

Special Town Council Meeting

December 4, 1984

7:00 p.m.

A special meeting was held in Council Chambers to discuss the Board of Education's demographic survey, as requested by Frank Yulo, Ph.D.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. Present at the meeting were Council members Bergamini, Gessert, Holmes, Killen, Papale, Polanski and Rys. Councilman James Krupp arrived later. Mayor William W. Dickinson was also in attendance.

Chairman Gessert prefaced the meeting by stating that Dr. Yulo had requested the meeting as part of his charge to seek the opinion of various agencies and people throughout the town as far as the study on enrollment and where the Town is going and how it will get there.

Prior to further discussion on the subject, Mayor Dickinson made a short statement regarding the fire trucks situation and that some of the trucks will have to be replaced. He asked if the Council would want to view the trucks in person to get an actual picture of what was needed in either repair or replacement. It was agreed that December 15, 1984, would be set aside for this purpose, with a time to be determined.

Dr. Yulo introduced himself as Professor and Chairman of the Department of Administration and Supervision at Southern Connecticut State University, and has been there in this capacity since 1975. He also summarized prior positions held, as well as the fact that he has been operating a consulting firm, Educational Management Consultants of Connecticut. He stated that it is with this firm that he is currently under contract with the School Board, to provide an outside objective view and analysis of the Town's population and school population, looking five or ten years into the future. He added that the firm will do an analysis of buildings and all aspects of buildings to update information supplied by a previous study done in 1971 at another university, in terms of the changes that have gone on programatically and the changes within the buildings during that period of time. He said that it would be his objective to put all that together, after studying a lot of other things and trying to come up with some recommendations, or at least a series of options. He said that these recommendations may or may not be ranked, which will depend upon what the firm's analysis finally shows.

Dr. Yulo stated that the steps they have been going through essentially is to collect a lot of information from the school system and that material is "cranking out" in terms of different computer runs on the population projection. The next step is to visit all the school buildings that are in question and to do an analysis of their real capacity vs. their emergency-type capacity - what their optimal operating capacity is. He said other steps were to read as much documentation, to meet with as many groups, as this, to get input and to make sure that before the firm does their final writing that they know all of the possible options, whether viable at this point or not. Dr. Yulo stated that he had received a lot of input as he went around to the schools and talked to people, and more so when you offer them confidentiality of not being quoted in terms of their analysis of the past, present and what their guess at the future would be. Dr. Yulo stated that he had met with Mayor Dickinson, the Planning people, and had received a lot of documentation from the Planning & Zoning Commission, the Sewer commission, and studies that they have done in the past several years. He added that he is in the process of reading all of this and that he has been dealing with the Greater Southwestern Regional Planning Agency and all the materials that they have shared with the firm. He said that they will be meeting with the teachers' organization in the next couple of weeks and with the officers of some of the various PTA's in Town to get any input or suggestions and that they have to make sure that the firm is not missing a critical point in their study. He added that there are three or four other people working on the study with him, some of his colleagues at the university - Dr. Tobin, who has been around to some of the schools already; Dr. Jane Rock, the statistician, and Mr. Ed Maas. He added that as they need any x levels of expertise, they draw that into the team. The recommendations that they end up with will not be those of an individual but of a team of people who have no vested interest in the Town of Wallingford beyond their professional pride of delivering a good product that will set the stage for the dialogue that will obviously have to go on - initially starting with the report when it is presented in January or early February to the Board of Education.

Dr. Yulo added that they are trying to interface all of the study with a concept of what they might call both effective schools and efficient schools, and that the town is obliged to operate both - that they accomplish what they think they want to be doing and that they be efficient in that accomplishment. He said that perhaps with that data, they can throw it off into any specific questions about the conduct of the study that the Town may have and or any comments and/or observations that the Town would like to make. Dr. Yulo expressed that he would be glad to meet with any of the Town Council members individually at a meeting or over the telephone, and this can be done through Superintendent of Schools Frank Soldan, or that he could give out his telephone number after the meeting.

654 Chairman Gessert commented that, with regard to closing of a school because it was not needed and, in the interest of economy, that there is no sense keeping a school open, the Council would be interested in knowing what the actual real savings would be, taking into account that the students that go to such a school would still have to be taught. Mr. Gessert wanted to know if that type of recommendation would have a realistic and accurate estimate of the potential savings if such were recommended. He added that all the costs associated with that school would not disappear and that the bottom line is if they close a school and it really costs \$200,000 to operate the school, would they actually be saving the \$200,000 or would it actually be saving \$25,000, or whatever that figure may be. He added that if the Town had an estimate of what the first year's savings would be, it cannot be predicted what will happen in the future as far as inflation and other things that would have an effect.

Chairman Gessert stated that another question is the potential fiscal liability of making the wrong decision and closing a school and what the options are if the Town must reopen it, and what new State requirements would apply, as well as fixing damage. He said that, if the population explodes and this must be done, what would the options be - would the Town add portable classrooms in the other school or would they reopen the one that is closed or do you build another one, the last not being an option the Town would want since they would have closed one that was said to be unnecessary.

Dr. Yulo stated that hopefully the strategic planning that the School Board and School administration, in getting the firm involved in this project, is addressing itself to that question - to do some strategic planning into the next five or ten years. He added that if they go much beyond that time period, it becomes very difficult.

Mr. Polanski asked if the Planning & Zoning Commission gave some indication of what the Town's growth would be over the next 5-10 years. Dr. Yulo responded that this would be based on some of the reports they submitted and that the Planning & Zoning Commission had hired a number of consulting firms over the years and have had reports from those groups, for example, in trying to project the ultimate capacity of the Town of Wallingford. Dr. Yulo also stated that the Sewer Commission also has a report, or referred to one, where they have done the same, using outside resources to try to project into the future what would be possible. He used as an example playing a scenario of what if the Town built on every lot that is available under Planning & Zoning currently. Dr. Yulo said that, reading some of the documents, the Town's guess would be probably a lot finer than his right now in terms of what could happen. He said that the Town could take a lot of the land that is not buildable right now and say that that is frozen land and set it aside because it will never be sold, but that he did not know that would be true fifty years from now and doubted that anyone could tell what would have over such a time. He added that, from reading all the documents, you can estimate which way things have been going and what the next five years have in store.

Mr. Polanski said that Dr. Yulo has information from Planning & Zoning on what presently is going on and what building permits have been scheduled for the next two or three years. Dr. Yulo responded that he had gotten serious documentation of all the building permits up through last month and had stopped collecting that type of material. He stated that he had gone through the building permits for the last ten to twelve years. He said that this meant things that will not go on line in terms of occupancy permits have not been tracked by him because they are not organized well enough. He added that normally when he does such a study he does not want to look at building permits but rather certificates of occupancy, but that he has had to settle for the building permits.

Mr. Holmes stated that on the west side of town he sees condominiums springing up for 75-80 units and that he knows of a plan for another development consisting of 70-80 homes and that the Town is going through a large building phase. He felt that the Town will see a decent increase in the population of both the schools in the future. He added that he has always had reservations about closing a school and then looking toward the future and selling the building and then spending \$30,000,000 to build a new school. He felt that it was important to have this type of dialogue and that it was good for the School Board, the Council and the Town and that he appreciated the opportunity to sit down and talk.

Dr. Yulo stated that part of the study will address the relationship between housing - past, current and future - and the different types of housing in the Town and its relationship to the school population. This would be a very important part of the research.

Mr. Rys stated that, along the lines of what Mr. Holmes was saying, he had read in the newspapers that there were agricultural farms that owners were intending to sell for residential use, if they cannot find someone willing to farm the land. He also pointed out the building of large corporations coming into Wallingford and the notation that Wallingford is the corridor between Boston and New York and that there is an indication right there that there will be a need which cannot be found in building records.

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Dr. Yulo responded that, for some of that, they can get a glimpse of the future with the Planning & Zoning documentation, where they have played various scenarios including, for example, the utilization of every piece of land in town. He felt that he could get an upward limit in terms of doing intelligent planning into the future within the next 5-15 years. He said that Wallingford clearly has been growing rapidly as a town and that the nature of the town is changing also. He said that, in his discussion with Mayor Dickinson, the Mayor pointed out that not too many years ago the people who lived in Wallingford worked in Wallingford and this is no longer true. Whether this would shift and how it would shift is why a body such as the Town Council would try to steer the Town on an intelligent course and look ahead as far as the Town can intelligently look ahead.

Mrs. Papale felt that Dr. Yulo had quite a job ahead of him, trying to get through the situation and coming up with something that would be sure for the Town. She pointed out that the Town had closed a school last year, Parker Farms School. Mrs. Papale commented that now the situation is that they keep hearing that maybe the school will have to be reopened and that that is why Dr. Yulo is here. But that, in the meantime, the Council is in a quandry as to whether to sell it or lease and that they don't want the same thing to happen as with the Robert Earley school. She added that this is a tough situation and that she spoke to the members of the Parker Farms School Committee and they don't know which way to go with the building, and that the Board of Education cannot figure out if they are going to need the school in a few years. She added that if we would have to reopen it, as Mr. Gessert had pointed out, would the Town be saving money.

Dr. Yulo responded that, since Parker Farms School is still under the control of the Town of Wallingford, it is still a legitimate part of his study and he spent one afternoon there. The consideration of what to do with all properties that are under the control of the Board of Education, or could be under their control, would be part of the study and he presumed that Parker Farms falls under that category.

Mrs. Papale commented that another matter to be taken into account is the fact that the Town has two high schools. Dr. Yulo replied that an observation, at this time in the study, is that the Town has school space available right now but at the wrong end of the educational spectrum. He said that there appears to be, and will increase, more space at both high schools, and that, on the other hand, on visiting all seven elementary schools, his colleague and himself at different times and intentionally, they could not find a single vacant classroom. He felt that no matter what computer run was used, the school system had stopped its decline on the elementary level and will start to slowly grow. He stated that the problem the Town is facing is that there is space, but in the wrong places. He hoped to address these using the best logic available that the Town would be able to see and move to action on.

Mrs. Papale stated that their big concern right now is what to do with Parker Farms school. Dr. Yulo said that nothing should be done until his report is in, which is estimated to be some time in late January to the School Board. He thought that this should start with the dialogue since he felt that the Board of Education was obviously the key governmental agency involved here and that would start their dialogue and/or hearings at that point, to double-check the logic, etc.

He felt that it would then be the Board of Education who would get the Council involved on the way to move forward.

Chairman Gessert pointed out what happens when you close a school temporarily and then have to reopen it. He felt that there would be a lot of investment necessary to get it back in working condition because it becomes a target for vandalism while it is closed. Dr. Yulo responded that it may take money to put Parker Farms back into working condition, but that that may not necessarily be a critical issue. Besides the start-up costs, Dr. Yulo pointed out that once you take a school out of operation for more than a couple of days, under State law, when you reopen it you are obliged to bring the school back up to the 1984 fire, safety, handicap codes, etc. He felt that this might not be a bad thing since you will end up with a building that meets all current codes.

Mrs. Bergamini asked if, in prior studies that Dr. Yulo has done, he ever recommended to a town that they should reopen a school that they had closed. Dr. Yulo responded that in his most recent study, in Farmington, he had said to do nothing with the schools. He said that a similar recommendation was made to Cheshire before that. He said that his West Haven study had recommended that they close three schools as rapidly as possible, and two are closed already. Their Meriden study recommended that the town close two schools and replace them with one new one. He has not, as far as he recalled, been in a situation where they have suggested that they reopen a school. He added that the Meriden study called for replacing two of their middle schools with one middle school, from an economic and grouping view. He felt that it is hard to justify some schools at certain sizes and that there is a fair amount of research which indicates optimum maximal and minimal sizes for school units - elementary, middle and high school - and that there is such a thing as too small a school on any of those levels, in terms of cost-effectiveness and good educational grouping, and there is such a thing as too big a school, in terms of deficiency - the economy of scale then catches up with the Town and it becomes more expensive to operate a huge unit, and they don't need that number of youngsters to form the kind of critical mass in terms of grouping and having options with those groupings.

656 Mr. Killen asked Dr. Yulo if, in his charge, he might recommend that the Town go beyond present buildings and recommend other buildings, including the Parker Farms school, or is he limited to the present buildings. Dr. Yulo felt that he was not limited in any way and that his charge was the school system, its future and its needs and that nothing would preclude him from suggesting the need for additional facilities or any relocation, grade reorganization - could more effective and efficient use of what you currently have, with or without Parker Farms, be made by organizing the grade structure in the right way? He said that right now it is K-5, middle school (6-7-8) and 9-12 organization. Research indicates very little that one organization is better than any other.

Dr. Yulo stated that the Town, like most other places in the U. S., developed schools in the middle to solve a building problem. The reality of the emergence of the junior high school a number of years ago started at a meeting similar to this and was really some Town members struggling because they had two school buildings, a K-8 and a high school, and both were filled to the brim, and that one member suggested that a building be built in the middle and take from each of the other two schools to solve their problem. He said that this had nothing to do with good education, and this was how the concept of junior high school, or middle school, came about.

Mr. Killen stated that he felt that too many communities, including Wallingford, were not necessarily interested in that particular concept of it, but that when some other part of the country does a certain thing, then the community feels it has to get caught up in it. Dr. Yulo felt that the Town of Wallingford did it much for the same reason as the original middle school - because of facilities.

Mr. Killen commented that two schools had been built, one on the east and one on the west and that they had followed a concept, which may be good in California, and had an open space in the schools to go from classroom to classroom and that they had to eventually build a glass wall on the north side because it was not good for New England climate. Mr. Killen questioned whether the Town is always being practical and it depends on whether or not the Town has a Board that comes forward and is influenced by what is going on elsewhere.

Dr. Yulo felt that the concept as indicated above was fine from an educational point of view but it should have been put together. Mrs. Bergamini asked if they had installed a third heating unit in the school and that it was still too cold. Superintendent Soldan said it was the second unit installed.

Mr. Killen questioned Dr. Yulo as to whether he would be recommending where the schools should be located, if he felt that they needed more schools. Dr. Yulo said that he would not, at least not in a definite way. He felt that most towns try to use the resources they have in an intelligent way by getting the children to where the facilities are and that re-districting is an on-going process, even though somewhat traumatic for parents from time to time. He felt that there were other groups in Town that could more effectively do the pin-pointing of areas in terms of planning and zoning; whether they could effectively do this in terms of where the children are going to come is another question. Dr. Yulo added that he could come to some generalities.

Mr. Killen stated that no one foresaw the Pill, and no one sitting down at meetings or all the experts in the world could foresee this and the impact it would have. He added that, as Mr. Kys pointed out, there are the farm lands and that if something happens in Congress it could change what will be done and whether more farm lands will be set up again and what side of town it will affect. He felt that these were unknown factors.

Dr. Yulo responded that there is predicting and there is projecting. The distinction he makes in his study is that they are projecting, having taken all known factors such as how many children in the town may die, how many may not get promoted, how many would move in to Town and how many would move out of Town, etc., and is a much more valuable instrument to work with, to keep updating it once a benchmark is obtained.

Mr. Killen asked how effective the grammar schools are. Dr. Yulo said his judgment would be that all of the elementary classrooms are now being used and on a need basis, and that, in some cases, there are tight situations as far as the auxiliary programs. He stated, for example, that the Town's art and music program could be referred to as minimal, in terms of facilities, even though there are good attempts by the staff. There are no separate facilities for art and music that are operating full time. He felt that most of their media centers, the libraries are half the size they should be. He also felt that, taking those as givens, they still have not found any empty rooms. He pointed out that in their visits to the school, the firm

has insisted on seeing every closet, every room, every storage space, to get a full sense of what is possible and what is available.

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Mr. Gessert commented that, as Mr. Killen had stated, no one foresaw the Pill and its impact, and that he felt that if tomorrow the interest rate went to 18%, the construction would stop and that the only reason construction projects are going ahead is because the interest rates came down. Dr. Yulo noted that the line of the Dow Jones industrial average and the issuance of building permits can be plotted almost in tandem.

Chairman Gessert asked if anyone in the audience would like to make any comments. Mr. Ray Bulmer said he understood that the firm has to make an overall survey, but he asked if the firm could deal with the Parker Farms School issue first so that the Board could have some idea of where they are going. Dr. Yulo responded that they will be submitting the final report by the middle of January, at a public meeting, at which time he would present orally the highlights of that report and the copies for the Board members to study and that members of the community and town government, as well as the newspapers, would very quickly be interested in the report and, specifically, the recommendations, whether they are rank-ordered or not.

Chairman Gessert asked Mr. Robert Devine, who was in the audience, whether he had an opportunity to provide input to Dr. Yulo. Mr. Devine indicated that anything he would have to contribute has already been indicated by the Town Council and the Board of Education. Dr. Yulo commented that there are still some groups he has not met with. He added that December 18, 1984, was confirmed just today for a meeting with some of the PTA leaders at Cook Hill School and a teachers' organization meeting for next Tuesday.

Mr. Polanski commented that Superintendent Frank Soldan would be able to give Dr. Yulo information regarding any changes in curriculum and vocational education programs. Dr. Yulo responded that this was two-pronged, one from having met with the administrators groups and then having met with each of them in their own buildings asking them to project their needs for the future and what they see as programatically changing, and the other being what the firm, as outside professional educators, think may be on the forefront that the Town should be providing for or thinking about and trying to put into the planning. He said that education is quite different today from what it was 15 years ago and it will be quite different fifteen years from now and he will be hoping to address some of those issues in their report.

Mr. Polanski asked if they will be looking at what the State may mandate the Town to do. Dr. Yulo replied affirmatively and that this would be more predictable. Dr. Yulo felt, from his experience, that when these mandates come about, communities, school boards and school committees may go into court, but that, in the end, the mandates stand and have an implication for financing, education and planning. Dr. Yulo added that he felt that the State has not been very frivolous and that most of the things that have been placed on school systems over the past 30 years have been reasonable things that, in most cases, where being done or would have been done eventually. Mr. Gessert pointed out that "frivolous" would be in the eyes of the spender.

Mr. Killen commented that we have the most efficient education system in the world but that it could not be done without money. Mr. Killen felt that the State had the money but did not want to fund the small communities.

Mrs. Bergamini expressed her concern over the all-day kindergarten issue, which she feels the State will mandate and the Town will have to fund, even though she feels that 5-year-olds are not ready for all-day school. She added that the staff required would have to be funded by the Town. Dr. Yulo said that there is no State law now that requires a kindergarten child to go to kindergarten, because the State law requires that children between the ages of 7-16 go to school; parents elect to send their children to kindergarten voluntarily. Mrs. Bergamini felt it was unfair that the Town is not given a choice and that when the mill rate must be increased for these things, the same parents complain. Dr. Yulo said that the State does not even mandate the existence of high school, but just that children from 7-16 be educated.

Mr. Krupp addressed Dr. Yulo, regarding his observation that he did not believe that the state mandates are frivolous, and questioned that, prior to 25 years ago, when these mandates started becoming as numerous as they are now, were we not providing an education for our children. Mr. Krupp asked whether he would be incorrect in alleging that many of the mandates that come from the State at this point in time are irrelevant to the question of basic education. Dr. Yulo felt that answer to that would be basic to whom. A glaring example of this, according to Dr. Yulo, and the most significant legislative act both on the State and Federal level over the past 30 years would have to be the Special Education Act, which insisted that schools that were not doing it, recognize the responsibility to children with exceptionalities - exceptionalities being defined, in this case, on the lower end as handicapped children - physically, mentally, and other categories of handicapped.

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He added that prior to 1969, very few school systems made any effort. The attitude was that the children were unfortunate and so were the parents but their job was to deal with the regular children in a regular building with a regular basic program. Dr. Yulo felt that this was immoral and that the country has an obligation to all children and to see those laws passed is good, even though he may not agree with some of the rules and regulations that go along with the mandates.

Mr. Krupp did not argue this point but he contended that, for example with special education, the tab in some cases runs \$25-30,000+ and that if the State is going to place these mandates upon the Town that the State should share some of the burden. Mr. Krupp felt that sex education is one example of the municipality funding a program which is being instituted as a result of the default of the parent whose responsibility it is. He felt that this was one of those mandates which increased the financial burden of the school system and that sex education was not necessarily a critical item within the public school system, or if so, that the State should pick up some of the tab.

Dr. Yulo pointed out that it is clear that the State is on the verge of mandating within the next few years programs for gifted children from kindergarten through twelfth grade and, whether we agree with it or not, is going to have implications for planning by the School Board, by the School administration and the funding agencies.

Chairman Gessert summed up what was discussed thus far. Mr. Krupp commented that he would be interested in seeing the results of the study, especially as far as the west side of Town.

There being no further comments or business, Chairman Gessert thanked Dr. Yulo on behalf of the Council and the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

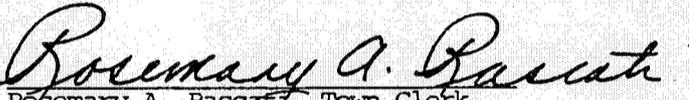
Respectfully submitted,

Carmen L. Gonzalez  
Council Secretary

APPROVED:

  
David A. Gessert, Council Chairman

12 - 11 - 84  
Date

  
Rosemary A. Rascatti, Town Clerk

12 - 11 - 84  
Date