



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

**QUESTIONS TO DIRECTORS
FEBRUARY 4, 2019
At 6:00 PM**

DRAFT MINUTES

The Special Meeting, the Questions to Directors Workshop of the Common Council of the City of Middletown, was held in the Council Chamber of the Municipal Building on Monday, February 4, 2019, at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta
Councilman Carl Chisem
Councilman Gerald Daley
Councilwoman Sebastian Giuliano
Councilman Grady Faulkner, Jr.
Councilman Eugene Nocera
Councilman Philip Pessina
Councilwoman Linda Salafia
Councilman Robert Santangelo

Absent: Councilman Robert Blanchard; Councilwoman Deborah Kleckowski; Councilman Thomas Serra; and Corporation Counsel Daniel Ryan, Esq.

Also Present:

Council Clerk – Linda S.K. Reed	Police/ Sgt.-At-Arms – Capt. John Lezefski
Arts Coordinator - Keisha Michael	Police -- Lt. Michael DeSena
City & Town Clerk – Ashley Flynn, CCTC	Public Works Director – William Russo
Communications Dir. -- Wayne Bartolotta	Recreation & Senior Serv. Dir. – Cathy Lefkowitz
Equal Opp. & Diversity – Faith Jackson	Registrar of Voters (Republican) – David Bauer
Finance Director – Carl Erlacher	Tax Assessor – Damn Braasch, CCMA II
Fire Department – Chief Robert Kronenberger	Technology Services – Bryan Skowera
General Counsel – Brig Smith, Esq.	Water & Sewer Dir -- Joseph Fazzino
Health – Kevin Elak, R.S.	Youth Services Coord. – Justin Carbonella
Health -- Dennis Murray, Housing Official	Superintendent – Dr. Michael Conner, Ed.D.
Library Director – Ramona Burkey	Board of Education – Christopher Drake
Parking Director – Geen Thazhampallath, Esq.	Board of Education – Sean King
Planning & Zoning Dir. -- Joseph Samolis	BOE Mgr. of Human Res.– Michelle DiMauro

Members of the Public: 2

1. Call to Order

Deputy Mayor Robert Santangelo, calls the meeting to order at 6:02 PM and leads the public in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Clerk reads the Call of the Meeting and Deputy Mayor Santangelo declares the call a legal call and the meeting a legal meeting.

2. Questions to Directors Opens

The Chair asks if anyone has questions for any directors. The Chair calls on Councilman Eugene Nocera.

Councilman Nocera invites Superintendent of Schools Dr. Michael Conner, Ed.D. to the podium to speak to the recently negotiated collective bargaining agreements FOR Middletown School Administrators Association (MSAA) and Middletown Federation of Teachers (MFT).

Dr. Conner explains that there are two (2) negotiated contracts. The premise or strategy with the two (2) contracts was aligned directly with the Strategic Operating Plan (SOP). To be consistent with the SOP, the amount of instructional hours has increased during this negotiation. Looking at some of the major changes, one are the PDES days and PDE days. There were 13 in the previous contract. Based on negotiations with MFT, they reduced that from 13 days in an academic year to 5 days. The change includes an increase of 1,040 minutes, which is equivalent to 17.33 hours and an increase of 2.66 instructional days. The innovation behind this element is the increase of instructional time, increasing instructional hours and days, but not increasing the academic day at all. In the 2019-2020 academic year, the academic day is increased by 10 minutes per day, restructuring some of the time at the end of day – 40 minutes -- repurposed that time to go back to the instructional day. In 2020-2021, they have added another 10 minutes to the academic day.

Based on the MFT negotiations, without increasing a day of the academic year thru time – the variable being time – the increase in totality with the 3-year contract proposal is 11.89 days. In the context of all Alliance School Districts, we now have the highest amount of instructional hours, which equates to 191.89 days. The document shows that they will be significantly higher focused on personalized learning, which is one of the core strategies. Looking at instructional support and, moreover, how we structure intervention with this increased time. This is one of the innovations that they have highlighted to be able to expand and focus on raising achievement comprehensively.

Alliance School District	School Days	
Ansonia	181	
Bloomfield	180	
Bridgeport	182	
Bristol	181	
Danbury	180	5 additional days reserved for emergency closure
Derby	183	
East Hartford	180	
East Haven	180	
East Windsor	180	
Groton	181	
Hamden	181	
Hartford	182	
Killingly	184	
Manchester	182	
Meriden	181	
Middletown	180	Plus 11.89 days of instructional time added with new MFT contract = 191.89
Naugatuck	180	
New Britain	180	
New Haven	182	
New London	180	
Norwalk	182	
Norwich	180	
Putnam	183	
Stamford	181	
Thompson	181	
Torrington	187	
Vernon	182	
Waterbury	181	
West Haven	180	
Winchester	181	
Windham	180	
Windsor	181	
Windsor Locks	181	

Looking at the MSAA contract, the focus in negotiations was to increase the number of days that instructional leaders are in district. In the summary handout that has been provided to the Council, at page 3, there is a significant increase in the amount of instructional time that administrators need to be present in the district. Last summer, one of the conundrums faced was that there was a lot of curriculum work, especially with the focus of the Strategic Operating Plan. They actually had to pay administrators to come back to help with this curriculum work. It is now embedded in the actual MSAA contract: they will be here in the summertime for professional exercises as well as necessary curriculum development. This year will include the first summer school literacy academy to focus on closing the achievement gap. The administrators need to be here in the summer. Looking at it from a strategic standpoint aligned to the SOP, the increase in instructional time was one of the core imperatives that was successfully negotiated as well as increasing administrators' day within the academic year.

Dr. Conner asks the Board of Education Manager of Human Resources Michelle DiMauro to go over the wage increase data.

Ms. DiMauro explains that, going back to the MFT contract, the contractual changes have been submitted to the Common Council explains all changes to the contract. The insurance cost share has gone from 19.5% to 20.0% in this contract. Article VIII, regarding salaries: for Year 1 is 2.98% increase, which is the GWI + step movement to Step 11; Year 2 is 3.92%, which is a 1.0% GWI increase including steps of 1.0% to maximum Step 11; and Year 3 is 1.0% plus increase in increment to Step 11 and step movement, which is 3.10%. The salary total for the 3-year contract is listed. There is also a section regarding longevity and stipends increased 1.0% every year for the total 3-year contract. The total cost of the MFT contract is listed on page 3.

Councilman Nocera asks, as far as cost share for health benefits, was there any change? He notes that he sees 21% right now, adding that theirs is redlined, they don't see the changes, but only the outcome.

Ms. DiMauro explains that the current rate is 19.5%, increasing to 20%. Councilman Nocera states that the rate did go up. Ms. DiMauro replies, "Yes."

Councilman Nocera states that, in the past, both the administrators' contract and teachers' contracts were relatively right out of the box in terms of the DRG (District Reference Group), making Middletown one of the first in this cycle,

Ms. Di Mauro confirms that this is correct.

Councilman Nocera adds that, given these numbers, he would imagine that these are very reasonable numbers given that it is a 4-year contract.

Ms. DiMauro replies, "Yes, for the administrators." She notes that, for the 1st year, it is a little high because we are buying the days. From what the negotiation team stated for Council, it is usually about 0.5% for every day, so for year 1, it is a little high, but curriculum supervisors were increased by 20 work days, which was needed to achieve the incentives, initiatives, and SOP. In addition, for many principals the work year increased by six (6) days in the MSAA contract.

Ms. DiMauro outlines the MSAA contract changes, For 4 years, the premium cost share is 21%. In the first year, the wage increase is 4.23%; 2nd year is 2.61%; 3rd year is 2.31%; and 4th year is 1.88%. Over the 4-year term of the contract, it is 11.02%.

Councilman Nocera replies that this sounds very fair.

Deputy Mayor Santangelo asks if there are any other questions for directors. He calls on Councilman Sebastian Giuliano.

Councilman Sebastian Giuliano asks Registrar of Voters David Bauer to the podium to discuss the proposed appropriation for \$7,500, which is divided into \$5,000 for part-time salaries and \$2,500 for supplies. Councilman Giuliano asks when that office will actually run out of money.

Mr. Bauer replies that they will run out of money by April.

Councilman Giuliano notes that, in the Office's full-time line, there have been some vacancies/absences in the full-time positions. He asks if that money is still being expended or is there any savings there.

Mr. Bauer replies that, the way he understands the budget, there is they do not have the same control over the full-time salary line.

Councilman Giuliano replies that, normally, they do not transfer out of full-time salary lines; however, given the unique nature of the current issue, and given that it is a total of only \$5,000, rather than appropriate, if there is an excess in the full-time line, he believes that the Council would authorize, be amenable to authorizing a transfer to cover that. He asks if that is possible.

Mr. Bauer replies that he could request it, but he has not analyzed it because there is a separation between that appropriation line and other funds that they have more direct control over.

Councilman Giuliano states that he does not believe that the policy is carved in stone to transfer out of the 110 salary line, which goes across the City. It is not impossible, but is generally frowned upon. In the end, any money not expended in that salary line will go back to the General Fund, so it may be a tempest in a teapot. He reiterates that he is wondering (a) if there is the time and (b) is it an inquiry that he is willing to make.

Mr. Bauer replies that he can talk to the people in the Finance Department, adding that he has been working under the assumption that they do not have that type of department head control.

Councilman Giuliano adds that it will certainly have to be approved by the Council body, but, with that condition, it could be done. Thank you

Deputy Mayor Santangelo calls on Councilman Philip Pessina for this Director. Councilman Pessina has no questions for this Directors. Councilman Pessina asks for a representative for the Health Department.

Acting Health Department Manager Kevin Elak steps to the podium.

Councilman Pessina asks Mr. Elak about the proposed Health Department appropriation for \$3,000 for overtime for sanitarians and code enforcement officers. He asks if there was not enough money in the existing overtime line for these staff positions.

Mr. Elak replies, yes, that is correct, adding that those funds were used for emergency, off-hours calls. There is currently about \$1.00 left in that account.

Councilman Pessina asks if, in the original budget, the appropriate amount was initially included in that line so that an appropriation does not need to be submitted to the Council. He also asks if there are any other areas from which to draw these funds, adding that the Council needs to be very careful with these appropriation requests. He asks if it is lack of funding or if funding, which would ordinarily have been that account, was removed.

Mr. Elak replies that he is not sure what happened in the past relative to asking for an appropriation, noting that it probably depends on factors like weather and the number of calls they need to address.

Councilman Pessina replies that this is an assumption that he made, but he is always concerned that, when doing the budget, not enough funds are included at the beginning, causing the issue to come back to the Council for more funding. Thank you.

Deputy Mayor Santangelo asks if anyone has additional questions for this director. He calls on Councilman Gerald Daley.

Councilman Daley states that his understanding is that the need for this appropriation was created by the higher than expected demand for overtime work due to the number emergencies and call outs that occurred this year compared to last year, noting that it does not mean that the amount budgeted was inadequate, but, rather, that there was higher demand,

Mr. Elak replies, yes, that is probably correct, adding that there are peaks and valleys as with the ice storm that recently occurred, which prompted quite a few calls. It depends on weather variables such as temperature. Councilman Daley noted that other factors include fires, anything where a person is unable to stay in their residence. Mr. Elak agreed, noting that this overtime appropriation goes hand-in-hand with the other Health appropriation for relation assistance as submitted by the Health Department. He explained that, over the past few months, they have had to relocate several families because of fires.

Deputy Mayor Santangelo asks if there are any other questions for this director. He calls on Councilman Philip Pessina, who asks that Cathy Lefkowitz, Director of Recreation & Community Services come to the podium.

Councilman Philip Pessina asks that, for the Council's edification, she provide a synopsis of the rate increase and the need for the skating rink.

Ms. Lefkowitz replies that they are not increasing existing rate; rather, they are adding rates due to request and for demand in community. They are adding a family pass for non-residents similar to Veteran's Pool. They are adding group rates, which several have asked about. They are clarifying that, similar to other City programs, resident seniors are free. In short, it is a clarification and adding the non-resident family passes and group rates.

Councilman Pessina states that they recently had a meeting. Relative to Middletown non-profits and school groups, if a non-profit from another community wants to use the facility, he understand that it is her discretion, as Director.

Ms. Lefkowitz replies, "Yes." If they are going to rent a facility and if the City is going to incur a cost that they would not typically see, then that cost would be passed on to the organization, even if a non-profit. There will not be an additional rental fee, but any cost incurred for opening will be passed on.

Deputy Mayor Santangelo calls on Councilman Eugene Nocera.

Councilman Nocera thanks the Commission for doing this work quickly. He states that there have been people driving by on Route 9, who stop by, but who are not residents, and they are looking to join the fun. Now there is a plan, which is good. Ms. Lefkowitz acknowledges the suggestions and reiterates that the operational structure is closely aligned to how veterans' pool is managed. Councilman Nocera, states, that, while it cannot be resolved tonight, he would like to know what can be done for veterans and military. Many cities make exceptions for veterans and military and their families. This is something that he hopes the Commission will address soon. He indicates it would be a waiver. Ms. Lefkowitz replies that they will look at the fees and determine if there is universal policy that they would like to set for veterans. She is open to that and will follow-up with Councilwoman Bartolotta and Councilman Pessina for their next Commission meeting.

Deputy Mayor Santangelo calls on Councilman Daley. He does not have any questions. Deputy Mayor Santangelo calls on Councilman Grady Faulkner, Jr.

Councilman Grady Faulkner asks Ms. Lefkowitz if she has any data about rink participate rates for the City's African American community.

Ms. Lefkowitz replies that they have not been tracking demographics. They are adding that as voluntary information, so that when families register, they may share that information. She reiterates that they are not tracking this information, but that it is important to see what programs are engaging different parts of the community. Moving forward they will track this information.

Councilman Faulkner adds that there has been at least one professional skater which has come from the community. He adds that there are also grants, which might make a class possible. He asks that Ms. Lefkowitz keep an eye on this matter.

Ms. Lefkowitz replies that they have had school groups from Woodrow Wilson Middle School scheduled to use the rink, but it was freezing, so that event was postponed. They are appealing to non-profits – sports leagues, civic groups – to try to attract different audiences.

Councilman Faulkner asks about the \$50,000 on the agenda, asking if it is a grant.

Ms. Lefkowitz replies that it is from their revenue account, explaining that they earn revenue in the Recreation Department that goes into a separate account. They later draw from that revenue. It is a standard, so 2 or 3 times a year they request money from that fund.

Councilman Faulkner asks about the amount of money relative to the bus referenced in the grant document. To clarify, Councilman Faulkner indicates that a "bus" is mentioned in the descriptive text of the \$50,000 grant confirmation request before the council; namely, \$50,000 for activities, supplies, and bussing.

Ms. Lefkowitz replies that it is bussing for activities, not the purchase of a bus, which has already been done for the Senior Services. For some activities, the Department supplies transportation, say for a field trip he bussing is for activities Bus - transportation for field trip, for weekend activities such as bowling, jump places.

Deputy Mayor Santangelo calls on Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta. She states that she does not have questions for this Director. She asks that Public Works Director William Russo come to the podium.

Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta asks Mr. Russo to address the Public Works items. She asks that he explain the request for the appropriation for the organic application, indicating that it is the first year that this is in effect.

Mr. Russo explains that this appropriation is to get through the rest of the year. He recounts that he originally requested the funds at budget time. That line is now depleted, so this funding will get them through the rest of the year; this spring and summer.

Councilman Bartolotta clarifies that these funds are meant to allow us to treat all fields organically.

Mr. Russo replies, "Correct."

Councilwoman Bartolotta asks about the bond appropriation for \$223,000 to add to the CNR fund. She asks Mr. Russo to elaborate.

Mr. Russo explains that he originally appeared before Finance & Government. Ordinarily, the City bonds to about \$750,000 for equipment, but Finance & Government wanted them to pull out some pieces that are now in this request. The bonding is for a couple of plow trucks, one being a 4-WD vehicle. They are replacing vehicles that are now 17 or 18 years old. The other items are for Park, noting that Finance & Government wanted it appropriated rather than bonded.

Councilwoman Bartolotta thanks Mr. Russo, adding that she wanted this information to be clear to anyone watching from home as to why there are two (2) separate line items. It is an effort to bond less and pay a bit more up front to address the CNR issue that we have. She asks that he address the \$523,000 bond ordinance, which is being heard on tonight's agenda for the second public hearing, which includes the trucks, the larger vehicles.

Mr. Russo replies that there are two (2) plow trucks, including the one (1) ton, and the replacements that are listed on the proposed appropriation document. He explains that these trucks are, unfortunately, very expensive, recounting that they cost about \$210,000 for one and about \$189,000 for the other. There are just two (2) plow trucks.

Councilwoman Bartolotta asks how many trucks he estimates having to purchase.

Mr. Russo replies that they put about 34 trucks on the road during a major storm, which are from City Yard. In addition, they bring about six (6) trucks from Water & Sewer Department and Parks combines with them as well. That brings a total of about 50 trucks on the roads.

Councilwoman Bartolotta states that this information provides clarity to the request, knowing how many trucks are on the road. She adds that we have been replacing a few trucks at a time over the last few years, which is lot of money.

Mr. Russo explains that each truck goes about 18 years, the turn-around time.

Deputy Mayor Santangelo calls on Councilman Gerald Daley.

Councilman Daley reiterates that there are about 50 City trucks on the road during a major storm. He notes that years ago, there was a significant reliance on contractors to plow. He asks if this reliance has been reduced.

Mr. Russo replies that this reliance has essentially been reduced to zero. He explains that we are equipping the trucks from Water & Sewer Department and have consolidated with Parks, using those trucks as well.

Councilman Daley states that he believes that the City has realized a savings by reducing the use of contractors.

Mr. Russo replies, yes, quite a bit, adding that they paid about \$130/hour for contractor work with a plow truck and that that they brought in 10 drivers.

Councilman Daley quips that City drivers don't make that much, adding that City employees, who are driving, know the Town -- the routes -- so he imagines there is a quality performance using direct labor rather than contractors.

Mr. Russo replies, that is correct as they are familiar with the Town and the same routes and same trucks, to be more efficient.

Deputy Mayor Santangelo calls on Councilman Carl Chisem.

Councilman Chisem asks that the total cost is not just for a truck, but includes the plow and other equipment, which adds to the price.

Mr. Russo replies, yes, that is a fully loaded vehicle: the truck, the plow, the sander, and everything that comes with it. He states that everything that the City buys everything that is needed for a major storm.

Councilman Chisem adds that it is a cost for the truck and all the equipment needed to outfit the vehicle fully.

Deputy Mayor Santangelo asks if anyone has additional questions. He calls on Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta. She asks for a representative from the Police Department. Police Captain John Lezefski and Police Lieutenant Michael DeSena come to the podium.

Councilwoman Bartolotta asks that they speak to the bond appropriation and ordinance for \$250,000 to purchase police vehicles and equipment. She asks that they explain this need to the public, including if this is everything that the Department needs.

Captain Lezefski explains that they are trying to eliminate some of the older vehicles with 90,000+ miles plus. He explains that there are currently 41 vehicles that now fit in that category, so, with this appropriation, they are trying to purchase three (3) marked cares and two (2) unmarked cars, which will cut into the pool of 41 cars with over 90,000 miles.

Councilwoman Bartolotta asks the average age of current vehicles.

Captain Lezefski replies that it's over 100,000 miles and the average year for cars to be replaced is model years 2002, 2003, 2007. He explains that he provides a spreadsheet with detailed information to Finance & Government.

Councilwoman Bartolotta asks, that, typically, with the number of vehicles that they use, each year, what would be the normal request for turnover, if we were keeping up on these vehicles in a manner that you would consider appropriate.

Captain Lezefski replies that he would look to get five (5) care a year until we get caught up.

Deity Mayor Santangelo asks if anyone has additional questions for any other directors. He states that, there being no further questions, the Questions to Directors session is closed.

Questions to Directors closes at 6:35 PM.

4. Meeting adjourned

Councilman Sebastian Giuliano moves to adjourn. Councilman Philip Pessina seconds the motion. The Deputy Mayor calls for the vote. It is unanimously approved with nine (9) aye votes. The Chair states the motion passes unanimously. The meeting is adjourned at 6:36 PM.

ATTEST:

LINDA S.K. REED,
COMMON COUNCIL CLERK

K: review/ minutes – 19 February 04 – questions to directors – 4 February 2019