

**TOWN OF HAMDEN, CONNECTICUT
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING**

April 24, 2023

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<https://hamden.zoom.us/rec/share/XW1kQLBGMPDSzfKNGCDGbJPNpVUvqwxX9BBBmhEzKUFprvZmr-jnPdZfB-305oEw.TqGXj7wgxzNMrrDt>

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A meeting of the Legislative Council was held on Monday, April 24, 2023. This was a hybrid meeting held both in person and electronically via Zoom. The meeting was called to order at 7:51 P.M. by Council President Dominique Baez. The Clerk took the roll followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Ms. Sweet then read the Land Acknowledgement followed by a moment of silence.

Z= On Zoom P= In Person

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dominique Baez (P)	Abdul Osmanu (P)
Katie Kiely (P)	Kristen Zaehring (P)
Justin Farmer (Z)	Bob Anthony (P)
Laurie Sweet (P)	Cory O'Brien (Z)
Adrian Webber (Z)	Jerron Alston (Z)
Sarah Gallagher (P)	Ted Stevens (P)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Betty Wetmore; Lesley DeNardis; Paula Irvin

PRESIDING: Dominique Baez, President

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Sean Grace, Chief of Staff; Curtis Eatman, Finance Director

PUBLIC INPUT SESSION: There was 1 in person speaker, 3 Zoom speakers, and 7 written comments submitted which can be viewed here:

<https://www.hamden.com/DocumentCenter/View/8130/04-24-2023>

(Written comments can be sent to LCpublicinput@hamden.com)

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT: None

EXECUTIVE SESSION: None

REGULAR AGENDA: Ms. Baez requested a motion to suspend their standing rules. Moved by Mr. Anthony, seconded by Mr. Stevens and approved with 1 opposed (Farmer) and 2 abstentions (Gallagher) (Zaehringer)

1. ARPA resolution adoption

-- Moved by Ms. Baez, seconded by Ms. Kiely.

Ms. Kiely moved a motion to amend this resolution and allocate \$650,000 for SCBA (self-contained breathing apparatus) for the Fire Dept. The motion was seconded by Mr. Farmer. **DISCUSSION:** Ms. Kiely said she thinks it's really important to make sure that the people protecting Hamden residents have the equipment that they need. She said we don't know down the line how things like carcinogens and environments affect our first responders until it is too late, and then there's nothing that can be done about it so she thinks it's important to do everything we can to protect them, it's the right thing to do.

Mr. Farmer said they are taking this request seriously and he understands the need and importance of this.

Ms. Gallagher thanked Ms. Kiely for bringing this amendment as well as the Chief for bringing this forth. She said she will be supporting this.

A vote was taken and the amendment passed unanimously.

Mr. Farmer moved a motion to amend this resolution and allocate \$200,000 for a Social Worker at the Library. He stated \$100,000 for each year, for two years. The motion was seconded by Mr. Osmanu.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Farmer said this has been brought to them every year for the last 3 years and that he could go on and on as to why this is needed, but there are concerns that happened and he feels this is the best way to address these concerns and considerations is with the health of mental health providers rather than a carceral response. He said we would pay for police overtime if we do not fund it this way and thinks it's an added benefit in the right direction, not only for general public safety, but it also allows us to work with people who are in need.

Mr. Anthony asked if this was for salary only. Mr. Farmer said yes, it's the number the P.D. gave.

Mr. Stevens asked why in the Library as opposed to Community Services? He also asked if this would be a union position, how this would work, and then stated he would rather see this in the budget process. Mr. Farmer agreed that this needs a job description and to be figured out if it's union. He said it doesn't make a difference to him if it's ARPA or budget, whatever the general will of the Council is.

There was then discussion on where this should be in the budget, as well as discussion on fringes.

Mr. Webber stated he thinks it's important for the Administration to submit the Rubik's and then they can determine an appropriate amount.

Ms. Kiely said she'd be in favor of approving the requested amount and then amending it once they are able to get better specifics. Ms. Baez then stated that if they vote in favor of this they would like the Mayor's office, in coalition with the library, to find out how much this salary would be, what the benefits would be that go along with it, is it unionized, contracted, special funds, that sort of thing. Mr. Grace said they'd be happy to get that information.

Mr. Anthony said if it's a union position it's going to be there a lot longer than 2 or 3 years. He said if it's salary position they can put a limit on it, but if it's union it'll be there forever.

Mr. O'Brien suggested maybe a contract position for the first couple of years to see if it's something they like and then putting it into the operating budget if so. He said if it does qualify as a union bargaining position they're committed to funding it long term and this is why he suggests a contract position until they figure it out.

Mr. Osmanu said he's committed to this position but doesn't feel like they as a Council are bound to make a union position that in any way becomes permanent long term, unless the Council so chooses to explicitly.

A vote was taken and the amendment passed with 1 abstention (Zaehringer)

Ms. Gallagher moved a motion to amend the resolution and allocate \$1,000,000 to support our Hamden neighbors, experiencing homelessness and housing and stability support that the Coordinated Access Network of New Haven has requested during their presentation. She said this is part of their \$6,000,000 ask and she would like to cut out \$1,000,000 for this which would be a multi year, 3 year period that this would support. The motion was seconded by Mr. Farmer. DISCUSSION: Mr. Anthony said he finds it heartbreaking to see the homeless but if we allocate this \$1,000,000 he wants to make sure it works. He then thanked Ms. Gallagher for this.

Mr. Stevens asked what the group was that asked for this. Ms. Gallagher said it was the Coordinated Access Network of New Haven run by the United Way. She then explained a little how the program works.

Ms. Kiely thanked Ms. Gallagher for bringing this up, she thinks it's important that they acknowledge this and take on the pieces that they can. She said she is in support of this, it is something they need to do.

Ms. Baez asked what other asks she had. Ms. Gallagher said for a Housing Trust Fund they asked for \$5,000,000 but she will ask for \$2,000,000.

There was then discussion on special housing, CBDG dollars, and the warming center.

Ms. Baez asked Ms. Gallagher if she would take a friendly amendment to \$500,000. Ms. Gallagher said no.

Ms. Kiley said without the warming center it would be \$750,000 to \$800,000 and asked Ms. Gallagher what she thinks of \$800,000. Ms. Gallagher said she'd rather see what the \$1,000,000 brings first.

Mr. Stevens asked if this ask was more important than her other ask. Ms. Gallagher said yes. Mr. Stevens said he will support this.

A vote was taken and the amendment passed with 2 opposed (Baez) (O'Brien) and 1 abstention (Zaehringer)

Ms. Baez moved a motion to amend the resolution and allocate \$15,000,000 for a Community Campus at 560 Newhall Street. The motion was seconded by Ms. Kiely. DISCUSSION: Mr. Farmer said he's really struggled with this idea of a community campus. He said there has not been community conversations nor conversations about the buildings that may close and to put \$15,000,000 before they talk to people is unconscionable and so he will not be supporting \$15,000,000 and thinks \$6,000,000 or \$7,000,000 is more reasonable.

Mr. Anthony said he also is not in favor of this and thinks the ARPA money would be better spent offsetting in our budget all capital improvements, road repairs, drainage issues, Public Works in need of 4 or 5 trucks that are down and out and they can no longer use, fire service is going to need a ladder truck within a few years. There are a lot of capital improvements in the budget that he thinks could be offset with this ARPA money and reduce the burden on the taxpayers which he believes is the direction they should be going.

Mr. Osmanu said he also would be more amendable to \$7,000,000-\$7,500,000 himself and it boils down to community conversations that he doesn't think have been had, Conversations about buildings that have been proposed to be closed like the Brundage and Whitneyville libraries, the ones that serve a bulk of our community that doesn't have English as their first language and are more walkable libraries. Mr. Osmanu then went on to talk about public safety and how Dixwell Avenue is one of the most dangerous streets in the Town where we see countless motorist and pedestrian deaths, and the idea of forcing our youngest and oldest and least able folks to cross Dixwell and in that realm of traffic safety he feels very uneasy in moving over to this building without a stated plan in how they're going to keep people safe crossing. For these reasons he doesn't feel he can confidently allocate \$15,000,000.

Mr. Anthony stated Phase I has an estimated cost of \$38,000,000 and Phase II has an estimated cost of \$21,000,000 which brings the total cost to \$59,000,000 and as of right now there is no site plan or description of what is going to go there and is another reason he will not be in favor of it.

Ms. Kiely said she does understand that \$15,000,000 is a lot of money but thinks they need to do this and agrees with Mr. Farmer's point when we talk about southern Hamden consistently treated subpar than other communities. She said in order to be able to create a plan or to be able to get the community centered around and really give them options, we first need to be able to afford and know there's money to talk about because otherwise they are doing, which she fears they did with the ARPA funds this time, which is ask people to tell us what they would like without being able to guarantee them funds in return. She knows that was not the intent, but they must make sure that they're not doing things in the name of transparency and then not following through. She said if they don't have commitment that we are investing in southern Hamden then we can't get off the ground and get a developer to come and tell us to be able to hold the meetings with the community and treat the community the same way that we treated High Meadows. Ms. Kiely, after speaking some more on the subject, said she thinks it's important for them to invest in that part of Town.

Mr. O'Brien said there is a lot of validity to the question on how the plan is defined or if there was enough community input but this is part of that process. He said this is the first step in allocating money and investing in a part of the town that has been neglected for generations and this is a once in a generation influx of money that we can try to start righting some of those wrongs and investing in the community. This is putting a fund of money with an outline of a plan that can then be taken to the community and ensuring that it meets their needs. He's hesitant to change the amount and shortchange the community and say this is a part of Town we don't want to invest in.

Mr. Farmer quoted himself back in April 26, 2022 when Councilman Farmer says: "I believe an agency is what one of our key cornerstones to democracy." He went on to say that Farmer stated during that meeting: We heard the community members in Newhall and we have to trust that people will vote for their self-interest and to empower and make decisions about their communities. He said in doing so he will be supporting the thoughts and concerns from the last couple months of the community members. He said there's been a lack of investment in this community for 40 years and we are over correcting by telling people who are disadvantaged and first in need that we know better about what's best for their lives than they do and if we tell them what they need without talking to them we are making a grave mistake. He said this is a keystone right of a democracy to allow people to have agency over their own lives.

Mr. Webber asked if there have been public meetings. Mr. Grace said if this is approved they would engage a consultant and make sure the community gets what they want. He then explained the ARPA meetings they've held to date as outlined in the Q&A sent over. Mr. Webber said he believes in doing something historical for Hamden but also believes \$15,000,000 is too much and wonders if the money could be given in three parts and if

they can come up with language to disperse the \$15,000,000. Mr. Grace said this is just sort of a commitment from the Council that this is a worthy project. We will have to come back to the Council many, many times over the course of this project to fully allocate the funds.

Mr. Alston said this site has sat there for 21 years. How can we not say we'll use this money to do something we could not do in 21 years and will not again get to do in the next 21 years. We have this money now and he is in support of this.

Ms. Baez said this is highly and well deserved of this neighborhood which has been underserved and underrepresented for years and we finally have a Council to repair this neighborhood. She said they also have the opportunity to save the Town money to consolidate and to create buildings that we don't have to be ashamed of. She said she walked the neighborhood and heard from the people that talked about the poison they live in and why they did not want the previous proposal there and that they wanted a community center, they needed services for the seniors, they needed a better building, they needed a place for the youth to go, they needed something to enrich their arts culture, they needed something to bring people to the neighborhood in a positive way that didn't overcrowd it which allows them to have a throughway ability to use the spaces we have and to fix multiple problems. This building is to create a branch for the senior center, as asked by the neighbors. to create spaces for the youth, it is to create an arts campus so that our artists here in Hamden can have a home, it is to bulldoze a building that has been poisoning us, etc. Ms. Baez went on to list some of the other things that would be included. She went on to speak of promises from the State and talked about grants and private corporations that offered to help in this investment Ms. Baez said on the table isn't just a building it's a reparation and a well-deserved one on top of that.

Ms. Zaehring said when it comes to the old middle school site there isn't a doubt that something needs to be done and she thinks the 5.4 million dollar grant we got from the State to demolish the school is an excellent first step. She said when it comes to the ARPA money she thinks we're doing it backwards and that they need to due diligence to fully understand the scope and cost of the project. She feels there's still going to be a big gap between the 59 million and the ARPA funds and other grants. We need to know how we're going to pay for it, are we going to sell off other town assets, and if so, which ones, and are we going to bond out for it? If so, what will that do to our Town, which already has a big debt obligation? Ms. Zaehring said for these reasons she can't vote for the project as is now but she'd be open to allocate a smaller portion of the ARPA funds while they see how they can develop the site.

Mr. Farmer said this project has the opportunity to change a community right, but if we are not honest about floating the Town's finances off the back of the poorest people we can't say that it's reparations, we can't say that that it's a positive benefit, we can't say that that we're investing. He said he has 53 homes that are actively sinking into the ground and we are prioritizing a Taj Mahal that we have not even gotten input and the benefit of the community on. He said he would love to make a friendly amendment than not do anything at all.

Mr. Farmer asked Ms. Baez if she would take a friendly amendment of \$7,000,000. The friendly amendment from \$15,000,000 to \$7,000,000 was accepted by both the maker of the motion Ms. Baez, and the second of the motion Ms. Kiely.

Ms. Baez announced the 7 million dollars as amended for the community campus was accepted by both herself and Ms. Kiely and then announced she was calling this meeting into recess until Monday, May 8th.

The meeting was recessed at 10:07 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Renta
Clerk of the Council