



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

**COMMUNITY MEETING
JANUARY 10, 2019**

DRAFT MINUTES

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, January 10, 2019 at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta Councilwoman Deborah Kleckowski
Councilman Robert Blanchard Councilman Philip Pessina
Councilman Gerald Daley Councilwoman Linda Salafia
Councilman Sebastian Giuliano Councilman Robert Santangelo
Councilman Grady Faulkner

Absent: Councilman Carl Chisem, Councilman Eugene Nocera; and Councilman Thomas Serra

Also Present: Sergeant-at-Arms, Middletown Police Officer Silvestri
Linda Reed, Clerk of the Common Council

Members of the Public: 12

1. Call to Order

Councilman Robert Santangelo calls the meeting to order at 7:07 PM. He invites those present to join in the Pledge of Allegiance. He welcomes the public to this meeting.

2. Public Comment

Councilman Santangelo opens the public comment session at 7:08 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 and will not be taking any action. Speakers are asked to limit comments to five (5) minutes.

The Chair is reminded that the warrant needs to be read. The Clerk of the Common Council reads the Call of the Meeting and Councilman Santangelo declares the call a legal call and meeting a legal meeting.

The Chair declares the call a legal call and the meeting a legal meeting.

William Prevatte, 25 Hotchkiss Street: He states that he is present to honor Carole Crayton, his 5th grade teacher at Farm Hill Elementary School. He describes her as a dedicated teacher and offers condolences to her family. It is a privilege to have been her student, especially since she helped him through hard times. Mrs. Crayton was a visionary who loved teaching. She is loved and respected by all. She was more than a teacher; she was a friend and among his favorite teachers. He asks for a moment of silence to remember Mrs. Crayton, adding that she sacrificed much for her students. He describes her "the best of the best." She remains in their thoughts and prayers, noting her legacy to the community. The community should be proud and thanks to her efforts, he is the person he is today. Rest in peace, remembered and never forgotten.

Joan Hedrick, 41 Home Avenue: She is speaking on the future of 51 Green Street. The Economic Development Commission has awarded this property to CHC (Connecticut Health Center). She has just read the Mayor's letter, which proposes to give the property to St. Vincent de Paul for their work in the City. Both of these dispositions of the property would involve gutting the Arts Center, turning it to a completely different use. She notes that 14 years ago, Wesleyan University invested more than \$1.3 million to convert the former Green Street School Building into this Arts Center with features including a theater, sound room, all purpose rooms, a pristine dance studio with beautiful polished floors and mirrors. It does not make economic sense to destroy this a \$1.3 million asset that the City owns and could put to good use for the youth of the City. The real damage is to the youth of the North End, who will no longer have a safe place to go after school, who will no longer have their minds and hearts expanded by exposure to activities, ideas, and mentors, who broaden their horizons which lead them to productive opportunities in the community. One of the original purposes of establishing the Arts

Center was to stabilize the North End, which it did accomplish. It encouraged landlords to invest in properties. It improved that neighborhood and stabilized it. She asks if they have considered what it will do to take that Arts Center away, how demoralizing to the neighborhood. She asks if they considered what having St. Vincent de Paul in middle of that neighborhood will do to residential quality. It seems to be something not in best interest of the North End or the broader community. She understands the arguments of the Mayor and the Economic Development Commission that they don't have secure funding sources for the Arts Center, but they have lots of good ideas. They have an amazing number of volunteers with terrific skills, experience, and willingness to invest time to make this happen. It is a community resource that can be mobilized mobilize and which cannot have an economic term on it. Although they don't have a lot of economic resources in the present, she reads a comment from Chris Colstead, the Chairman of the Board of the Green Community Center and Vice-President of Marketing at Kaman Aerospace Corporation. He states that many Connecticut corporations are willing to support tech education of young people to create a pipeline to jobs in the State. The longer term benefits of investing in youth and maintaining a treasured resource, which the North End residents point to with pride, is to put a price on. The youth are our future.

Gail Thompson Allen, Guilford, CT: She has spent 37 years at Russell Library, spending more time in Middletown than in her hometown. She loves Middletown and has seen what the Green Street Arts Center meant to the North End. She has interacted with the Green Street Arts Center for collaborative projects. She will not repeat what the previous speaker has said. In Green Street, the City has a jewel in the crown, a beautiful, historic building that is totally designed to support youth services in the arts, health, and technology. To gut the building to create alternative office space or St. Vincent de Paul, which offers services such as the soup kitchen, makes no sense. She rhetorically asks why anyone would gut a building that is already designed. On the occasion of looking at the RFPs, all of the Common Councilmembers were asking what each RFP offered to Middletown youth. The one RFP that offered 100% to the City's future was the Middletown Green Community Center. If it is taken away, she hopes the Council is planning to find another place for it because now there will be no special place for the youth of Middletown. The City will have an office building and a soup kitchen, but what about the youth, whom all profess to be Middletown's future. She hopes they are thinking about what the North End constituents want in their community. She believes that close to 100% would say Greet Street Community Center, not CHC office building or St. Vincent de Paul. She hopes that the Council is really thinking about this -- what the City wants and what the constituents want in Middletown -- and take that seriously. If not, the community will lose a valuable resource and asset.

Christopher Chenier, Portland, CT: He is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Art at Wesleyan, teaching and as a staff member. He runs the digital design studio, overseeing about 150 students each semester, who are working on design and engineering projects using digital tools. Beginning four (4) years ago, he has been working at Wesleyan on design and engineering opportunities for students. He recounts that one thing that his students always tell him is how excited they would be to run youth programs related to technology and innovation. They want to help in the community, mentor people, who are younger than them, to gain teaching experience much like what Wesleyan students were previously doing at Green Street Arts Center. Many were shocked and surprised to learn that Wesleyan was divesting the Green Street Arts Center. What he is hoping to do as a Wesleyan member, a community member, and as a father is to participate in a grassroots community effort to reinvest in that space, which, as has been noted, is ready to go as youth center focused on education, teaching opportunity especially for North End community members, and, as a parent living across the river, also for people in the broader Middletown community. He recounts that his father grew up in central Connecticut. His grandfather lived in central Connecticut, working for United Technologies making spacesuits for NASA in the 1960s. The innovation that Connecticut is capable of -- in East Hartford, Windsor Locks -- can also be done in Middletown, or, if not at that level, train our kids to get jobs at those firms working in aerospace in the area. He rhetorically asks why not let this Middletown Community Center be a hub for mentoring and teaching skills for Middletown youth. It's ready to go; we can do it. He reiterates that there are tons of Wesleyan students ready to participate in that. He knows for certain that, in the North End and in Middletown in general, there are kids dying to get their hands on 3-D printers and robotics. They want to learn how to code. It's cheap; it's easy, noting that he has set up multiple labs to do this kind of work, adding that it won't take \$1M in renovation, but only a couple thousand dollars. We could do it.

Jeffrey Hush, Founder & Executive Director of the Green Community Center: At many meetings over the past 3 months, people from their group have shown up to speak. The Economic Development Committee (EDC) does not seem to understand the basics of economics, which state that one wants to innovate and develop, not simply expand services to the homeless. He notes that he has nothing against the homeless: they need to be fed; they need to be clothed; however, the youth of the community also need to be served issue. This is becoming an issue about race in Middletown. The group is trying to serve low-income people, black people, Latino people, and immigrant people. They have come together -- with corporations, with Wesleyan, with a number of people now sitting in this room behind the desk -- and know that they can accomplish this. They are very disappointed by two (2) facts recently. The first was the actions of Councilman Robert Santangelo and Councilman Gerald Daley at the Economic Development Committee (EDC). The second is the letter that they received yesterday from the Mayor. He reviews three (3) points. In this letter, the Mayor, on his own, as a sole despot, or whatever you want to call him, states: "I am pleased to announce that St. Vincent de Paul has been selected for the reuse of the City property at 51 Green Street." Only later in that letter does he state: "The City of Middletown has entered into a non-binding agreement with St. Vincent, pending ratification of a final agreement by the Common Council at which time ownership will be transferred."

This means that the 12 Council people, who should all be in this room, will get to make a decision whether to follow the Mayor and give this building to the soup kitchen and St. Vincent de Paul, which does good work, or to allow the community and its leaders to lead the youth forward and to lead Connecticut forward and to develop their skills in the arts, technology, and health. It's the Council's choice, adding that each of the Councilmembers will be historically noted as voting on this issue and that issue will become something that reflects each Councilmember's personality into the future. The Mayor has misrepresented, as have Councilman Robert Santangelo and Councilman Gerald Daley at the Economic Development Committee (EDC) meetings, the Middletown Green Street Community Center by saying that they have no fiduciary or nonprofit to handle funds. He asserts that the Middletown Green Community Center is a gathering of several non-profits, one called *Afropop*, which has been a non-profit for 30 years. That entity is the fiduciary entity that funds have gone thru. He reiterates that they do have a fiduciary. They also have NEAT (North End Action Team), adding that the Council may not remember NEAT, which is the North End Action Team. It is one of three groups that signed the original agreement for the building at 51 Green Street: Wesleyan University, NEAT, and the City. NEAT still exists, adding that NEAT President Cookie Quinones is one of the Board members of Middletown Green. There are 17 Board members, including Rob Rosenthal, the former #2 at Wesleyan, and people in this room, who have already spoken. It is a powerful organization and they will be running things for youth of this City whether they are given the building or not. He reminds the Councilmembers that it will be their images that will be destroyed by voting for this decision of the Mayor.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
City of Middletown
CONNECTICUT 06457

Daniel T. Drew
MAYOR

January 9, 2019

Dear Applicants,

I am pleased to announce that St. Vincent DePaul has been selected for the re-use of the city property at 51 Green Street, which formerly housed the Green Street Arts Center.

St. Vincent's has devoted itself for decades to the care of the less fortunate. While the most visible element of its work is the provision of food, the organization assists people in need with substance abuse counseling, supportive housing, workforce development, casework, accessing safety net programs, accessing behavioral healthcare, and the provision of social services supports for some of the neediest individuals and families in our community.

St. Vincent's will be able to expand the availability of its services, better serve their clients in a way that offers privacy and dignity, and better manage the flow of casework of which it is in charge on a regular basis. The City of Middletown has reached an agreement with St. Vincent's that will require it to assume ownership of the building and to sell its property at 617 Main Street to a taxable entity whose products or services are in alignment with the city's goals and plan of conservation & development.

The City of Middletown has entered into a non-binding agreement with St. Vincent's pending ratification of a final agreement by the Common Council at which time ownership will be transferred.

I appreciate the interest by the community in the use of 51 Green Street and its impact on downtown. I feel it is important to address for the public, given the attention on this building, our view of the disposition of the other applications. I do this to explain the rationale not only behind the selection of St. Vincent's, but also as a way to elucidate for the community why the other applicants were not selected.

I have been and remain impressed with the Community Health Center and the impact its operations have had on our community writ-large and in the North End, specifically. We look forward to working with CHC in the future to assist in its ability to provide healthcare in the community as the organization grows. In the final analysis, though, CHC rents or owns significant office space now. While the availability of this building would help it as an organization, the building itself is not essential for the CHC's growth.

Municipal Building: 245 deKoven Drive, Middletown, CT 06457
TEL: (860) 638-4801 FAX: (860) 638-1901 Email: mayor@middletownct.gov

I received much communication about the Middletown Green Community Center and, while I have been glad to see significant community engagement, much of what I heard rested on incorrect assumptions. First and of critical importance, I must note that the Green Community Center is not actually a legally incorporated organization with either the State of Connecticut or the Internal Revenue Service. It has no non-profit status, no fiduciary non-profit to handle funds, and no ability to obtain insurance. Its proposed funding plan included a major deficiency in that it relied on funds awarded through a federal grant which are spoken for and it did so without the consent of either the federal government or the fiduciary organization administering that grant.

Those facts alone preclude it from consideration as was reflected in the final vote of the Economic Development Committee. Awarding the building to the Green Community Center would be tantamount to awarding it to an individual.

Finally, any organization offering community-centric programming must show that it is or can be a collaborative member of the community of organizations working to make Middletown a better place for everyone. Unfortunately, the Green Community Center's application was marred by attacks on the other applicants, who devote the entirety of their time and resources to assisting low-income people.

I see tremendous value in the *types* of programs described in the Green Community Center's proposals and, should a credible organization emerge to provide some of those services, the City of Middletown will eagerly consider our role in supporting their work.

I am appreciative of the community interest generated by the availability of this building. It is a sign of a healthy and compassionate community.

Happy New Year.

Sincerely,



Daniel Drew
Mayor

Valika Clark, 38 Santangelo Circle: She has been left out of the entire discussion. She explains that what she brings to Middletown is from her Instagram page. She provides services as a buffer between youth, ages 13-18. There is a plethora of resources in Middletown, which many young people do not know about. She has found that, once they graduate, they know nothing about getting a Connecticut ID at the satellite office right here in Middletown at the DMV Office. She would love to part of 51 Green Street to have a place to help bridge the gap for those resources. She does not believe that St. Vincent de Paul will be able to provide what she offers. If they could, they would already be doing that. She explains that she has an extensive resume in school systems, with 17 years in communities including Bridgeport, Trumbull, and Wallingford public schools. She worked briefly in Middletown and maintains a relationship with the local youth. She has 3½ years of experience as a community activist in Middletown. Great progress and has made great progress connecting resources, putting things into place where youth are comfortable speaking with her. There are a lot of teen parents, who seem to be forgotten. As a parent, who began as a teen parent, it is disheartening to see them that they are left out, that they are a burden. After a certain age, teen parents are not connected to resources and they depend on the system rather than progressing and becoming independent. Her own now 28 year old child is a clinician, running a behavior center for a hospital network. Her 25 year old is also successful, but her 18 year old has been disparaged by the Middletown Police, showing that there are poor relationships. Nevertheless, her 18 year old connects with other youth. There is so much to offer. She describes the *Right Response Agreement Program*, which is geared to lowering youth arrest rate. How

does it function if the teens do not have the proper resources? This is why she came in. People don't know about CRT or housing vouchers or low income housing sections. She is giving this information and is excited; however she has no office. It is not fair to her or to the youth, who have to meet her in a fast food restaurant, which takes away from their dignity. Many are not even comfortable leaving the North End. It is sad to hear their stories. She reminds the Councilmembers that, if they care about the youth, they should reconsider how important Green Street is for them and to the future of Middletown. We all age out and will rely on these same people when we are older. We need to provide the structures so they care for us in the future. It is gravely segregated by class and economics.

Nekita Waller, 80 Ferry Street: She now lives in Middletown and is the current Connecticut State Troubadour, the State's ambassador for music. She recently received a proclamation from the Mayor for her work. She takes pride in her work. The Green Street Center is important to her and is literally at her back door. When she goes outside, she sees the kids outside playing. If they had more activities, their parents would be reassured about their safety. This is something that is needed in the community. It will also bridge the gap with artists in the building, and will keep things in the community and show the kids what they can become. She hopes that the Council listens. When you live there, you see it. She came to Middletown 10 years ago and someone gave her a chance and mentored her. Create a mirror image and let that happen in your own backyard.

Jimmy Drawn: He is 40 years old, born and raised in Connecticut. He speaks from what he has experienced. He is a licensed barber. He was sent to Middletown by the Department of Corrections. He is homeless. His career, thru his art, is successful. To understand people – back white, Spanish, blind, deaf – he is blessed to understand people and understand what kids want. In Middletown, and not choosing to be here, with the Art Center, he felt comfortable, which allows him to grow as an individual. Coming here with an Art Center, reminds him when he was growing up in New Haven in a single parent household, the oldest of seven children, he saw a lot. In seeing the Art Center here, by the time he found it, it is now dissolving. With that dissolving, so is his morale and that of the North End. Although it may not have been utilized as much as it should have been, it was there. To remove it now, it will throw everything off in the community, not today, not tomorrow, but in 10 years it will be shaky.

2. Public Comment Closes

Councilman Santangelo states that, seeing no additional members of the public wishing to speak, the public comment session is closed. The public comment session closes at 7:42 PM.

4. Meeting adjourned

Councilwoman Deborah Kleckowski moves for adjournment. Councilman Sebastian Giuliano seconds the motion. The Chair calls for the vote. It is approved unanimously with nine (9) aye votes. The Chair states the motion passes with nine (9) affirmative votes.

The meeting is adjourned at 7:43 PM

ATTEST:

LINDA S.K. REED,
COMMON COUNCIL CLERK