

A **REGULAR MEETING** of the City Council and Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) of the City of Torrington was held at the City Hall Auditorium on Monday, November 20, 2023. Present at the City Hall Auditorium were Mayor Elinor Carbone, City Councilors Drake Waldron, Keri Hoehne, Armand Maniccia, Anne Ruwet, Paul Cavagnero, and David Oliver. Also present at City Hall was Treasurer Dan Farley. Joining via Zoom were City Planner Jeremy Leifert, Fire Chief Eric Borden, Deputy Fire Chief David Tripp, and Deputy Police Chief Bart Barown.

Mayor Carbone called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. beginning with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment: (in-person only)

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Hoehne, the Council voted unanimously to open the meeting to the public, in accordance with Section 4(e) of the City Council & WPCA Meeting Rules of Procedure.

Mayor Carbone told the Public and the Council that earlier today she had met with the City Planner regarding the overflow shelter planned for Northwest Hills Community Church on Prospect Street. She said that due to the change of usage for the property, it must go through a public process for approval, with a Public Hearing. Then the Planning & Zoning Commission will decide if this is the appropriate location and the appropriate use. She reminded everyone that the City has nothing to do with the overflow shelter.

Councilor Cavagnero arrived at 6:32 p.m.

Torrington Resident Nicole Milo said that as a parent, volunteer with the homeless community, and director of a non-profit, she was disappointed in the lack of communication and inadequate effort to bring the community together to be informed of the decision to put a shelter near schools. This is a cause for concern regarding drug use being near schools, she said.

Litchfield Resident John Simoncelli, Executive Director of Greenwoods Counseling, explained that this location will not be a permanent shelter, will run from 8:30 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., and from that point, the unhoused will be directed to the Community Kitchen for breakfast and then to the Gathering Place to stay warm until the Community Kitchen opens again at 5:00 p.m. He told the Council that the shelter will be getting \$250,000 from the State to provide staffing support and food. He said that drug use is not allowed at the shelter. Mr. Simoncelli said that a committee has been looking at locations for six months, and if this location is rejected, people won't have a place to go.

Torrington Resident Gary Eucalitto, Member of the Board of Education, said that the Coe Park staff and the Torrington Library staff deal with addicts every day. He said that people are being dumped in downtown Torrington and that other communities need to step up.

Torrington Resident Roberta Raffa, Security Director for St. Paul the Great and a retired DEA Agent, asked if they will have metal detectors and if they will be patting down every individual for drugs and weapons before entering. She is concerned about drugs and drug paraphernalia being left on the playground, as it would only take a tiny bit of Fentanyl for a child to overdose.

Torrington Resident Conrad Sienkiewicz, Coordinator for Operation Overflow, said that these are human beings looking for a place to sleep. He said that the Police Department and other mental health counselors would be available to help the shelter. He said we should be led by love and not fueled by fear.

Norfolk Resident Julie Scharnberg, Vice President of Community Engagement for NW CT Community Foundation, said that they have planned to have as much coverage as possible while being extremely sensitive to this issue. This shelter is an emergency response to having no room at existing shelters, she said.

Waterbury Resident Christina Bishop said she works with the homeless and noted that every shelter in Connecticut is full. She said there are currently 12 families that are not sheltered and are living in a tent or car with their kids. She said without this overflow shelter these families will not have shelter during the winter.

Peter Kapitancheh said he has a son attending St. John Paul the Great Academy and he doesn't agree with the thought of a 'not my backyard' attitude. Just because someone is unhoused, he said, does not make them dangerous, and any delay in the opening of this shelter is cruel.

Torrington Resident Michael Burgos, Pastor of Northwest Hills Community Church, said that no one else in town would open the shelter. We have an obligation as Christians to take care of others, he said, and his church isn't making a dime from this shelter - the only thing that they would receive is the differential

in cost for heating and electricity. He went on to say that having a professional shelter that's run professionally with safeguards in place, allows for a schedule that doesn't interfere with church programs and does not permit loitering.

Torrington Resident Noel DeLeon II said that people deserve love, compassion, and shelter.

Hartford Resident Michael Ambrose, Pastor of the Northwest Hills Community Church, said that you just don't know what may happen one day, and that safety is the number one concern.

Torrington Resident Donna Georgescu said that Torrington is misrepresented and is a very generous community. She said that in the past St. Peter Hall has been used as a shelter. The issue is that even if there is 1 out of 10 chances of something happening, then that becomes a huge liability for Torrington, she said.

Canton Resident Greg Brisco, CEO of the YMCA, noted that people want a warm place to be. He said there have been a handful of times that individuals were violent. He said he would never put any of his staff at risk for violence.

Torrington Resident Caitlin Hall said that as parents we should be teaching kids to take care of other people. Her concern is that they found out about the shelter on Saturday night and were never told anything ahead of time to be able to address questions and concerns from parents.

Torrington Resident Jim Ryan asked who does the vetting process to ensure no drugs or weapons are allowed in the shelter, as well as who would be escorting the individuals out of the building to ensure that they were leaving.

Barkhamsted Resident John Noelke, owner of Howards Bookstore, said that he deals with the homeless every day with his business being located downtown. He said that the solution would be to shelter them, so they could be out of the elements.

Torrington Resident Kristen LaMesa-Hamzy said to put the \$250,000 into one of the abandoned factories for a permanent location. She said that the school would be more than happy to help with fundraising efforts for sleeping bags or whatever else may be needed. She also said that this should be a town issue as the Police force is already overworked.

Torrington Resident Susan Cook read a portion of Father Emmanuel's letter to his parishioners regarding the shelter. He said it is their responsibility to ensure the safety of our children.

Torrington Resident Krystal Wall said that there are issues with homelessness and food insecurity within this town. She said that this community needs to come together to do better. She said it is a humanity issue and not a homeless issue.

Principal Ed Goad of St. John Paul the Great Academy said that the safety and security of his students are the priority. He went on to say that he is floored by the generosity and passion of the parents in this community. He said with better communication, they would come together for the common good of the people.

Torrington Resident Carol Botticelli said her main concern is the safety of children, and that as a parent our job is to protect the kids.

State Representative Jay Case said that many buildings throughout the area were considered as a location for this shelter. He said that he would like to work with the community so that everyone has a voice, and for everyone to be on the same page.

Mayor Carbone added that some of the buildings that were being looked at were contaminated, and people couldn't be put in there.

Pastor Marisol Miranda is a Pastor, but before that worked at a hospital with addicts, she said they are nice but can snap. She would like to volunteer her time for the shelter, but not near the school.

Harwinton Resident Christina Emery Director of Primetime House said that Torrington is the hub for housing case management. Currently, there are not enough shelter beds, and this shelter is the support needed to keep the individuals alive until they can find long-term shelter for them.

Torrington Resident Lisa Candles, an employee for EdAdvance, said that many of their families are homeless, or doubled up in housing. She said anything that stops this shelter from opening as soon as possible would be a danger.

Torrington Resident Mary Fisher recalled working for Operation Overflow when it was staffed by volunteers and the shelter survived by contributions.

Winchester Resident Diedre DiCara, Executive Director of F.I.S.H., said the number one goal is getting a housing voucher for all the individuals entering the shelter. She said last year when the shelter was in Winsted, 75% of the individuals left there with a housing plan because the agencies all worked together. She said that they needed to find a place before winter to house the children.

Megan Lowell, a parent and teacher shared that this is a perfect example of a need for better communication to help families with their fears.

Mayor Carbone said that the City found out last Thursday about the location of the shelter, and asked who is going to communicate this information to the schools. She reiterated that there is a Zoning process that must occur, and the Commission will decide on what’s best for the community.

Approve Minutes

On a motion by Councilor Ruwet, seconded by Councilor Oliver, the Council voted unanimously to accept the Regular meeting minutes from November 13, 2023.

Human Resources Director

On a motion by Councilor Maniccia, seconded by Councilor Oliver, the Council voted unanimously to appoint Denise Gagne Kurpiewski to the position of HR Director for the City of Torrington beginning on December 1, 2023. Councilor Hoehne asked why Ms. Kurpiewski was moving from Education to Municipal, and Mayor Carbone explained that Ms. Kurpiewski also has Municipal experience, and is excited to begin working with the City.

ARPA Grant Funds

On a motion by Councilor Oliver, seconded by Councilor Waldron, the Council voted unanimously to approve an additional \$100,000 of Grant Funding from the ARPA funds to help fund the Warner Theater’s initiatives as disclosed in the memo and document provided by the Warner Theater.

Vote to Add Section B to the Agenda

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Ruwet, the Council voted unanimously to add Section B to the agenda.

Brownfield Remediation - 70 North St. & 100 Franklin St.

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Oliver, the Council voted unanimously to authorize the Mayor to enter into a Consulting Services Contract with Juliet Burdelski for Economic Development Grant Administration Training. Services will begin Dec. 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024, for approximately \$14,000 as described in Ms. Burdelski’s proposal dated November 15, 2023.

Tax Collector Refunds

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Oliver, the Council voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the Tax Collector and authorize the tax refunds indicated on the list dated November 20, 2023.

Business by Dept. Heads

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Hoehne, the Council voted unanimously to consider business by Department Heads. There was no business to be discussed.

Business by Mayor & Members

On a motion by Councilor Hoehne, seconded by Councilor Oliver, the Council voted unanimously to consider business by the Mayor and City Council members.

Councilor Cavagnero asked for an explanation of all the Public Comments. Mayor Carbone explained that they have been trying to identify a location for the winter shelter, and that funding wasn’t guaranteed. A committee investigated the purchase of property to be turned into a permanent shelter. She went on to say that at this point Planning and Zoning needs to approve a Change-of-Use for this location. Councilor Cavagnero asked if there was a group that could help process or monitor this since there is a need in the community. Mayor Carbone said that currently, all the social service agencies work together. She further explained that once the State started distributing money, the sheltering changed, individuals could call 2-1-1 and get bussed from New London to Torrington.

Councilor Ruwet said that it was a good hearing from the public tonight and that homelessness has been around for a while, adding that what the City needs to do is open a community location. She also acknowledged Councilor Maniccia, and Councilor Hoehne for their last meeting, and that it was an honor to serve with them.

Councilor Maniccia Thanked Councilor Ruwet and the rest of the Council, as it has been a pleasure serving the City.

Councilor Hoehne asked why they didn't have to go through the whole process of getting Zoning approval 16 years ago, and Mayor Carbone told her that they would be changing the use of the building, as it would be a six-month commitment whereas before it was never more than 30 days at one location. Councilor Hoehne asked how quickly the Planning and Zoning meeting would be held, and Mayor Carbone told her that P&Z would meet on November 29, 2023, to set the Public Hearing for December 13, 2023. Councilor Hoehne asked why the shelter couldn't use different churches for a month and then move to the next one, Mayor Carbone told her at this point it would be what the public would be comfortable with.

Councilor Waldron thanked Councilors Maniccia and Hoehne for their service and wished them luck in the future. He also wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Mayor Carbone expressed her gratitude for Councilors Hoehne and Maniccia who represented the part of the population that has no voice, and she hopes to work with them again in the future. She also wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Public Comment (in-person only)

On a motion by Councilor Hoehne, seconded by Councilor Cavagnero, the Council voted unanimously to open the meeting to the public to comment on agenda items only.

Torrington Resident Alan Rosa shared his frustrations with the City, about how his house had previously been foreclosed on and is now being charged \$1,000 a day in fines.

Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Hoehne, seconded by Councilor Maniccia, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Heather Abraham, Asst. City Clerk

ATTEST:


CAROL L. ANDERSON, CITY CLERK