

CITY COUNCIL & WPC AUTHORITY

REGULAR MEETING

LOCATION: ONLINE/REMOTE

April 20, 2020

A **REGULAR MEETING** of the City Council & WPC Authority was held on Monday, April 20, 2020. In response to the Governor's Executive Orders regarding COVID-19, this meeting was held remotely using the ZOOM online meeting platform. Participants included Mayor Elinor Carbone and City Councilors Drake Waldron, Sharon Waagner, Paul Cavagnero, Frank Rubino and Anne Ruwet.

Corporation Counsel Victor Muschell, Fire Chief Peter Towey, Public Works Director Raymond Drew, City Clerk Carol Anderson, Elderly Services Director Joel Sekorski, City Comptroller Alice Proulx and Tax Collector Launa Goslee also joined the meeting remotely.

Councilor David Oliver was absent.

Mayor Carbone called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m.

Minutes Approved

On a motion by Councilor Rubino, seconded by Councilor Ruwet, the Council voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the regular meeting held April 6, 2020.

Fair Housing Resolution

On a motion by Councilor Cavagnero, seconded by Councilor Ruwet, the Council voted unanimously to adopt Resolution #143-202, publicly endorsing the right of all people to full and equal housing opportunities in the neighborhood of their choice:

WHEREAS, All persons are afforded a right to full and equal housing opportunities in the neighborhood of their choice; and

WHEREAS, Federal fair housing laws require that all individuals, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status or national origin, be given equal access to all housing-related opportunities, including rental and homeownership opportunities, and be allowed to make free choices regarding housing location; and

WHEREAS, Connecticut fair housing laws require that all individuals, regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, marital status, age, lawful source of income, familial status, learning disability, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression be given equal access to all housing-related opportunities, including rental and home ownership opportunities, and be allowed to make free choices regarding housing location; and

WHEREAS, The City of Torrington is committed to upholding these laws, and realizes that these laws must be supplemented by an Affirmative Statement publicly endorsing the right of all people to full and equal housing opportunities in the neighborhood of their choice.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOVED, That the City of Torrington hereby endorses a Fair Housing Policy to ensure equal opportunity for all persons to rent, purchase, obtain financing and enjoy all other housing-related services of their choice on a nondiscriminatory basis as provided by state and federal law; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the chief executive officer of the City of Torrington or his/her designated representative is responsible for responding to and assisting any person who alleges to be the victim of an illegal discriminatory housing practice in the City of Torrington and for advising such person of the right to file a complaint with the State of Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and

Opportunities (CHRO) or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or to seek assistance from the CT Fair Housing Center, legal services, or other fair housing organizations to protect his or her right to equal housing opportunities.

Assisted Transportation Program Wheelchair Van Grant

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Rubino, the Council voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the Services for the Elderly Commission and the Elderly Services Director to authorize the Mayor to apply for the Assisted Transportation Program's DOT Sec. 5310 grant and approve the purchase of a wheelchair accessible van with an expected maximum cost of \$59,822, as described in Joel Sekorski's memo dated April 7, 2020.

Mr. Sekorski explained that the grant was applied for last spring and approved this fall. He was optimistic that the procurement process would be fast-tracked by purchasing the same Ford Transit van that was purchased in 2019.

Senior Center Carpet Replacement

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Waagner, the Council voted unanimously to approve the recommendation of the Senior Center Director and the Purchasing Agent to waive the City's bid process and award the contract for carpet replacement at the Sullivan Senior Center to Bartholomew Contract Interiors (BCI) of Hartford, CT for \$14,617.28 (State Contract #12PSX0307).

Suspension of In-Person Budget Adoption Requirement

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Cavagnero, in accordance with Executive Order 7I, the Council voted unanimously to authorize the Board of Finance to adopt a budget and set a mill rate without holding a public hearing as required under Torrington City Charter Section C13-3B.

Mayor Carbone emphasized the importance of continuing to move through the budget process and clarified that the City would only adopt the budgets and set the mill rate without a public hearing if the COVID-19 pandemic makes it impossible to do so. She assured the Council that every effort would be made to ensure that the proposed budgets are made available for public inspection and that the public would be able to submit their comments in writing before any budgets are adopted.

Councilors Ruwet, Rubino and Waagner expressed their concerns about limiting public input. Mayor Carbone reiterated the importance of having opportunities for public input and outlined her anticipated schedule for budget adoption. The schedule included attempts to solicit written or typed comments from the public by way of website notifications and promotion through the newspapers in advance of a joint meeting with the Board of Finance and the Board of Education and also prior to the regular Board of Finance meeting on May 19, 2020. The Mayor reassured the Council that any reduction to City's budget would come back to the City Council for their approval. Councilors Waagner and Cavagnero expressed their support for the new budget adoption strategy.

Participation in Tax Deferment Program

On a motion by Councilor Ruwet, seconded by Councilor Rubino, the Council voted unanimously to participate in the Tax Deferment Program as set forth in the Governor's Executive Order 7S, as amended by Executive Order 7W, requiring municipalities to offer to eligible taxpayers, businesses, nonprofits and residents a deferment by 90-days of any taxes on real property, personal property or motor vehicles and municipal sewer user fees from the time that said tax or user fee becomes due and payable and to notify the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management of the same.

Tax Collector Launa Goslee expressed her appreciation for the cooperative relationship that TTC, LLC has with the City and endorsed the Mayor's recommendation to participate in the Tax Deferment Program. The Mayor discussed some of the difficulties of implementing the program and Ms. Goslee stated that TTC, LLC would try to make the application process as efficient and easy as possible.

Modification of Tax Deadlines

On a motion by Councilor Ruwet, seconded by Councilor Waldron, the Council voted unanimously to authorize a modification of Paragraph 3 of the Tax Collector Service Agreement to allow the Tax Collector to fulfill its obligation of final settlement of the first installment of the total taxes and sewer use fees due on the rate books for the 10/1/2019 Grand List on or before the first Monday in January 2021 instead of the first Monday in November 2020.

TTC Credit for Loss of Interest

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Rubino, the Council voted unanimously to credit TTC in an amount not to exceed \$40,000 as compensation for its loss of interest attributable to the Deferment Program required by the Governor's Executive Order 7S which amount shall be used to reduce the balance due by TTC to the City for the first installment of the total taxes and sewer fees (on the October 1, 2019 Grand List) on or before the first Monday in January 2021.

Councilor Rubino asked how the \$40,000 figure was determined and Mayor Carbone explained that the City and Tax Collector came to an agreement based on figures extrapolated from TTC's database. Councilor Ruwet expressed her support.

Release of Liens

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Waagner, the Council voted unanimously to accept Corporation Counsel's recommendation and authorize the Mayor, pursuant to C.G.S. §12-179, to release the liens described in Atty. Muschell's memo dated April 20, 2020.

Tax Collector Refunds

On a motion by Councilor Ruwet, seconded by Councilor Waldron, the Council voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the Tax Collector and authorize the 14 tax refunds indicated on the list dated April 20, 2020.

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Cavagnero, the Council herein acting as the WPCA voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the Tax Collector and authorize the sewer usage refund indicated on the list dated April 20, 2020.

Business by Dept. Heads

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Ruwet, the Council voted unanimously to consider business by Department Heads.

Chief Towey provided an update on the City's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and reported that Torrington had just over 200 cases. He expressed gratitude for the individuals and organizations that have supported the frontline workers and encouraged everyone to maintain their efforts to reduce the spread of the virus. Mayor Carbone expressed her appreciation for Chief Towey and those that participated in the Parade for Heroes. Councilor Ruwet also expressed her appreciation for Chief Towey and Councilor Waagner thanked the entire emergency management team for their preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Business by Mayor & Members

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Ruwet, the Council voted unanimously to consider business by the Mayor and Council members.

Councilors Waldron and Rubino urged everyone to stay safe and healthy. Councilors Waldron, Rubino and Waagner also thanked the City and public safety personnel for their work. Councilor Ruwet shared her concerns and the concerns of her neighbors regarding the potential lease of property on East Pearl Road to Verogy Energy for the construction of a solar farm. She requested that a discussion on the proposed project be placed on the agenda for the next City Council meeting.


Mayor Carbone clarified that the proposed site for Verogy Energy's solar farm is on property owned by the Archdiocese of Hartford and she stated that the Council could discuss the public process that would need to be followed for the solar farm project to move forward. The Mayor also updated the Council on progress being made with the Board of Assessment Appeals to proceed with appellant hearings.

Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Waldron, seconded by Councilor Waagner, the Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Jonathan R. Draper, Asst. City Clerk

ATTEST:


CAROL L. ANDERSON, MMC
CITY CLERK