



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

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2023
6:00 PM**

MINUTES

A Special Meeting of the Common Council of the City of Middletown, Questions to Directors, was held on Tuesday, January 3, 2023, 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 Meghan Carta	Councilman Michael A. Marino
Councilman Grady Faulkner, Jr.	Councilman Edward McKeon
Councilman Darnell Ford	Councilman Eugene Nocera
Councilman Anthony Gennaro, Sr.	Councilman Philip Pessina
Councilman Vincent Loffredo	Councilwoman Linda Salafia

Linda Reed, Clerk of the Common Council
Middletown Police Sgt. Kurt Scrivo, Sargent-at-Arms

Also Present:

Arts & Culture – Kisha Michael, Coordinator
Board of Education – Cassie Steinhilber
City & Town Clerk – Ashley Flynn-Natale
Communications – Robert Grauer, Deputy Director
Econ. & Comm. Development.– Barbara Knoll Peterson, Eco. Devel. Specialist/Acting Director
Finance – Carl Erlacher, CPA - Director
Fire Department – Chief John Woron
General Counsel – Brig Smith, Esq.
Health – Kevin Elak, Director
Land Use -- Marek Kozikowski, AICP, Director
Library – Ramona Burkey, Director
Police Department – Chief Eric Costa; Sgt. Kurt Scrivo
Public Works – Christopher Holden, PE, Director
Recreation & Community Services – Catherine Lechowicz, Director
Technology Services – Brianna Skowera, Director
Water & Sewer Department -- Joseph Fazzino, Director
Youth Services, Justin Carbonella, MPA – Director

Absent: Assessor -- Damon Braasch, CCMA II; Director
Equal Opportunity & Diversity Management – Faith Jackson
Human Resources – Justin Richardson, Division Director

Public: WebEx: 1 Facebook: 12

1. Call to Order

Councilman Vincent Loffredo, Deputy Mayor, is chairing this evening's meeting in the absence of the Mayor. Deputy Mayor Loffredo calls the meeting to order at 6:05 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 6:04 PM. The Chair calls on Councilman Edward McKeon.

Councilman McKeon states that he has a question for someone from the Human Resources Department. General Counsel Brig Smith steps to the podium.

The Chair notes that Attorney Smith must be the new Director of Human Resources.

Councilman McKeon states that he knows that this item has been discussed in the General Counsel Commission meeting as well as in the Finance and Government meeting. He asks for an explanation on the MOU (*Memorandum of Understanding*) that the Council will be voting on tonight.

Attorney Smith states that there are two MOU's in the packet: one for UPSEU and one for Local 466. The issue has been the Building Official and Assistant Building Officials, who are on-call for emergencies when that happens. He states that the job descriptions, which are in the agenda packet, are proposed to be amended because, unlike other positions in UPSEU and Local 466, they had not specifically talked about the need to be on-call. The employees in this position have said, if the City wants them to be on call, they need to be on-call like other positions. They went to Step 1 and Step 2 grievances that were filed and denied. In each instance, an MPP was filed by each union. The resolution is the MOU before the Council tonight. It says that, for officials, they will have on-call weeks. During the on-call weeks, they will receive \$300 as a stipend, so that, if that official is called in for an emergency on that week, they will have a \$300 stipend. The local rules for overtime will all occur, so that, depending on how long they are there they will receive time and a half for time addressing the emergency. Three officials, three-week rotation, \$300: that is what is before the Council.

Councilman McKeon asks Attorney Smith to take this a step further, asking how this is an issue with these individuals in the department.

Attorney Smith replies that, when a fire occurs and there is a structural issue, the fire department comes and puts out the fire; however, they are not building officials. They cannot determine whether the building is safe, what has to be done to be sure the building remains safe, or what need to be done to be sure it is cordoned off to remain safe. The building officials have to be called out and that was the genesis: who is being called out; when are they being called out; and why are they called out. This is to address that.

Councilman McKeon replies that what is a puzzle to him is that it was an informal system. He asks when it changed and why.

Attorney Smith replies that this is his understanding. He thinks that it was a specific event that raised the event, noting that it may have been a fire. This is beyond his depth and he does not want to speculate further.

The Chair calls on Councilwoman Blackwell. (*Inaudible.*) He asks if anyone is looking to ask questions of Human Resources through Attorney Smith. The Chair calls on Councilwoman Jeanette Blackwell.

Councilwoman Blackwell calls Public Works Director Christopher Holden. She notes that Item 14D is on the agenda tonight for 80 Harbor Drive. She asks Director Holden to speak to the \$2M ARPA (American Rescue Plan) allocation and also to bring the Council back to the initial ARPA allocation of \$1M. She asks Director Holden for clarification.

In lieu of Public Works Director Holden, Acting Economic & Community Development Director Bobbye Knoll Peterson steps to the podium.

Acting Director Peterson states that there was an initial allocation for this building from the 21st Century bond. That was the initial pot of money, noting that \$1M was approved and then another \$1M. She notes that people may be wondering why this much for a building. The answer is that it is, like many municipalities, deferred maintenance. It is either repair it or lose it forever because of the location. People have asked why not just knock it down and start over. She asserts that they cannot because the footprint of the building is that they have to repair this building. When they started this project, none of them were aware of what shape the building was in. Their initial structural engineer -- Tighe & Bond -- came in and opened walls. There are structural deficits to the building inside and outside. By the grace of God -- or whomever you believe in -- there wasn't an accident with that deck. The deck has been removed and will be completely replaced. The matter is that they have an opportunity with Federal dollars to protect this building for the next 20, 30, 40 years and do that maintenance that had been deferred. Once they make this investment and use these Federal dollars, this will be the showplace of the river they want it to be. What happened was a perfect storm and the Council will hear about these building projects. It is in the continued increase in materials and labor. It is full structural engineer that was not anticipated so that, once we got them in to look at one thing, it became another thing, and then became a full structural engineering report of the building. The roof has been done. The stucco has been done on the outside. Once we get through this, it will be something really special. She cannot say enough about the partners that they have in LaMonica. They have gotten more than they counted on, adding that they anticipated having this building open more than a year ago. They have incurred costs. The City has incurred more costs, but, at the end of the day, she thinks that they believe that, once this is done, it will be a very special place. It is kind of unique in the State and will draw people from all over.

Councilwoman Blackwell states that, to clarify, there was an initial \$1M from (*multiple speakers/ inaudible*).

Acting Director Peterson interjects, saying, "From the 21st Century bond.

Councilwoman Blackwell continues, saying (*multiple speakers/ inaudible*).

Acting Director Peterson states, "There was another \$1M after that." Truth be told, that was from the structural engineer, which we did not anticipate. There was another \$1M. For this building, for those who have seen it,

those of us, who have attended the construction, it has been brought down to the studs. When you walk in, there are trenches in the floor where you can see all of the piping straight down to the dirt. Now we are seeing a building that is coming back to life with windows, a gorgeous bay to look at the river, and a 3rd floor that never was utilized. Again, we are doing maintenance that should have been done all along. We have contracts with folks, who were tenants with the City, they were using the space and the City was not able to get in there and do things, as they should have. Now we are sort of doing it all at once, at a time, when it is most expensive. We are making the choice to do the things to protect what we know cannot get wet. We are doing things that can withstand water.

Councilwoman Blackwell replies a full renovation, essentially. She adds that there is an anticipated date for opening or has that been pushed back.

Acting Director Peterson replies that they are really committed to getting this building opened by May.

Councilwoman Blackwell replies, "May 2023."

Acting Director Peterson replies, "Yeah," adding that the for the contractors, this has become a fulltime job because, again, as she said, the partners that they have in there – LaMonica – they have stuck with us for a project that is much larger than they anticipated, a project much larger than any of them anticipated. They have invested in this, We have invested in this and we need to do everything that we can, The folks, who are on the building committee, can and have certainly heard her say that we have to get this done. Because we cannot miss another spring/ summer season, it would just be unfair to the agreement that made with them

Councilwoman Blackwell replies, "Absolutely. Thank you."

The Chair calls on Councilman Eugene Nocera.

Councilman Nocera thanks Acting Director Peterson, adding that he wants to echo everything that she just said. It is important for us to reflect on this. As Chair, it has been a struggle at times to come up with solutions, he thanks the City and its partners to bring this forward in a way that this building will be ready by summer for the next 40 or 50 years. The design is excellent, he was there with Acting Director Peterson and Public Works Director Holden at noon, looking at the steel going in. The design is outstanding. He asks Public Works Director Holden to speak briefly about the structural price that is ongoing now so that the public and Council can understand why the additional money is so important and why we appreciate that there is Federal money available to finish this project.

Director Holden states that, once they got into the building with the demo, they discovered the poor quality of the building. They had to do a full structural analysis, which not only led to structural issues, but they had to meet the current building code. There was a lot that had to be done to meet current codes because of the size of the renovation. It was a combination of both discovering what was underneath the drywall, and what have you, and to see that there were areas that should have a column, but did not, which required adding a column. It also supporting the floor joists as well, sistering up supports throughout the building.

Councilman Nocera asks Director Holden to speak about the mechanicals and the plan for solar.

Director Holden replies that, as part of the structural analysis, they considered whether or not to support the solar on the roof. At this point, the structural engineer does not see a problem with the additional weight load. They are working with the solar company that has been sort of standardized throughout the City. They will be getting a proposal as to what they can do. Since the property is in a flood zone, all of the mechanicals have to be above the 100-year flood, which is a challenge that have been facing for the electrical as well as the other mechanical equipment.

Councilman Nocera states that his plan was more costly than originally thought. The good news is that, through careful planning, he believes that this building will be ready this summer. It is full steam ahead.

Director Holden replies that through some of his engineering, they have been able to reduce some of the costs. The lighting costs were much higher than anticipated, so it was redesigned to have a significant savings.

Councilman Nocera replies, about a 50% savings. Thank you.

The Chair calls on Councilman Grady Faulkner, Jr. for Director Holden.

Councilman Faulkner states that he has a question, adding that he forgets what the specific arrangement with the restaurant for all of the years before. The question is: who is libel to have insurance for the property.

In lieu of Director Holden, Acting Director Peterson steps to the podium.

Acting Director Peterson replies that the City has always had insurance, but, the truth of the matter is that, the lack of maintenance and structural deficiencies that were found by age would not have been covered by insurance. It was a complex property with a complex history. They have an agreement that was reached several administrations ago. They chose to end that agreement and do a payout, which came through this Council so that they could get online and do all of this maintenance and bring it up to Code. She continues, saying that, as Chris (Director Holden) said, bring it up to Code and make it ADA compliant, so everyone can enjoy it. She

invites everyone to revisit the plan, as it has been a while. It will be place that she believes they want the riverfront to be, which she believes is partnership and community. If you are walking your dog and want to grab a coffee. There will be an option for that. If you are with your kids or grandkids and want to grab an ice cream, there will be an option for that. It will be work experience for high school kids. If you want to bring the family down and have a nice dinner by the river, there will be an opportunity for that. It is going to be a special project once this investment is made and everything is ready to go.

Councilman Faulkner asks if there will be a program to inspect it in a periodic basis.

Acting Director Peterson replies, "Yes," adding that she thinks that this is, again, the relationship with the building and tenant that they have chosen is going to be very different than the previous relationship.

The Chair calls on Councilman Phillip Pessina.

Councilman Pessina states that he is glad that they brought up ADA because, in this building, adding that . . . he is the vice-chair of this committee . . . they were certain that there would-be an elevator for those with disabilities. That building never had one. Being on previous Economic Development Commissions, they were on the cusp of starting to deal with this. When the Mayor and the group made the decision to go ahead with this building, the timing is perfect with the riverbed project over development that they are looking to do in the future. With the recent concerns at Harbor Park, it is the first building that people will see whether attending concerts at Harbor Park until a venue is found for that and the building itself. Let us not forget that here is a lot of boat traffic on the river. We have never made attempts to attract that to the restaurant. The previous restaurant said they - the LaMonica, who invested quite significantly amount of dollars - - are going to provide with the collaboration with the high school. This is a very important project and it is important thought that this Council here supports this funding so we can move ahead and reach the May 2023 deadline.

Acting Director Peterson interjects, saying that it is important to point out that, in addition to the relationship with the high school and work experience, they also intend to have a relationship with *Perccatory*, which has a location in Middletown and with Nora Cupcake, which has a location in Middletown. Both are woman owned buys8inesses that are already established in Middletown. They will join us at the river.

The Chair calls on Councilman Edward McKeon.

Councilman McKeon states that, addressing LaMonica and the amount of waiting that they have had to do, he asks when they start making lease payments on this building.

Acting Director Peterson replies that it has obviously been amended, adding that we cannot expect them to pay for a building that is not useable. Once the building is something that they can operate. Once we can hand them the product that we promised, we can engage in the lease.

Councilman McKeon states that he has another question about the same property, noting that either Acting Director Peterson or Public Works Director Holden can answer. One obvious issue is springtime flooding. He wonders what we are doing in the building for the inevitable floods that come.

Acting Director Person replies that it is treatment of the floor, to the downstairs bar, moving as many of them mechanicals to the 2nd floor. It is basically understanding that this is a property that is going to flood, so making it -- when it inevitably does flood -- dry out, and does not have a sitting pool of water and does not affect mechanicals in the same way it has in the past. They will make sure that there are shut offs so that, if something happens, it is really easy to shut the building down.

Councilman McKeon states that he has another question on the Keating Building. We just got an emergency notice tonight. He asks for a brief explanation of what happened regarding deferred maintenance.

Acting Director Peterson replies that, speaking of deferred maintenance, Keating, for a fun little bit as to how Keating is designed, the sewer, which Chris (Public Works Director Holden) tells her that, at the time it was done, and she can see why, the sewer pipes go up and run across the ceiling. So, when there is a break, you get sewage inside the building, and this happened to be a break in the Stubborn Beauty space where they store cans and things like that. So, it was around 5:00 with a call from a tenant and there was a pipe leaking. She explains that she brought Building (Department) and they went down. It confirmed that it was a sewage pipe so they immediately called ServPro because that is not something that the City can bring its own people into do. They need someone, who has the tools, time, and expertise to do that. It was . . . they called the plumber. They confirmed. They came and fixed the leak and then ServPro came in the next morning before the start of business to clean up so they could get Stubborn Beauty up and running again.

Councilman McKeon asks if there will be additional liability because of the damage to Stubborn Beauty.

Acting Director Peterson replies that there is. There were cans damaged and information was sent about that. It will go as a credit to their rent, adding that they work with them to identify what was lost, the cost of what was lost, and credited against their rent.

The Chair calls on Councilwoman Jeanette Blackwell.

Councilwoman Blackwell calls for Public Works Director Christopher Holden on Item 11E, asking that he elaborate. Specifically, she wants to know how residents can access these services through this grant.

Director Holden replies that this is a matching grant through the Sustainable CT program. This will help fund the program called Cheer. Cheer provides clean, efficient energy and renewables. It tries to provide low to moderate-income households with the savings that you can get with either additional insulation, upgrades in weather stripping around windows. What Cheers does is help overcome any health and safety issues that sometimes can stand in the way of access financing through Eversource or other funds that would be free to the homeowner to make these improvements. For this grant, they just need to contact the Public Works Department as they are currently overseeing the program. They will be able to put them into contact with the appropriate people. This also goes back to the home energy solutions audits of houses, that is the first step in the process to better understand what efficiencies could be installed to help the homeowner reduce both the energy costs, energy consumption and, possibly, water consumption as well.

Councilwoman Blackwell states, to be sure that she is clear; a resident can contact Public Works. There isn't an application process.

Director Holden replies that there is a process that they have to go through because we have . . . it will help us hire a company that will go through the process. We have to check out energy bills. We have to make sure that they have the appropriate income levels so a family living in the dwelling. There is a process. That they have to go through.

Councilwoman Blackwell adds that the first step is to contact Public Works.

Director Holden replies that they need to contact them and to get the process started.

The Chair calls on Councilman McKeon for this director.

Councilman McKeon states that his comment may be more informational than anything else. They are not going to have a report on the riverfront tonight. They did have a meeting a couple of weeks ago about closing the lights on Route 9, which would send the traffic down River Road. He understands, through the auspices of his colleague -- through Councilwoman Blackwell -- that we are going to be discussing this at the next meeting for the community. He asks Director Holden to let them know what will be happening at that meeting.

Director Holden states that they came up with a concept alternative for the removal of the signals on Route 9. That presentation will be given at the Community Meeting when that happens in the next week or two. That is the plan.

Councilman McKeon asks, through the Chair, not many people watch Questions to Directors, so it may be something that we want to announce.

The Chair states that, on the regular meeting agenda, there is a notation about amending the calendar. At that time . . . (*multiple speakers/ inaudible*).

The Chair asks Director Holden, as a follow-up, the voltaic cells, money being allocated for the renovation of 80 Harbor Drive is \$2M. Included in that money, that proposed allocation, is money that will add photovoltaic cells to 80 Harbor Drive.

Director Holden replies that, in the past they did not actually purchase the solar array. They entered into an agreement with the company and paid a reduced rate so the cost is built into the energy rate. It will not be a capital outlay, but will be figured into the energy costs for the building. It will reduce the energy cost and will be the differential between what we pay for the solar array versus what we would have paid for commercial power.

Councilman Loffredo asks if Beman School has this arrangement.

Director Holden replies that Beman School has it. Water & Sewer has a similar agreement and may have included a roof repair. The new Recreation center has a similar agreement. Yes, that is how we have been doing it.

Councilman Loffredo asks if it is a separate agreement that will be presented to the Council at some point.

Director Holden replies, "Yes."

The Chair thanks Director Holden and calls on Councilwoman Blackwell.

Councilwoman Blackwell asks for Russell Library Director Ramona Burkey regarding agenda Item 11I, the library report. Councilwoman Blackwell notes that the Connecticut State Library Board has approved the \$250K grant request. She congratulates Director Burkey and asks that she expand on the ADDA accommodation that will be supported through this grant. She also asks Director Burkey to talk about the partnership with Recreation Director Lechowicz to disseminate a survey for senior citizens.

Director Burkey states that, in terms of the \$250K State grant that they are approved for through the Connecticut State Library is a direct 50/50 match for the \$250K ARPA grant awarded to the library last year. The total project

at Russell Library is \$500K. It is intended to get them through some issues that they have in terms of ADA accessibility, some sanitary and code issues that they have in the restrooms in the lobby as well as to allow them to bring the public back into the building. She states that part of the purpose of the ARPA grant is to bring the public back together after the pandemic. They did have a lot of isolation and we know people are handling, or, unfortunately, not handling things, especially mentally. We want to get people back in the building -- into the library – which can be the center of Town, the Town Square. For example, the checkout desk in the lobby is large, but it is not ADA compliant. You pull a wheelchair up to that desk, but cannot access services offered by staff. It is also not ergonomically correct for the staff. It is a kind of nightmare. We also have private staff talks that happen in the middle of the lobby right bow. We would like to reclaim that space and be able to use it for the public and create that “Town Square” feeling. As far as the bathrooms go, the lobby restrooms have ever had ventilation and the many decade they have existed. We are trying to get ventilation in there, adding it is hard to believe, noting that she sees many wide eyes. If you have been in these restrooms recently you can agree that there is no ventilation, which is something that is very important. She adds that ventilation was something that can up a lot during the pandemic: ventilation, clean air. It seems so basic. It is so necessary. This grant will help with that. As far as the Senior Services, survey she has talked with Director Lechowicz about disseminating the survey citywide, adding that it has been a few years since any survey with the library was done. The last time was during the strategic planning process in 2019-202. Obviously, a lot has happened since then: a pandemic, the landscape has changed. Conditions have changed and people’s needs have probably changed dramatically. Again, what are seniors looking for -- and need -- here in Middletown and how can – and how should -- the library respond to that. What are the challenges that they are dealing with? What are their needs? How can the library respond? She adds that the survey will go out in a variety of formats -- electronic, paper – and at the library as well as the Senior Center, residences, through faith communities, casting as wide a net as they can so that they can get really good, comprehensive information on where we want to go with services for senior residents.

The Chair asks if there are any additional questions. He calls on Councilman Eugen Nocera. He has no questions The Chair calls on Councilman Edward McKeon.

Councilman McKeon calls a point of personal privilege, noting that he has a couple of questions for Lucy Lechowicz. He asks her Mom, Recreation Director Cathy Lechowicz, to bring her to the podium.

The Chair quips, asking if she is a rising Director.

Councilman McKeon asks her what book she is reading. (*Inaudible*). Lucy Lechowicz replies, “The Babysitters Club.” Councilman McKeon asks what her favorite Christmas present was. Lucy Lechowicz replies (*inaudible*). Councilman McKeon asks when they go back to school. Lucy Lechowicz replies that they went back to school today. Councilman McKeon thanks her for coming to the meeting.

The Chair states that he has a question for Recreation Director Cathy Lechowicz. He notes that, in the reports that the Council received, both last month and this month, the Recreation budget is rearranged in increments of about \$5K per month, a total of \$10K. He asks for an explanation as to the miscellaneous requirements.

Director Lechowicz replies that, in preparing for the Recreation Center opening, there have been different costs than they would ordinarily have. They have shifted some monies. They have been discussing with the Mayor and Finance, so both are aware of this need. Costs have also shifted. As they enter budget season, they will be looking at the lines so they more accurately reflect dally needs. Miscellaneous supply line will come in much, much higher this year. Supplies, in general, are more costly, noting that they have spent almost the entire line during camp season because the cost for these materials were so high. As they prepare to open the Rec Center, they need different supplies than they needed, historically. They have shifted money, which reflects what they are actually spending.

Questions to Directors Workshop – Closes

There being no further questions, the Chair closes Questions to Directors at 6:39 PM.

3. Adjournment

Councilman Edward McKeon moves to adjourn. Councilman Philip Pessina seconds the motion.

There being no discussion, the Chair calls for voice vote. The motion is unanimously approved by a vote of 12-0 (AYE: Councilmembers Blackwell, Carta, Faulkner, Ford, Gennaro, Loffredo, Mangiafico Marino, McKeon, Nocera, Pessina, and Salafia.) The matter is approved. The meeting is adjourned at 6:44 PM

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