



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

**COMMUNITY MEETING  
MINUTES**

**OCTOBER 10, 2019**

The Special Meeting of the Common Council of the City of Middletown, also known as the Community Meeting, was held in the Council Chamber of the Municipal Building on Thursday, October 10, 2019, at 7:00 PM.

Present: Councilman Sebastian Giuliano  
Councilwoman Deborah Kleckowski  
Councilwoman Linda Salafia

Absent: Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta; Councilman Robert Blanchard; Councilman Carl Chisem; Councilman W. Vance Cotten; Councilman Gerald Daley; Councilman Grady Faulkner, Jr.; Councilman Eugene Nocera; Councilman Philip Pessina; Councilman Robert Santangelo; Clerk of the Common Council Linda S.K. Reed

Also Present: Linda DeSena, Acting Clerk of the Common Council

Members of the Public: 10

**1. Call to Order**

Councilwoman Deborah Kleckowski is seated as Chair.

Councilwoman Kleckowski calls the meeting to order at 7:06 PM. She invites those present to join in the Pledge of Allegiance. The Clerk reads the warrant. The Chair declares the call a legal call and the meeting a legal meeting. The Chair welcomes the public to the community meeting.

**2. Public Comment**

The Chair opens the public comment session at 7:03 PM. He invites anyone wishing to speak to come to the podium, asking that they state their name and address for the record. He reminds the public that the Councilmembers are here to listen, not to engage in dialogue. The Council will not be taking any action. People having an issue are welcome to contact individual Council members or the Mayor's Office. Speakers are asked to limit comments to five (5) minutes.

Claudia DeFrance (664 Bartholomew Road): I am a 1964 graduate of Woodrow Wilson Sr. High School. Since April of this year, a group of Wilson alum have been working to stop the name change to the Wilson Middle School. The first meeting of the naming committee was not properly noticed and an FOI complaint was sent to the state re: the BOE failure to adequately notify the date, time, & place of the meeting to the public. Chair of the BOE Chris Drake, who never attended the FOI hearing in Hartford, that Tom D'Aquila, Hope Kasper and myself attended- sent a proposal to the FOI commission that the BOE would provide FOI in-service to its employees and members of the BOE. The alum group refused the offer and is still waiting for a decision by the FOI Commission. A lack of minority representation was noted in the Naming Committee - This whole process violates City Ordinance Section 23-22. A grievance was filed with the BOE administration - the City Attorney having no jurisdiction over the BOE- advised us to send the grievance to the BOE to forward to their attorney. That was several months ago and nothing has been heard. We don't know if the BOE attorney ever received this notice. We have been stonewalled by an illegal BOE committee that was appointed by itself. The Naming Committee is illegal and must be shutdown. When the schools merged, Middletown High and Wilson Sr. High, a group of community leaders, parents, faculty, including the late Tom Serra and Christine Marsilli met and worked out a gentleman's agreement that the high school would be Middletown High and the Middle School, Woodrow Wilson- always! This was done to preserve the history of our town!! Well over a thousand alum have signed petitions, written letters to the Council, attended BOE and Naming Committee meetings- all to no avail! I beg you to stop this name change. I thank the three council members who are present and wonder, with an election a few short weeks away, why no one else found it necessary to be present tonight! Thank you.

Chair/Councilwoman Kleckowski states that Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta, Councilman Eugene Nocera, and Councilman Philip Pessina are not present at this meeting because they are attending the Woodrow Wilson Building Committee Meeting, which is scheduled this evening and running concurrently.

Thomas D'Aquila (165 Front Street): He wishes Councilman Giuliano best wishes in the upcoming election, offering his full support. He echoes concerns raised by Claudia DeFrance, the previous speaker. Two days ago, they called the Freedom of Information (FOI) Commission office to find out what the ruling on their complaint. That office had trouble finding their names and the issue talked about. Finally, they were referred to Tom Hennick, an FOI staff and former Middletown Press Editor. He had worked with Hope. Mr. Hennick got back to them and said that the matter has not yet been solved. The hearing was on August 1<sup>st</sup> and it will likely be another month. In that case, it will be after the election. The also contacted the Board of Education lawyers and asked if there has been any correspondence between the Board of Education and their attorneys. No one knows of any correspondence. They were supposed to get back the group, but have not. These are the two (2) things that stick every time they try to figure this out. It bothers them. It is important. He never would have voted for the bond ordinance – some \$83M – had he known of a name change. He want the Woodrow Wilson name. Which has been in place since 1932-1933. He corrects, saying 1931. He adds that people have paid \$50 to put in individual pavers at Woodrow Wilson football field. The Woodrow Wilson Committee is trying to find more people to allow more pavers to be installed at that location. It would be a shame to put their names on that field and then find that it is no longer named Woodrow Wilson.

Hope Kasper (30 Anderson Road): She has also been attending all of the Naming Committee meetings. She has found that it does not comply with the minority representation requirement and has two (2) students, who are not allowed to vote. She believes that the question to be answered is about the legality of that Committee to begin with. She notes that there was a referendum question, appropriating City dollars for this school. That ballot question mentioned Woodrow Wilson. She states that the average voter would have believed that this school would be named Woodrow Wilson. The legality of this item should be questioned. Also the State of Connecticut has given money to the City for constructing of the school. These documents all refer to Woodrow Wilson School. She explains that she called the State and was told that the Superintendent of Schools would have to notify them of the name change and it would have to go thru the process all over again. She cannot understand why they would out that money into jeopardy.

Terry Kleckmankowski: She is not currently a Middletown resident, but grew up in Middletown, the East Main Street area. She sees no reason for changing the name, noting that it is part of our history. It is a President, who resided in Middletown and was part of Wesleyan University, which has also been a major part of the City's history. She sees no validity in the name change because Middletown has been around some 400 years, long before this was a country. We see the progression from what the community was then to what it is today – the changes, the inclusiveness of Middletown – she feels that changing the Woodrow Wilson name deletes history. We should be teaching history, encouraging that we should how far the community has come from prior the Woodrow Wilson era, including the times we grew up in. To change the name would be a shame to the future children. They will have nothing to learn from to better society as we have had.

Salvatore Spatola (307 Ridge Road): The name means a lot to him. We honored Woodrow Wilson as our President. It has great meaning to him. He recounts that he came to Middletown in 1966 from the old country. Woodrow Wilson School is where he learned to speak English and where he made friends. It was the first place he went as a child in Middletown. Mrs. Grimaldi taught him to speak English. It was different. It is dear to his heart and he would be upset if they change its name. He holds that name dear.

Thomas D'Aquila: Someone mentioned that, when this Naming Committee was first formed, he got a call from a woman in Rhode Island, who sea that she was in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade Student Council. This woman recalled that the name was to be Woodrow Wilson forever. At the same time, he doesn't recall the name of the Superintendent when the High School was being built, but spoke with his wife. She also recalls that the name was to remain Woodrow Wilson Middle School. The night he said this at an earlier meeting, Tom Geary also remembers, from when he was a Student Council representative that it was to be left as Woodrow Wilson middle School. He also has a call into former Superintendent of Schools Frechette, having found him. He is waiting for a call back.

Terry Kleckmankowski: She asks why this Naming Committee was formed when the City was not building a brand new building like they did for the new high school. We are remodeling and expanding to accommodate the populations. Where did the idea of a name change even come up?

Chair/Councilwoman Kleckowski states that, to clarify, they are building on the front footprint (inaudible) of the old Woodrow Wilson School.

### 3. Public Comment Closes

The Chair state states that, seeing no additional members of the public wishing to speak, the public comment session is closed. The public comment session closes at 7:21 PM.

### 4. Meeting adjourned

Councilwoman Linda Salafia moves for adjournment. Councilman Sebastian Giuliano seconds the motion. The Chair calls for the vote. It is approved unanimously with three (3) aye votes. The Chair states the motion passes with 11 affirmative votes.

The meeting is adjourned at 7:22 PM

*(NOTE: At 7:22 PM, Councilman Eugene Nocera arrives from the Woodrow Wilson Building Committee meeting; however, this Special Meeting of the Common Council – Community Meeting is adjourned.)*

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

*K: review/minutes/ 19 October 10 – community meeting minutes – 10 October 2019*