Director
Library – Ramona Burkey, Director
Police Department – Erik Costa, Police Chief
Public Works – Christopher Holden, PE, Deputy Director
Recreation & Community Services – Catherine Lechowicz, Director
Water & Sewer Department -- Joseph Fazzino, Director
Youth Services – Justin Carbonella, MPA, Coordinator

Public: In-Person: unknown WebEx: none Facebook: unknown

1. Call to Order

Mayor Benjamin Florsheim calls the meeting to order at 6:08 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 Opens

The Chair opens Questions to Directors at 6:10 PM.

Before taking questions, the Chair states that there are some housekeeping items. First, when a Director is called to answer questions for a Councilmember, that Director will remain to continue to take questions from any other Councilmembers. This will eliminate having several people going back and forth. This is for efficiency. There are Councilmembers and Directors both in the Chamber and on WebEx, so they will switch between these locations. Finally, they will adjourn this meeting, followed by a short break before the regular meeting. The Chair calls on Councilman Eugene Nocera.

Councilman Nocera calls on Technology Services Director Bryan Skowera. He states that his question is on the proposed upgrade of Administrative Secretary II to Administrative Secretary III. He adds that he was at the General Councils Commission meeting so he does not have a question as it was explained fully and approved unanimously. He is asking for the bent of the full Council, asking that Director Skowera explain why this upgrade is important.

Director Skowera states that the Technology Services Department recently had a vacancy when the Administrative Secretary II took a promotional position in another department, leaving his office position vacant. Following protocol, any time there is a vacancy, it fell on him, as the Department head, to be sure that the job description was accurate. In doing so, they found that the responsibilities of this position are actually encapsulated in the Administrative Secretary III position. There are four (4) vital responsibilities of the staff position in his office, which are only enumerated in the Administrative Secretary II job description: prepares, transcribes, types correspondence and documents from rough notes with dictation and transcription equipment; prepares and types a variety of reports; assist in preparation of the annual department budget; pays bills and monitors expenditures; prepares purchase orders; transfers funds and additional appropriations; researches a variety of issues for the Director and other Department personnel; schedules and coordinates meetings and events; and coordinates office functions. All of these are listed in the position of Administrative Secretary III, not Administrative Secretary II. Since these are important duties of this position, he wanted to be sure that it is correctly classified when they fill the position. It was unanimously supported by the Technology Advisory Committee. As Councilman Nocera stated, it was unanimously supported at the General Council Commission meeting. It also passed Finance & Government Operations meeting last week.

Councilman Nocera thanks Director Skowera for this explanation.

The Chair calls on Councilman Vincent Loffredo.

Councilman Loffredo states that he wants to be sure that he understands how this came about. He asks what precipitated this change.

Director Skowera reiterates that the general policy to follow, when a vacancy occurs, is to make sure that the duties of the position for which they are hiring and which are enumerated in the job description match what the duties actually are. They recognize that the function of this position is all of the duties that he just listed. This position transcribes the minutes for the Technology Advisory Committee meeting. This position is also responsible for the purchase orders and billing for the department. They handle credit card reconciliation, not only for the department, but for bill-backs for telecommunications lines and other data services. When they realized that the Administrative Secretary II position is not the accurate description, we wanted to be sure that we are not asking someone to work out of class and want to be sure that we are hiring for the correct position level: Administrative Secretary III, which is an already defined job within the City. He asks if this answers Councilman Loffredo's question.

Councilman Loffredo replies, "Not quite." He continues, saying that the various needs that his department has, that he is now articulating, are contained in the Administrative Secretary II level. These needs, he assumed, had been filled somehow, some way or is he misunderstanding. He rephrases asking if the needs now being articulated are in the Administrative Secretary III job description were never being done.

Director Skowera replies that the duties were being done by a person whose job description did not include those responsibilities.

Councilman Loffredo asks if there was any attempt, noting that here is a contract with Local 466, there is a provision when someone is misclassified, that it gets properly classified. He asks if it went through that process.

Director Skowera replies that the person, who held the Administrative Secretary II position, instead of following that process, took a promotion into another department.

Councilman Loffredo asks how long the person was in the Administrative Secretary II position in the Technology Services Department before transferring.

Director Skowera replies that it was about 1½ to 2 years.

There being no additional questions for Director Skowera, the Chair calls on Councilman Loffredo for another Director.

Councilman Loffredo calls on Economic & Community Development Director Joseph Samolis. On the regular meeting agenda, Item 11F deals with swap of some land under the control of the City and, specifically, the Board of Education. It is a 4.88 acre parcel swap. It was reported at the Economic Development Committee meeting, but not discussed at length, that the Board of Education (BOE) Facilities Committee had considered this matter; however, the full Board of Education had not received the recommendations of the BOE Facilities Commission to weigh in one way or the other. This is land that is currently occupied by, designated for, the use of Lawrence Elementary School. Councilman Loffredo asks if that is correct. Director Samolis replies, "Yes," it is correct.

Councilman Loffredo notes that he has had some earlier discussions with Director Samolis, in light of that. He adds that, before the Council acts this evening, they should wait for the Board of Education to weigh in.

Director Samolis replies, stating “That is correct.” He adds that the Office of Economic & Community Development recommends that the matter be referred to the Board of Education of their final review and, hopefully approval. At that time, the resolution would come back to the Council.

Councilman Loffredo states that the Council will not act on this matter this evening, but at some other time.

The Chair calls on Councilman Grady Faulkner, Jr.

Councilman Faulkner calls on Kisha Michal, Arts Coordinator. He asks about resolution 11A, the Arts & Culture Office grant. There are a few new names and he is curious. The main reason is to ask about something that he was not aware of: the required matching fund commitment for all arts grant recipients. He asks if that has always been in place.

Arts Coordinator Michael replies that this requirement is based in a City ordinance and will find that reference.

Councilman Faulkner replies that it is Chapter 44, Section 44-11, section B.

Arts Coordinator Michael concurs, noting that it provides that all City funds received are required to have a 1:1 match, which applies to all grants.

Councilman Faulkner asks if this is all City funds, not just Arts & Culture.

Arts Coordinator Michael replies that it is all City funding appropriated from the Arts budget which is what she manages. These are municipal grants, specifically municipal arts grants. Each organization, individual, or business that applies for a grant and is awarded an amount, that amount has to be matched dollar for dollar.

Councilman Faulkner replies that it sounds like that has always been the case.

Arts Coordinator Michael replies, “Yes,” in the three (3) years that she has been in this position. She offers to find the date when that Ordinance was first enacted.

Councilman Faulkner states that the reason he asks is that they have other grants for youth, afterschool, Citizens’ Advisory, which is a Federal grant, but the others, including the Health Department, the Council has been giving out these grants. He is surprised because most of the grants do not seem to have a matching requirement, noting that a few had that language. They had a place for people, who were unable to get matching grants. He is concerned that this is different. It sounds like other grants – such as Youth Services – are not covered by this ordinance. He asks if anyone knows that answer.

Arts Coordinator Michael replies that she does not know how other departments run their grants. She notes that the Ordinance does apply to the Arts & Culture grants.

Councilman Faulkner replies that this gives him someplace to go. He notes that this gives him what he needed to know. He will need to find out what the differences are by talking to others, who may know something about that. From his perspective they should be looking to jumpstart local artists. A lot of them are not institutionalized with a lot of money. Thank you.

The Chair states that he can speak to this adding that General Counsel Brig Smith may also be able to weigh in. The Chair believes that the grants are comprised of appropriated City funds. Only City funds fall under that Ordinance. Other sources of funding – grants like CDBG (Community Development Block Grants) through Citizens Advisory – whatever stings, so to speak, are attached to that money would overrule the Ordinance. The Chair asks General Counsel Brig Smith if he can add to that.

General Counsel Smith replies that he will quote Polonius in *Hamlet*: “Brevity is the soul of wit.” He cannot add to that, stating that the Chair said it well himself.

The Chair calls on Councilman Vincent Loffredo.

Councilman Loffredo states that, under reports, there is the Affirmative Action report for July to September. He asks Faith Jackson, Director of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Management, to come forward to explain the report that the Council has received. If she is not available now, he suggests that they can hear from her during the regular meeting.

The Council Clerk states that Director Jackson is not on WebEx.

The Chair states that they will try to get Director Jackson later in the meeting if there is a question that needs to be answered.

Councilman Loffredo notes that, ordinarily, Director Jackson would come in and address where we stand and what our goals and objectives are in terms of the report. Councilman Loffredo notes that Director Jackson is not on although she has an item on the agenda.

The Chair states that they will follow up on that.

Councilman Loffredo state the he would like to question another director. Under the transfer report, there are a significant number of transfers for the Water Department, totaling \$37,358. He is looking for a clearer explanation of the entry, dated October 14, expenditure \$22,358 for a pump station repair and replacement he would like to know exactly what is going on. He notes that the funds were taken from the well development fund and lab equipment. He asks if Water & Sewer Director Joseph Fazzino is available.

Director Fazzino asks for a moment to find the document. He asks Councilman Loffredo to repeat which line item he is looking to discuss.

Councilman Loffredo indicates that it is the entry from October 14th, in which money was taken from the well development fund - \$12,687 – and \$9,671 from lab equipment, totaling \$22,358 for pump station repair, replace. He asks for clarification as to what is going on as it is a significant transfer for a very particular need.

Director Fazzino states that, looking at the agenda and he does not see the transfer funds on there, He notes that, typically, they have to buy various pumping equipment for maintenance and it comes out of CNR (capital non-recurring). In the case of a shortage, where we funds under other items in the budget year, a director has the ability to transfer up to \$15,000 in any given year under CNR items. He thinks that this was for the purchase of equipment and they needed additional funding. This need allowed him to transfer friend from one line to another line.

Councilman Loffredo asks if Director Fazzino knows that it was a rather significant transfer. He asks if a pump station failed.

Director Fazzino replies, “No,” adding that it was for the water treatment plant at Higby. They purchased some submersible pumps for the filter backwash. He believes that is where the money was needed. It was taken from one line and transferred to another line in accordance with Finance regulations.

Councilman Loffredo notes that the report indicates that they took \$12,687 out of the well development fund. He asks what that line balance is now.

Director Fazzino replies that it is a 5-year CNR fund, adding that there is funding there every year He probably took it out of an old year. There is \$60K in the current year. There is probably \$60K in 2020. That is all part of the CNR 5-year plan.

Councilman Loffredo asks how much has actually been spent on well redevelopment in the past several years, if any.

Director Fazzino replies that they have not done any well redevelopment in the past couple of years. They have a bid going out and new specifications have been updated. They base the frequency of the well redevelopment on what is called the cone of influence. They draw down; that is, they take specific capacity of the well, and, when the screens in the well get clogged up, they hire the vendor to come in and, using an acid wash, clean it out with brushes to get the capacity back to where it should be. They have not had the need in the past couple of years, but they do have the funding. They also have the new bid so they are planning to do more of that work in the spring.

Councilman Loffredo replies, saying that, to make it clear, the money has been used in terms of well redevelopment. They are not developing wells; rather, they are basically maintaining the existing wells.

Director Fazzino replies that, for the CNR items; that is for maintenance of wells. They had a project not long ago for replacement for Well #1 and Well #3. That project was recently completed. That was a bond project that went out to bid. That work was separate from this money. This is a CNR for well redevelopment.

3. Questions to Directors Closes

There being no additional questions, the Chair closes the Questions to Directors at 6:32 PM.

4. Meeting adjourned

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

The meeting is adjourned at 6:33 PM

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

K: review/ minutes/ 2021 December 06 – Questions to Directors – 6 Dec 2021