



Board of Aldermen Shelton, Connecticut

Public Hearing—Disposal of Two Municipal Buildings October 28, 2004

CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Mark A. Laretti opened the Public Hearing at approximately 7:02 p.m., immediately following the Aldermanic Public Hearing on Ordinances.

ROLL CALL

Aldermanic President John F. Anglace, Jr. - present
Alderman John "Jack" Finn - present
Alderman Stanley Kudej - present
Alderman Joseph Lanzi - present
Alderman Lynne Farrel – present
Alderman Nancy Minotti - absent
Alderman Kenneth Olin - absent
Alderman John P. Papa – present

1. Disposal of Two Municipal Buildings

40 White Street
470 Howe Avenue

Mayor Laretti stated, these buildings are familiar to most people in that they are in the downtown area – one is 470 Howe Avenue, which is the former location of a firehouse and the police station, and

Alderman Finn interjected, probate court was on the second floor. Back in the old days Echo Hose was down in the basement and on the first floor. The police station was on the first floor and the court was on the second floor.

Mayor Laretti continued, it's the current location for Valley Health. That organization has leased that space from the City for many years, and they're going to be vacating. We expect that some time in December of this year or the first of next year that the building will be empty. Right now there is no specific proposal on the table anywhere for future use of that

building, so we thought we would solicit public comment as to what people thought should happen there.

The other building is 40 White Street – the former City Hall, Judge of Probate, I think Board of Education was there at one time, the Parent-Child Resource Center was there in a lease with the City for a number of years. That building also will be vacant, maybe by December of this year or possibly sometime early 2005.

Mayor Lauretti asked if any member of the public wished to address the Board on those two items.

Mike Pacowta, 166 River Road

I was going to ask why to even consider the proposition of selling the buildings. There is no reason at this juncture; it is just speculation at this point, seeing who comes forward to possibly express an interest, or are you just seeking comment?

Mayor Lauretti replied, I think that is what I said just a minute ago.

Alderman Anglace stated, my view is utilization and/or disposal of the buildings.

Mr. Pacowta continued, during the six years that I occupied the Office of Mayor I don't think we disposed of any City assets. I think also, given the fact that the City is growing at the pace that it is, that it would be unwise to dispose of any assets of this sort, not knowing what future needs may be as time goes on. I would hate to think that we would unload two properties – the two you speak of - and then somewhere down the line realize that we need space and then have to go out to bid and contract to create and construct a brand new facility. I would advise exercising caution, and I would be on record as of this evening, and I think this point forward, as being opposed to it.

Mayor Lauretti asked, opposed to what? There is no proposal.

Mr. Pacowta stated, you are looking for public comment on whether or not you should dispose of two City buildings. I am opposed to disposing of those two City buildings.

Mayor Lauretti stated, there has been no discussion from myself or anybody on this Board that says anything about disposal.

Mr. Pacowta stated, it was in the minutes of the October 14th Aldermanic meeting.

Mayor Lauretti stated, I don't know who made that comment, but that is certainly not, and I want the record to be very clear here. The purpose of tonight is to solicit comment about future use of those two locations - not disposal.

Alderman Finn stated, the public hearing we have in front of us does state, 1) Disposal of two municipal buildings.

Mayor Lauretti stated, if it says that, that is an error and that is more the reason I want to clarify for everyone here and people in the media, this is not about disposal. This is about future use that could include disposal or sublet or any proposal that someone has on their mind.

Mr. Pacowta stated, then I would go on record that if you were to consider the disposal of these buildings, again, I would exercise caution and ultimately I would be opposed to their disposal. Thank you.

Susan Nofi Bendici, 23 Wells Avenue

I came here tonight because when I saw the minutes online it said, I don't recall if it was "disposal" or "possible sale" – the wording caught my attention. I live right off of Coram Avenue, right up the hill, I live near downtown and come to downtown frequently and patronize the businesses there. We've seen a lot of improvement, but we have a long way to go. I know when I read the paper and see that a Starbucks is coming to Shelton, that I'm going to see that it's on Bridgeport Avenue and not Howe Avenue. The downtown area is a concern for everyone. The development corporation, I know one of their priorities is turning it into an exciting place for dining, entertaining and shopping. I'm just worried that if we do sell it, that is one of the possibilities, that we sell off the buildings, that it sends a message that downtown property isn't property that is worth owning. That concerns me. As you mentioned, in recent years those buildings have housed organizations such as the Health District and the non-profit Parent-Child Resource Center. They are both agencies that have done a lot of good for the community. I'd like to see those buildings continue to serve the community. I know downtown is a challenge. I know there is not an easy fix. I would urge you all to consider putting those buildings to proper use rather than selling them. I don't have any particular suggestions, because I

thought the agenda item was whether they should be sold or not, not what their potential uses could be.

Mayor Laretti stated, the agenda should have read "disposition of two City buildings."

Irving Steiner, 23 Partridge Lane

I also had the impression that it was possible disposal. The main thing that I'm interested in is if those two building are going to be dedicated for anything, it would be nice if they were held in consideration of the upgrading of the whole downtown Shelton area, and not in any way dispose of them and then possibly have to do condemnation of those two buildings in the future. If there is a plan – I'm pretty sure the SEDC has a grand plan or is working at it, then those buildings should be held and be available for that grand plan.

Jim Ryan, SEDC

There was some confusion over what the meeting announcement was about. Ken Schiabe, our chairman, had contacted me and indicated he read in the newspaper that the buildings were going to be demolished. I said, 'that can't be possible.' So I inquired of the Mayor, and he said, 'Jimmy, we're doing a planning session to find out how we can best put these properties to work, one way or the other.' There is no grand plan. We verified that. We wanted to comment separately on the individual properties about some of the things that you're going to want to consider as you formalize any plans for these properties.

The former City Hall on White Street – historically, we've had conversations about folding that into a grand plan for that individual block, in terms of providing additional parking should that property ever be accessed. The considerations are, is it an historic property? In our view it isn't an historic property, but I think you'd want to consult with your Historic Society to find out what their views are. We had discussed possibly putting decks back there for additional parking, but we haven't taken any official action on that. We think it's great that you're assembling information to help make those decisions. If you don't have a municipal use for it as a building, there may be a municipal use for it otherwise. You're also doing your planning for a possible longer-range relocation of the Echo Hose facilities. Of course, having that at your disposal right next door makes it perfect. So there are lots of considerations. You're in the driver's seat. There are opportunities almost in any direction that you move.

As relates to the building on Howe Avenue, I also think that was City Hall at one point in time – a fire house, a police department, and a number of different things. I actually think that it might even have been city hall. I might be corrected on that. However it has played an important role in downtown. It is definitely part of the streetscape. I don't think anybody could imagine that building being removed from that site – it just fits right in perfectly. The City invested in that property with the Economic Development Administration Grant a number of years ago to bring it back into shape. It may need some minor improvements, but again, you are in the catbird's seat – you can decide who is going to be the user of that. If you ever made the decision to dispose of it for private reuse, we would ask, and I doubt that you'll do that, but we would ask that you include provisions that they maintain it as you have, that they keep the brick appearance of the building and the nice window treatments, etc., and that any changes be made subject to your specific approval. In fact, we would suggest that if you disposed of it, that you'd have the first right of refusal if you ever needed to assemble it again for some other redevelopment purpose in downtown.

We commend you for your thoughtful planning on this. There are opportunities. We're not ready today – project wise – to make specific recommendations, but they're issues we've discussed over the years. Thank you.

Pam DiMartino, Rodia Ridge Road

I'm a little unprepared because I was coming down for the hearing on the tennis center that might be going up in White Hills, but I heard it was tabled. I have this article here. In any case, this building that you're talking about sounds like it might make a good tennis center. I think it's a more appropriate place for a tennis center, more than in White Hills, so I'm really not sure what is going on with the White Hills thing. I think East Village Road is already very taxed and that area shouldn't be used for a commercial idea such as this proposed project amongst private people, I don't know, who want to build this tennis center. But I do think – I like the park the way it is and I think it should be kept the way it is. I find that when there are organizations such as tennis centers like that it makes it difficult for people to get involved because it becomes more of an elitist thing. I just know from my own experience trying to play tennis when I want to play it, all the good times are taken up by the people that participate maybe more than I do. In any case that is why I'm here tonight. I'm not sure what's going on with the tennis center. Thanks.

Ralph Calandro, 500 Howe Avenue

Mayor, members of the Board, I've been in town for a number of years for business and having property. I feel that Howe Avenue property is very good property. It is well put together and well maintained. I think that if the City does anything with that property, they should put it out for bid, go to a developer or business and let them revitalize it further to help the downtown area. The City of course can maintain the property and occupy it for whatever use they have. But I think giving it over to the private enterprise would add to the City's tax base. I think if there was a caveat on the title when it was sold that they had to maintain the property as it was, it would be a big advantage to the City.

Secondly, the other property on White Street – I think that property the City should definitely maintain. I think it's a resource that the City can't afford to let go. On the other hand, I don't think the building is advantageous to the City at all. I think it is probably very costly to maintain. It's not a new building, not a quality building, it's not structurally sound. I think if the City just perhaps razed the building and added to the parking that's there now. Unfortunately sometimes when we consider redevelopment, we don't think about what's going to happen in years to come. Right now, what is good for the City is more parking. We may have enough parking, but to revitalize the area and make it better for consumers and for business, we do need more parking. The property is such that its topography lends itself to another increase in the parking when it's needed. In other words, Coram Avenue is higher

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

than Howe Avenue. It would be cost effective - there would be no concern for egress, no concern for ramps, you would just simply drive onto that deck of parking. That would be very helpful to the City in years to come. I'm not saying that we need it right now, but in years to come if the area does grow further, I think it would be very advantageous. Thank you for your time.

Chris Panek, 19 Meghan Lane

I didn't come prepared to speak regarding these two buildings but since there is an apparent mistake on this agenda, I did want to briefly address the agenda for the Finance Committee who met just before. I'm sure a lot of these people that walked in late maybe weren't aware of this, but apparently the Mayor had asked Susan McSchanagh from Tennis in Shelton to come and do a short presentation to the Finance Committee, and it was

not something that was on the agenda and I think you'd have quite a few more people in here if they knew it was on the agenda. It is quite apparent that the Mayor still supports this idea – maybe not at East Village Park but at another City-owned property somewhere else. I just think it's very unfair. I don't know if it is a violation of Freedom of Information. I don't know why it wasn't on the agenda. It certainly should have been on the agenda. If it was in the press for the past few days that it was going to be spoken about tonight, you would have had a lot more people at that meeting. You know, you can keep pushing this issue forward, whether it's back in Parks & Rec or whoever thinks it's a good idea or a bad idea, but the most fair thing to do for the public and the residents of Shelton is to keep it out there and keep an open line of communication, because when it comes back up again, the people are going to be down here against it whether it's in East Village Park or in a park somewhere else in the City. Thanks for your time.

Mayor Laretti stated, for clarification purposes, Susan McShanagh came to see me this morning. I told her that if she felt so inclined then she could come to the Finance Committee tonight and speak at the public portion about the financial aspect of her proposal. I think it's fair to say that a number of us don't support the location that the proposal was originally made for. I certainly do not. I haven't said that until this date. But I think that from a financial standpoint, there might be an opportunity. If there is something wrong with exploring that then so be it.

Mr. Panek interjected, well there's nothing wrong with it, but she stated at the public portion that you asked her to present. If you asked to present, it should have been on the agenda and the public would have been here to hear it. Whether it's regarding financial or it's regarding the location, I think that the public has a right to know that this thing is still moving forward. It's not a dead issue. If you read the paper in the past week, people think it's a dead issue. The Chairman of Parks & Rec, Alderman Papa, is quoted in the paper, basically, they saw the people come out at the Board of Aldermen meeting against it, and I thought it was a dead issue too. I didn't even expect to hear any discussion about it. I just think - keep it out in the public and let the public know that the possibility is that Parks and Rec is still investigating this. It may move to a different location, it may come back. Just keep the public aware. That's all I'm asking. It should have been on the agenda if she was going to come and give any type of presentation. She didn't come speaking as a member of the public, she stood up there and presented her, the lease arrangements for the building. That's not speaking as a member or a citizen of Shelton – she is speaking on behalf of TIS giving a presentation of the building. It should have been on the agenda.

Mayor Laretti stated, as you know, we are very liberal with the public portion. What prohibits anyone from coming and speaking and making a statement. You know, in years gone by, any number of people from outside of Shelton have come here and spoken. People have come here from Derby and criticized the statue of David up on Scinto's property. That is the public portion. If there is something wrong with that, then so be it. I'm not going to argue that point with you.

Mr. Panek stated, there is something wrong when she is speaking on behalf of Tennis in Shelton and that she spoke specifically about the lease arrangements and how it's going to be beneficial for the City in the long run to keep pursuing this when the public came out in force against it last week.

Alderman Papa stated, Parks & Recreation has dropped that particular proposal. If you read the newspaper, you got my quote, and that stands. I didn't know she was coming here to the Finance Committee, because I wasn't here when she was here. The bottom line was, we did say to her or to the people that were here, that if somebody wants a tennis court, an indoor tennis court, they can maybe buy a piece of property and erect it. As far as I'm concerned, Parks and Recreation, we're not pursuing it. So you know; that's my stance.

Alderman Anglace stated, as a procedural point of order. Everybody knows that the agenda for the Finance Committee is filed in advance of the meeting. The Mayor or anybody else can suggest to anybody to come and address the Finance Committee during the public portion. That particular subject was not a subject to be discussed at the Finance Committee on our agenda tonight. People talk about any number of things – somebody talked about – during this public hearing somebody talked about tennis courts. Nobody gets cut off. You know, it is a courtesy. We listen to them. She came, she said what she had to say, and she left. There was no discussion by the Finance Committee of this particular item on our agenda.

Alderman Finn stated, I guess what Mr. Panek is referring to, usually when we have our agendas, it does make mention under the public portion, like 'Presentation of Open Space,' 'Presentation of SEDC,' and so on and so forth. The terminology was used. Susan did say she was asked to come down and make a presentation at the Finance Committee public portion. She did say that I heard it plain as day. I guess what Chris is referring to is, in the future if people come, somehow or another even though the suggestion is made in the morning, it should be posted on the Board in front of the City Clerk's Office that there would be a presentation pertaining to this, and it would be up to the residents to determine whether or not they should come down. I am aware of the fact that the Finance Committee didn't discuss it.

I also am aware of the fact that, even though I respect John Papa's statement just now, but it was going back to Parks & Recreation for their review, and I'm sure Mr. Papa does not have knowledge of that.

Alderman Anglace stated, just so you have the whole story, during the public portion of the Finance Committee, a presentation was made to us by Jack Finn, who presented us with a petition about the tennis courts. Why is that different from the other issue? The lady wanted to speak. She spoke.

Alderman Finn stated, it's very simple, Alderman Anglace. Tonight it's not on our agenda for the public hearing. But when I was sitting there and the presentation was made for the tennis courts, and I had the petition in my hand, I presented it to your committee, a subcommittee of the Board of Aldermen, and given to your clerk, it will be filed with the City Clerk's Office, and it's 682 signatures now – two more people did sign.

Nancy Steiner, 23 Partridge Lane

What he was going to present was different from this Susan person from the tennis group. If the Board of Aldermen know that the public is very concerned about this and has a lot of feeling about it and wants to be well informed, then you could have told her to make it for the next meeting and had it on the agenda with plenty of notice so that the public would know that she was coming if they wanted to hear what she had to say. If the public is well informed, then who knows, she may be able to talk them into it or into doing something slightly different. But to – it's almost as a citizen that you feel like it's being sprung on you. We didn't really have any notice. People came here to talk about something else and they find out that this is happening. My point is, if the Board of Aldermen know that the public really wants to be informed on any new information, couldn't they just have asked her to come to the next meeting? I mean, what's the rush? Have it publicly noted that she was going to appear. You might have made a lot of citizens happy to know that you're letting us know in advance so that we could be here. I'm thinking that a lot of other people would have wanted to be here. Thank you.

Irving Steiner, 23 Partridge Lane

Since the disposition of the old police station has changed from what I thought it was, and it's not for sale, I was curious if there is any connection or correlation between the departure of the nurse operation and the disposition of the building.

Alderman Anglace stated, I want the Board to know that, looking at utilization and/or disposition of the buildings downtown, former Mayor Pacowta mentioned that during his administration he doesn't recall selling any buildings. He might be right - I don't recall either. There were some buildings sold before that, and I've done some research. I will be writing it up and getting out to the Board so you'll have it as part of the record what did happen with the Ferry School, with the Commodore Hull School – those buildings and any others that I've uncovered here. I will get it to you; it's not ready to be entered into the public record yet, but I'll get it so you'll have it as part of your deliberations and make it so that you can include it with the minutes of the Board of Aldermen meeting.

Mayor Lauretti asked if any member of the public wished to address the Board. Being none, he declared the Public Hearing closed.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia M. Bruder
Clerk
Board of Aldermen

Date Submitted: _____

DATE APPROVED: _____

BY: _____

Mark A. Lauretti
Mayor, City of Shelton