

**AVON TOWN COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
November 16, 2020**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. via GoToMeeting by Chairperson Maguire. Members present: Mrs. Maguire, Messrs: Bernetich, Speich, Polhamus, and Weber. A quorum was present.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairperson Maguire, followed by a moment of silence as we remember Dom Zacchio who passed away on Saturday. He served his country in the Korean and he served this Town as Chief of Police from 1968 until he retired in 1983. Please keep all of the Zacchio family, including Mark, former Town Council Chair, in your prayers as they go through this difficult time.

III. OLD BUSINESS

20/21-02 Lights at AHS Synthetic Turf Field and Track

Chairperson Maguire reported that the purpose of this special meeting is to determine if and at what level the Town wants to appropriate funding combined with private fund raising for the lights at Avon High School turf field. Any appropriation would also require Board of Finance approval at their meeting next week. She noted that this project has been in the works for over ten years, part of the Recreation and Parks Master Plan; originally considered two sites – Thompson Road and ultimately it was determined to be best at Avon High School for the convenience of students and the sense of community it would bring; the original plan called for two field, lights, and bleachers; envisioned as a three stool process with the State, the Town, and private fundraising but we were the only source for funding so the project was scaled down to one field with the rest to come later; after successful completion of the field ACORN came forward to fundraise for the lights of which most Board members have already gone through the school system yet knew what a big part the lights be and we appreciate their efforts; the pandemic halted fundraising efforts but pending the outcome of the meetings coming up; the Town historically has partnered with ACORN to complete projects, most recently the Avon Middle School tennis courts. She noted that after going out to bond for the project we received back a bond premium which stipulates proceeds can be applied to the project or debt service; knowing the lights were at the top of the list, this seemed to be the perfect solution; the Town has always been committed to the turf field lights; conduit and foundations are already in place; we can complete the installation of the lights with the balance of the bond premium going to debt service; we want to be good neighbors; concern of the lights spilling over will be addressed with buffering; the use of the field has been predetermined; the use policy to remain in place until a subcommittee including the neighbors can review it; we need to see how the lights will work; a lot of people are excited about this; some people don't think it's the right time; there is no time like the present, recognizing the good work of the fundraisers; the bidding market was competitive, about \$25,000 less than we would have had it been a different climate; it builds on the investment the Town has already made; this is an unexpected funding source so we should take advantage of the opportunity it presents.

The Town Manager reported that Musco Lighting is on the cooperative purchasing arrangement and provided a quote of \$375,000 and does not include contingency (an additional 10% or \$37,500); we have a bond premium of \$461,000 to be used for a project related to the bond project or to offset debt service; ACORN has raised approximately \$139,000; there was a previous pledge made by the Board of Education from their Facilities Use Fund for \$30,000; no funding in place yet for the buffering; if we take half of the bond premium plus the \$139,000 from ACORN, we are at \$369,000 which brings us \$5,800 short; ACORN reports they have pledges sufficient to close that gap. He noted that if Council wants to proceed with this we need to include some additional funding for buffering, available through either the bond premium or bond amount in the \$40,000 range; we would do onsite assessment with the neighbors to come up with a plan and install at the same time as the lights.

Mr. Speich expressed being in favor of the lights; buffering and scheduling are important and everyone should be pleased by the new technology with this type of direct lighting. He inquired about any economic impact by not applying these funds to debt service. The Town Manager responded that if the Town capped its contribution to \$235,000 our combined budget is \$100 million, in terms of the tax levy, it's barely a rounding error so not a big impact on the Town economically. Mr. Speich wants to make sure that we fund the buffering.

Mr. Polhamus echoed Council members' comments made, understands the opposition, but fully supports this option to help fund the turf field lights; it is a great thing for the community; now is the time to do it; we have the extra money available versus a capital project in a later year; and we owe it to the neighbors to get the buffering in place.

Mr. Weber inquired about the bond premium savings. The Town Manager responded that the competitiveness of the sale is helped by our credit rating; instead of a savings it is a function of the cost of borrowing. He noted that this is an unexpected opportunity, the stars have aligned; and seeing the photos from Sudbury leading into the field underscores the necessity for some very good buffering for our friends and neighbors, also along West Avon Road; it is a win/win for the Town, the opportunity for the community to come together and he looks forward to seeing some lights shining down on the field in due time.

Mr. Bernetich supports 50% of the bond premium being used to pay down the debt and 50% towards the turf field lights; perhaps apply some of the money to fund a dog park at the Landfill.

Joe Weist, 59 Woodhaven Drive, inquired that in a future bond issuance if you don't get a bonus coming in favorable and it cost you more than you planned, does the project get scaled back or do taxes go up. The Town Manager responded that the project cost cannot exceed the amount of the authorization approved at referendum; if the interest rate is higher, then that gets resolved in the context of the overall operating budget, perhaps through debt service, reducing expenditures or increasing estimates on non-tax revenues.

Susan Reboul, 23 Sudbury Way, requested that the following remarks be made part of these meeting minutes. While we understand the interest in lights and your viewpoint, we would like to bring forward our concerns, as taxpayers, with regard to the proposed funding for these lights. As the Town Council considers funding the lights through referendum dollars, we would respectfully

request that you forward to the Town Council our perspective regarding the below three key areas for their consideration and placement into the official record as well:

FUNDING:

- When the town went to referendum to fund the artificial turf project, the Town Council was publicly on the record, in multiple venues, with many statements to the public that lights would not be part of the funding from the referendum. Residents approved the Turf and Track project, with the commitment of the Town Council that the referendum dollars would not be funding lights. When tax payers voted "yes" to fund the turf and track, was not a vote of "yes" to have tax payers fund lights. While it is easy to rationalize and interpret the scope of this project to include lights after the referendum was approved, the very public commitment of the Town Council stating that lights were not a part of the project or referendum should continue be honored.
- The Town Council has already made a significant contribution to this project by using our referendum dollars for the footings and conduit to connect the lights. While it did make sense to install these footings at the time, it is imperative that we do not forget that the town has already contributed substantial dollars to the lights.
- Immediately after the referendum passed, a group of Avon residents, under the ACORN banner, approached the Town Council and committed to raise the FULL amount of the funds necessary for lights through private donations. Since this very public commitment to the residents of the town, this group has raised about 1/3 (\$139,000 of \$375,000) of what they had committed to raise to fund lights. Understandably, as a result of the current economic situation and pandemic, this group has ceased efforts to raise funds for the lights. However, this group should be held to their original pledge and additional fundraising resume when the timing is better. Enabling a special interest group to only raise a small fraction of their pledged amount and then shift the burden to the Town of Avon and taxpayers (who did not vote to approve this project) to cover a large differential sets a bad precedent for future projects. While the Town has helped cover the gap for other projects, it was after almost 90% of the dollars had already been raised through private contributions. This is not the present situation with these lights.
- Taxpayers, who believe lights are a priority, have had many opportunities to contribute financially to the lights through the private fundraising campaign referenced above. For those taxpayers, whereby this project is not a priority, they should not be required to shoulder the responsibility of funding them through their taxes nor the use of the bond premium dollars for this purpose.
- More than any other point of consideration above, our depleted reserves need to be replenished. During this pandemic, the Town of Avon took the extraordinary step of implementing a 0.0% tax increase. In addition to wide ranging budget cuts, this was also made possible by the removal of significant dollars from our reserves. We all know these dollars must be paid back. Why would we not take into serious consideration using the bond premium dollars to offset our debt service?

BUFFERING:

In prior meetings, the Town Council has stated clearly that buffering is an integral component of any lighting plan. We have appreciated this care and concern for the neighboring homes. At this time, should the Town Council decide to move forward with lights, we would request that the Town Council simultaneously move forward with adequate buffering along Sudbury Way.

Initially, a comprehensive buffering plan was established for when lights were a part of the turf plan. When lights were removed from the Referendum, buffering plans were significantly scaled back. Given the Town Council is now considering a lighting plan, it is reasonable that it should include a comprehensive buffering plan as well. Both should follow a parallel path to completion.

For your review, we have included photos of open areas on Sudbury Way to help give a broader context and need for buffering. At present, the very tall trees that align the Sudbury Way side of the field have dropped their leaves. We would welcome any of the members of the council or to come and walk the property. It is clear that there is insufficient buffering. We should take the responsible step of re-visiting the buffering plan and bring it up to effective levels that were originally envisioned. The buffering plan needs to be given the same care and consideration as the lighting plan. Both are equally as important.

USAGE POLICY:

When the original Turf Project Planning Committee convened, it was comprised of many different constituent groups. They spent countless hours researching turf and lighting usage within other communities. There were many positive outcomes that were created from this group as they worked collaboratively to meet the many needs of our community. The current Usage Policy for these lights originated from this group. They believed it was a strong plan that could best meet the needs of the community at large, whether short term or potentially long term.

Should the Town Council decide to convene a new Usage Committee, we would respectfully request that a representative from our neighborhood (Sudbury Way) be included on that committee (as they have always been). We all strive to be good neighbors and believe in the very best outcome for all. We do believe being part of the solution is critical and representation on a Usage Committee helps greatly to that end.

Thank you so much for hearing our concerns and taking them into consideration in your decision making. Lights can be exciting if we collaborate, work together and take into account the perspective of a broader group of taxpayers. While we frequently attend Town Council meetings, we listen silently and rarely speak as our intention is not to engage in a counter-productive dialogue with members of ACORN. However, we do believe it is important to bring our concerns forward for your review. Thank you for your time and consideration, - William and Susan Reboul

Ms. Reboul expressed thanks for the consideration for buffering. She shared concern regarding self-interest groups who step forward and set a goal to pledge dollars for a project and then come back to the taxpayer to absorb a significant differential; this may be a one-time occurrence but does not want it to be a precedent. Chairperson Maguire responded that we approached ACORN with this possibility and also recognized that ACORN worked very hard to get something that we as a Town and a Town Council wanted, we supported this project and the lights; ACORN worked diligently to get this done and ran into a pandemic; it works best having a partnership and you have to look at each fundraiser separately; this is a big ticket item that completes a project and we thank ACORN for their work. Ms. Reboul commented that lights are a great idea; as a taxpayer she is disheartened that when she voted at a referendum, the words of our elected officials mean something to her and things shifted so quickly after the referendum passed which causes her concern and worries about this repeating in the future; the statements about that referendum not covering lights were so public and repeated on many occasions and causes her pause for future referendums.

Sarah Roberson, 24 Sudbury Way, expressed thanks to everyone that has gone through this with them as neighbors; we want to work in partnership as part of this community. She thanked the Assistant Town Manager regarding the fencing. She added that the neighbors will appreciate the extra buffering. She appreciated being asked to be part of the Project Subcommittee who worked really hard on the use policy; let us give it a year; we are going to learn a lot of great things and some things we will want to do differently. Chairperson Maguire thanked Ms. Roberson for her time on the Subcommittee.

Susan Rietano-Davey, 11 Edwards Road, expressed thanks to the Town Council, in partnership with ACORN. She noted that ACORN never committed to raising any specific amount of money, rather to go out and do their best; they raised \$140,000 in seven months before the pandemic hit; and they didn't ask the Town for help. She noted that their supporters are thrilled about this.

On a motion made by Mr. Speich, seconded Mr. Polhamus, it was voted:

RESOLVED: That the Town Council approve an appropriation not to exceed \$235,000 to fund the lights project for the Avon High School Synthetic Turf Field and Track.

Mrs. Maguire, Messrs: Speich, Bernetich, Polhamus, and Weber voted in favor.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

20/21-35 Staff Introductions

Chairperson Maguire introduced Stephanie Askeland, Director of Human Resources, and Tom DiStasio, Director of Finance. Ms. Askeland and Mr. DiStasio took a few minutes to share a brief bio with the Town Council. The Town Manager is delighted to have both of them join us in their key positions within the organization. Town Council welcomed both aboard.

20/21-36 Acceptance of Gift: Donation to Avon Food Bank, \$5,000

On a motion made by Mr. Speich, seconded by Mr. Polhamus, it was voted:

RESOLVED: That the Town Council accept the gift of \$5,000 from the Archdiocese of Hartford, 2020 Archbishop's Annual Appeal, for the Avon Food Bank.

Mrs. Maguire, Messrs: Bernetich, Speich, Polhamus, and Weber voted in favor.

V. ADJOURN

On a motion made by Mr. Weber, seconded by Mr. Polhamus, it was voted:

RESOLVED: That the Town Council adjourn the meeting at 6:26 p.m.

Mrs. Maguire, Messrs: Bernetich, Speich, Polhamus, and Weber voted in favor.

Attest: Jennifer Worsman, Clerk