

TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC SPEAKING MEETING

MARCH 17, 1998

6:30 P.M.

A meeting of the Wallingford Town Council held specifically for the purpose of offering the public an opportunity to speak on topics of concern to them was held on Tuesday, March 17, 1998 in the Robert Earley Auditorium of the Wallingford Town Hall and called to Order by Chairman Robert F. Parisi at 6:31 P.M. All Councilors answered present to the Roll called by Town Council Secretary Kathryn F. Zandri with the exception of Vice Chairman Rys who was unable to attend due to a commitment to judge an essay contest with the Mayor at the V.F.W. in Yalesville. This commitment was made prior to the setting of this Town Council Meeting. Mayor William W. Dickinson, Jr. was absent; as was Attorney Janis M. Small and Comptroller Thomas A. Myers.

The Pledge of Allegiance was given to the Flag.

Reginald Knight, 21 Audette Drive requested ten minutes to speak to the Council.

Reginald Knight stated, we have been told that we have to sign up to speak and give the length of time we wish to speak. To me, this is, in effect, a self-inflicted limitation of speech and does not reflect the possibility of debate or exchange of information from or to the speaker. One question could possibly open up more debate on communication time than the speaker has asked for. No one can foresee where a question or comment may lead. One is asked to sign up ahead of time. What is the definition of "ahead of time"? Officially, we have not been told. A week? A day? An hour before the actual meeting or up until the meeting starts? If a person has a lengthy speech in mind can he still sign up while those with shorter speeches are talking? There needs to be written guidelines to clarify these situations. Also, could it not be written into the guidelines that one could phone in one's request? No everyone can get down to the Town Hall during the day due to work schedules but could get a couple of minutes to phone in their requests. It was already suggested at the last Town Council Meeting that a person could phone in to say that they could not make the third meeting even though they had signed up for it. If one can phone to cancel their appearance why not let them sign up to speak by use of a phone. I feel very confused about the whole concept of these so-called third meetings which will actually be the second meeting of the month as the regular town meetings take place on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month with the third meeting in between. I am confused because I read statements in the local papers that the whole concept was to step up efficiency with the thought that the Councilors could rush home to the bosom of their families from the regular Town Council meeting. Indeed, more than one Councilor has stated that their family complain they spend too much time away from home at Council meetings, subcommittees and other such functions. In fact, quite a lot of time was consumed debating the hourly rate of recompense by those appointed out the amount of time they spend away from their families. There are one or two points I would like to make; first, these subcommittee liaison positions, rather than have Councilors be the liaison, could not each of these committees elect one of their own to report to the Council and this way Councilors would not be running hither and yon? During the last term of office the subject came up with Mr. Farrell being appointed to a committee outside of Council duties. I brought up the question of the workload and if it would be fair or could he possibly be overloaded with the obligations. The Chairman assured me that the gentleman was fully capable to handle the extra workload. Is it necessary that the Councilors have to take on these side issues? To delegate work and committees to others and have them report back to the Town Council would surely be more time-effective. All the groups such as P.U.C., town works, etc., could have their own liaison to the Town Council or the Mayor, which ever would be more appropriate. I realize that most of the Councilors have jobs or professions that also take a great deal of time but they chose to run for office and I feel that

they owe it to the public to not undertake too many projects so that they can give sufficient time and attention to the ones they consider most important; not to carry the whole world on their shoulders but to let others carry some of the load. I would like to suggest that the Councilors study the tapes of the Town meetings that they may observe their own speaking deliveries. We are all guilty of our different speech deliveries which cause problems. I am sure some of you already do study the tapes. Examples; repetitious use of a word over and over again which could easily be preceded by the word "many"; Councilor after Councilor adding their agreement to what another Councilor has just said and taking just as long and sometimes longer to say it than the original speaker; Councilors who use the expression, "as I have said before" three or four times in their statement showing how repetitious and time consuming the statement is; the parade of Council speakers who, when a gift is being given to the Town such as the clock from the V.F.W., surely a straight vote and a thank you speech from one person, preferably the Chairman, would be more effective and if deemed suitable a standing hand clapping ovation to show gratitude from all of the Council and Town. I am sure that if these tapes were studied with an eye to efficiency, the Councilors would see ways to step up their own time use factor. I am also puzzled by the whole idea of a third meeting being an efficient input time factor concept. For the sake of possibly, and I repeat possibly, one extra hour at regular meetings it was decided to take another evening away from their families. That is something that I find totally illogical considering the long, time-consuming vehemence I witnessed at the last regular meeting concerning pay per hour and absence from home and family. Apart from anything else, the extra meeting will bring down the hourly rate of pay. Take the concept of having this meeting between the first and second Town meetings leads to some questions; the first Town meeting will be over with very restricted input from the taxpayer. The Council will have already passed their ordinances, making comment or input from the public the third meeting a mockery, charade and because it will already be a done deal. At the same time the public will not have knowledge of what controversial items will be coming up in the second regular meeting and therefore cannot criticize, commend or contribute to debate on the subjects. During regular Town meetings it can be very difficult to get one's input/comment into three minutes. You can just about say a few words which cannot fully convey the full essence of one's statement and answers on debate and explanations take up time which eats into the overall public speaking period and yet, the longer time allowed at the third meeting is completely voided by being between the already done deal and the lack of knowledge concerning the next regular meeting. I feel very say that you have successfully squashed public input and real interaction of the people with Town governing process. I feel that the public has the right to criticize their government and to bring input on the wishes of the townspeople to city hall. No party or group should be so sacrosanct that they cannot or choose not to listen to those they are supposed to serve. The people who come down to Town Hall to comment give input or ask questions do so out of a love of Wallingford and deserve to be heard and listened to with a true awareness that these people care enough to get up and speak up. Sometimes that is getting more and more rare. Apathy and a sense of helplessness are becoming more prevalent among people who see government at all levels as a machine that is more concerned about party or careers than the wishes of those they supposedly serve. On another matter, televising of the third meeting; the Mayor stated that the cost would be prohibitive without coming up with any figures. A writer from the Record Journal has calculated after deep research that the cost would be approximately \$3,600 per year. Considering the \$3.9 million surplus in the tax budget and a \$40 million excess in the Town pension fund, \$3,600 appears to be small potatoes; very small potatoes. I would like to suggest that this cost could possibly be cut by employing only one camera instead of the usual three or four used at the regular town meetings. This camera could face the Town Council from the front and embrace the full Council while a citizen was talking and could zoom in, if necessary, to individual Councilors as they comment. This would save on tape and on the other two or three cameras. As for labor, with only one camera the operators could take turns and as it is only once a month, they would only have to work an extra night every three or four months. This would save on labor costs and bring down the estimate of \$3,600 per year. This is surely a small price to pay to let the public see the processes of Town government. Mr. Knight and the Mayor have both stated in the local newspaper that, quote, "This third meeting will not affect anything as the real town business is done during the regular town meeting", unquote. This surely adds credence to Mr. Kappi's statement that the third meeting is a hollow, shallow, empty gesture. If the townspeople cannot see and hear the processes of government on tape, that leaves us with the tender mercies of the newspapers. Both Mr. Knight and Mr. Renda have stated during regular Town meetings that the local papers quote, "get things out of context and print things all out of context." Whether they are

saying that the reporters are inept or the newspaper is slanted, I don't know. But, according to these Councilors the public can only get a completely inaccurate concept of a third meeting in the local newspapers. This is hardly fair to the taxpayers of Wallingford. On another matter, if I can harp back to the trees on the green; they were cut down without the full notice time between posting and cutting days. In the haste to cut them down the time was two days short because posting day and cutting day do not count in the five day period. These trees were of little or no urgent danger to anyone but were brought down on a shortened notification process but there has been a large tree on Sylvan Avenue, right off of South Main (street) that was declared decayed leaving one to assume that it is dangerous to people and property. This tree was posted February 23rd and was still standing until this afternoon. Twenty-two (22) days before this supposedly dangerous tree was approached by a saw. There are trees all over the city whose roots erupt the sidewalk but the most that has ever been done is use hot patch tar macadam to fill the step and believe me, this is not a temporary fix for most of these patches have been there for many, many years. We were told at the last Town meeting that anyone tripping and being injured could sue the Town. If this is so, then many of the city sidewalks are (law)suits ready to happen. Mr. Henry McCully took a verbal beating at the last Town meeting and I felt bad because I felt that he was used as a whipping boy for the administration. Did no one else; Mayor, legal department, etc., not see warning flags to slow down cutting the trees on the green? I think that Johanna would have cried at the site of those healthy trees cut down. I would just like to say, in closing, that my statements are not party-oriented and that I would feel compelled to speak no matter what party or individual sit up there. To speak up when one sees things that one feels in wrong is not only a right but an obligation. These are my opinions and I thank you for your time.

Christine Gavin, 34 Seneca Road stated, I have exhausted all my means for places and people that I can go to and speak with about a situation that you have before the Ordinance Committee about stray and feral cats so I wrote a letter to Mr. Parisi and if it is O.K. I just want to read it and then say something afterwards. My husband Robert and I, my two daughters, this is my daughter Casey who is three and one-half and I also have a nine month old, Meagan; we have had a huge problem with stray and feral cats in our yard and I am begging for help. I have been to the Health Department, Police Department, Mayor's Office and the Animal Control Department. We have gotten no help whatsoever. This has been going on for at least the past three years and we have been in our house five years. We love Wallingford, we love our house, we love everything about Wallingford but it is just that the situation is deplorable; it is horrible. We have been to Animal Control, Police Department, Health Department, Mayor Dickinson's Office. Some of the responses I have received are, "it is not our problem", "I can't help you", "There is no law against feeding stray cats" and we have gone as far as hearing, "It is being taken care of by the Mayor's Office." I have left two phone messages on Mary Mushinsky's answering machine but have never received a reply. I sent a copy of the September 1996 Public Act 96-243 Subhouse Bill No. 5801 regarding, in part, stray and feral cats that was passed by the State of Connecticut. It appears as though, unless a Town ordinance, is put into place, we will continue to live with the unsanitary yard conditions and unhealthy yard conditions. Noting my efforts, you cannot say that I have not tried to get some help. I would like you to know what we have been dealing with for the past three years. I wish I could be brief but it is just not possible. Our neighbor at 30 Seneca Road has been feeding stray cats for a number of years. She refuses to stop and it is because she does not want them to starve on her property. I understand that she has a heart but as I go on you will see what a problem it creates. These cats are huge and, judging by their size, they are fed better than normal house pets. The whole situation reached its boiling point when I was home on maternity leave last summer. I was starting to put my kids in the car to bring Casey to nursery school. A cat had gotten into the car through an open window; it was the summer; it found it's way in but could not find its way out. It started circling around the car, it was banging off of the windows, I had fur all over the inside of my car. When it finally found its way out through the driver's side window which was aimed right at us, it lurched at Casey, she had backed herself against the house screaming and crying that the cat was going to bite her. It didn't bite her, my problem and my request is, who would have been responsible for something had something happened? Does it just go unnoticed? At that point I called the police and they told me at the time that they arrest people, they don't arrest cats. I did not ask them to arrest a cat, I asked them to speak to my neighbor about feeding them. He, in turn, called Animal Control. April

Leiler, Asst. Animal Control Officer) had come out and said that she could fine the woman feeding the cats but she wouldn't fine her because the woman was elderly, she would go to court, they would see her, it will get thrown out. She does not have the money to pay, was another excuse but my point is, if she has enough money to buy the food to feed these cats then she sure has enough money to pay a fine. I was told that would not make a difference anyway. Another thing that was mentioned to me by Animal Control was again, the money, and my neighbor does have three indoor cats that she does keep indoors. There are approximately at least one dozen cats in the neighborhood that neighbors have counted. They live in the wild, go in and out of the woods in the back of our house and are no one's pets. I have gone door to door in my own neighborhood and adjacent streets asking if any one in and around the neighborhoods had any cats. They tell me no. I asked if they were feeding the cats and, of course, everyone is going to deny it after three articles in the Record Journal, no one is going to 'fess up anyway and I understand that, I have a heart. I am not trying to put these cats down. The conditions that they leave in my yard and for the safety of my children, I can't have it. I came today specifically because the meeting was not televised. My husband and I sit home and watch this at night because we want to know what is going on. My neighbors on the other side of this nice lady who is feeding the cats have their house up for sale. I did not want to be the one that was going to impede....."oh, Seneca Road, we can't move there, there is a whole bunch of strays cats and they are pooping all over the place". I consider that my taxes are paying for the use of the square footage of my house because I can't use my yard. We can't have a sandbox for the kids, the cats would go nuts. I can't cut the lawn without first going through and shoveling everything out and where do you put it at that point besides over the ledge into the woods. We have gone through everything imaginable to try and deter these cats. We have gone through using dried blood and every repellent that is known to Home Depot and nothing has worked. I currently have all of my bushes pulled up and plastic overI feel that I live in a trailer park; not that there is anything wrong with living in a trailer park but I did not buy one. I expect to be able to use my yard; I expect to be able to open my windows in the summertime and not have this foul stench underneath my kitchen windows. My husband is from New York in an area where one had to drive thirty minutes to get to a park. I don't expect to have to cement my entire yard, that is why he moved here. My neighbor who has his house for sale; we realize it was a growing problem, we have made complaints and the problem is not being addressed. The number of cats is growing. Mr. Stilson called John Petit from the Record Journal and an article was printed some time ago. The number of cats has grown since then. By making routine follow up calls to the Mayor's Office the Animal Control Officer has contacted me to say that she can only do what she is instructed to do as far as the status of the cats. I was told that the situation in my neighborhood was different and was being taken care of. There was apparently a Cheshire lawyer who read about the article, had a soft spot for my next door neighbor and said that he would have the cats trapped and removed to a heated barn upstate. He probably had three cats removed and that was the end of him. In a return call from the Mayor's Office upon receipt of a Christmas card that I had sent him, and I was not meaning to be fresh by that, we were told that the mystery lawyer trapped some of the cats but not all of them and was not going to take anymore away. During that same call I asked, what will happen now?, the first excuse I heard was, there was not enough traps. Next, there was no cages for inside the dog pound, the bid was out and it would be a few weeks before the bid comes to close. I went as far as to donate my have-a-heart trap to Kathy (Lindemann, Animal Control Officer) and April (Leiler) last August thinking that they wouldn't have anymore excuses because I was told that I could be fined if I trapped the cats on my own. I donated my trap thinking that it might move things along, apparently I did that for no reason. If this ordinance is passed it would eliminate numerous cat problems we have run into over the past three years. Below are some of the examples of conditions that are not meant to be offensive but are extremely nasty nonetheless: defecation on any patch dirt, concrete or grass that these cats can find; bird feathers and even half-eaten birds and mice on my patio; the attraction of raccoons and skunks which, according to local pet store, are drawn to cat urine; with the warm weather approaching I would like to be able to open my windows. I would like to be able to have my kids play outside in the yard that we pay taxes on. I would love to be able to go from my door to my mailbox and not have it be a "mine field". As it is, when anyone comes to our house we tell them to walk down the driveway and the walkway because if they walk across the yard the can't come in the house because I don't trust what is on their shoes. I don't know where else to go. I figure the Health Department

would help but a gentleman named George had mentioned that it is not something that they do. I said that it is a health issue, he said that is not us. With the police, I called them regarding the car incident figuring something would happen there; nothing has happened. All I got was a police officer who said, we don't arrest cats. I am not sure where else to go. I have been on the phone with the Mayor's secretary and I can recite the Mayor's Complaint Line number off of the top of my head, it is pathetic. I don't know what else to do. When I read that the issue was before the Ordinance Committee, that was my last hope. I purposely came today without having television for my neighbor's sake. I am not a saint but if I can help him out in any way in selling his house, fine. I also didn't want it on television because I don't think that there is anyone else out there that could help me. I have done a little bit of homework; your secretary, Kathy, was very helpful. I don't want to say I am ignorant but I have no idea about town politics. I asked her what the proper procedure would be, hence the letter to you, Mr. Parisi. I don't know where else to go. I brought my daughter with me today so that you could put a face with a name. I am at my wits end with my own house and I don't know what to do.

Mr. Parisi stated, I did get your letter and we did talk on the phone and I have been in touch with the dog pound. I am going to pursue that further as I told you I would. The ordinance is before the Ordinance Committee and Mr. Knight is Chairman of that committee.

Mr. Knight stated, I had a conversation with the Town Attorney today and asked him where he was in drafting such an ordinance to assist the Animal Control Officer in taking care of this problem. He (Town Attorney) had been awaiting a copy of a similar ordinance from Middlefield; I sent it to him; I would expect by next week that we should have a draft to work on in the Ordinance Committee. I wouldn't expect it to be more than, I would hope, by the end of April that we might be able to schedule a public hearing on a proposed ordinance. It will be taken care of. I thank you for coming in. This is something that we have been working on and you are right, there is nothing like having someone right in front of you to have the problem really come to light.

Mrs. Gavin stated, I know your contact on Valley Street; she is slowly becoming...I think we are being adopted by her; at least we are in contact three or four times a week. I think that her situation is a little different that ours whereas they're owned, ours are not. We were told by the Humane Society that if you feed them, you own them whereas nobody else seems to think that. I understand Middlefield just passed their ordinance within the last month or two. This has almost become an obsession with me only because it has been so long and I am getting a little frustrated. I feel that I am banging my head against the wall quite often enough where it is really starting to hurt.

Mr. Parisi stated, things are being done, though.

Mrs. Gavin stated, I am just afraid that it is going to die somewhere.

Mr. Knight stated, it is not going to die.

Mr. Zandri asked, does the Animal Control Officer have the authority to trap strays today?

Mr. Parisi responded, yes.

Mr. Zandri asked, then why is there a hesitation on accommodating the lady on trapping the strays?

Mr. Parisi answered, as I understand the traps were ordered quite a while ago and they just recently came in. I don't know if there is a run on those kinds of traps or if they take a long time to get or whatever.

Mr. Zandri stated, she mentioned that she supplied the Animal Control Officer with traps.

Mr. Parisi stated, I just found that out tonight and the first thing tomorrow morning I am going to check on that.

Mr. Zandri stated, obviously I know that we are trying to go through the process of establishing an ordinance or what have you but I think she needs immediate attention here and if the Animal Control Officer has the authority to trap then she should be sent out there tomorrow. If you would follow up on that, Bob, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Parisi stated, I am going to but I am not going to make any promise about exactly when it is going to happen. I will find out where your trap is. That bothers me, quite frankly. It ought to be on your front lawn, that is where it ought to be.

Mrs. Gavin stated, it should but I don't know what the proper procedure is....they told us they were going to be trapping and this lawyer apparently trapped a few of them on his own....if I could have done it, I would have.

Mr. Parisi stated, I am glad you didn't. I am not going to try and answer this right now. I will have an answer tomorrow night and I will call you.

Mr. Zandri stated, if there was a dog out there that we were having a problem with, that Animal Control Officer would be out there immediately.

Mr. Parisi responded, for some reason dogs are treated differently than cats.

Mr. Zandri responded, that is why I asked if she has the authority. If she has the authority then we should make her do her job.

Mr. Parisi responded, at one point, and this has been going on for quite a while, but the big thing was that we did not have the traps. I know I am right. It took quite a while to get them.

Mr. Zappala stated, she has the authority to trap them but she has no ordinance addressing how to dispose of them. The trapping will not do anything until the ordinance is in effect.

Mr. Parisi stated, we are not going to dispose of them (cats), Tom.

Mr. Zappala explained, she cannot act on anything unless the ordinance is put into effect. What is she going to do, trap them and keep them at the kennel?

Mr. Zandri stated, she could keep them at the pound. At least it will eliminate Christine's problem.

Mr. Zappala stated, until the ordinance is passed she has no right to keep them at the pound.

Mr. Parisi stated, the plan was to catch them, neuter them and put them back.

Mr. Zappala stated, once the ordinance is passed, the Animal Control Officer could dispose of the cats if no one claims them after seven days or what ever time period.

Mrs. Gavin stated, to my understanding, the way it was going to happen was, they were going to be trapped, it was going to be put into the newspaper.....and that if nobody claimed them....

Mr. Parisi finished, they would be destroyed.

Mrs. Gavin answered, I don't want them destroyed but I also don't want them as my problem but I can't see making them somebody else's problem either. If they are adoptable then that is fine, too. We were told from the get go by the Assistant Animal Control Officer that the minute I open my mouth, if I come here, if I go to the newspaper, I will have people with signs on my front yard. I don't want that. I am at the point now where, I don't care if I get that. I have an immediate problem that is keeping me in my house. I am not overly crazy about that. I do understand how business is supposed to work. Spaying and neutering them is great but it is not solving the wildness or defecation problem.

Mr. Parisi responded, until we get the ordinance, that is the program. After the ordinance, hopefully, is enacted, then there will be a very specific procedure.

Mrs. Gavin stated, in the meantime, I think that what Mr. Zappala was referring to, it was \$30.00 a cat to have them removed, spayed, neutered and returned. I don't make a million dollars and it is not going to take a million dollars at \$30.00 a cat to spay and neuter but I also don't want them back.

Mr. Zappala stated, you don't have to pay, the Town would have to pay.

Mr. Parisi explained, the person who claims the cat pays.

Mrs. Gavin stated, when this happened in the summertime when we were speaking with Kathy (Lindemann) and April (Leiler) this is what we were told, it is going to cost us \$30 per cat to get them spayed/neutered.

Mr. Parisi stated, that is not our understanding of it. We will write the ordinance.

The next speaker was Kathleen Duchesneau, 56 Lake Street.

Ms. Duchesneau stated, there are three of us here today because we have an issue that we had hoped the Mayor would be here for and we could address some questions to him. We don't feel at this time that we want to encompass this issue upon you because it isn't something that you, as a Town Council or Councilors per se, can do anything about. It is an issue that we want answers from the Mayor. Since he is not here tonight we choose to withdraw and not go any further. I know that Attorney Farrell was at a meeting we attended recently and it was an issue that was at that meeting. I don't want to have to have you listen to a long story with questions for the Mayor that you can't answer.

Mr. Parisi asked, have you talked to the Mayor yet?

Ms. Duchesneau responded, this has been going on for years. I withdraw, Karen Oakes and Barbara Swantek also withdraw their request to speak.

Mr. Parisi reassured Ms. Duchesneau that the Council was willing to listen to their concern but it is the speaker's decision to withdraw if they so choose.

Mr. Farrell agreed stating, it is a very complicated issue. Even being an attorney and knowing land use issues. That whole issue is about the most complicated bizarre thing I have ever seen. I was going to suggest that it might be appropriate to put it on the Council agenda at some point. I do think that the Council does need to get up to speed on the matter.

Ms. Duchesneau responded, but I can't talk in three minutes.

Mr. Farrell responded, I know and I think that we would need to get the appropriate department heads here that evening such as the Town Planner and Town Attorney so that they can give us...

Mr. Parisi was not aware of what matter Ms. Duchesneau was referring to and stated that he would be happy to speak with her about it after adjournment of this meeting.

Mr. Farrell stated that he will follow up and try and get the matter on a Council agenda.

There were no other speakers at this time.

Motion was made by Mr. Zappala to Adjourn the Meeting, seconded by Mr. Farrell.

VOTE: Rys was absent; no opposition was heard; motion duly carried.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned.

(No secretary was present at this meeting to record the individual votes nor the adjournment time of record.)

Meeting transcribed by:

Kathryn F. Zandri
Kathryn F. Zandri
Town Council Secretary

Approved by:

Robert F. Parisi
Robert F. Parisi, Chairman

4-14-98

Date

Rosemary A. Rascati
Rosemary A. Rascati, Town Clerk

4-14-98

Date