

ORIGINAL

VERBATIM PROCEEDINGS

MAY 24 2005

WEST HARTFORD TOWN COUNCIL

RE: TAX EXEMPTION FOR VETERANS

MAY 10, 2005

WEST HARTFORD TOWN HALL
50 SOUTH MAIN STREET
WEST HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

POST REPORTING SERVICE
HAMDEN, CT (800) 262-4102

HEARING RE: TAX EXEMPTION FOR VETERANS
MAY 10, 2005

1 . . .Verbatim Proceedings of a hearing
2 before the West Hartford Town Council in the matter of an
3 ordinance expanding eligibility criteria for local tax
4 exemption for veterans held on May 10, 2005 at 7:33 p.m.
5 at the West Hartford Town Hall, 50 South Main Street,
6 West Hartford, Connecticut at which time the parties were
7 represented as hereinbefore set forth. . .

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11 MAYOR SCOTT SLIFKA: And we will
12 immediately open the 7:20 public hearing. And roll call,
13 Mrs. Cronin.

14 (Whereupon, roll call was taken.)

15 MAYOR SLIFKA: Thank you. Mr. Spada.

16 MR. ART SPADA: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

17 Ordinance expanding eligibility criteria for local tax
18 exemption for veterans.

19 MAYOR SLIFKA: Thank you, Mr. Spada. Mr.
20 Feldman, do you have a presentation from the
21 administration?

22 MR. BARRY FELDMAN: Mr. Mayor, actually
23 maybe between Pat Alair and I we can briefly describe
24 this. But also just in some context, this was an item

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1 that was discussed a number of times at the finance and
2 budget committee. It included not only the elected
3 officials, the town assessor was involved, the finance
4 director along with Pat Alair and myself, we all looked
5 at this. And tried to understand it more and evaluate it
6 and ultimately this ordinance was drafted and it's now
7 before you.

8 And as the title would suggest, this is an
9 ordinance that actually expands the eligibility for local
10 tax exemption for veterans. And this is done pursuant to
11 a change in state law that allows this and this Council
12 is now going to consider actually expanding the
13 opportunities for additional tax exemptions for veterans.
14

15 It deals with the income eligibility, not
16 the actual assessed value. You have dealt with the
17 assessed value of property in a different ordinance. This
18 only deals with the income of the individual veteran. And
19 what you're doing is to modestly increase it to allow
20 additional veterans to participate in the program. We
21 looked and tried to understand what that might mean and
22 there is a certain amount of tax shifting that goes on
23 locally. But the shift should be a modest, a nominal
24 amount of money that actually is involved in this

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1 particular program.

2 I don't know if there, Pat, is there
3 anything that maybe I have forgotten.

4 MR. PAT ALAIR: No, that's essentially it.
5 We do have a -- and this has been discussed in committee,
6 we do have I guess a lack of clarity on how broadly we
7 are opening the pool of applicants. We have no data on
8 how many additional veterans will be eligible for the
9 exemption by changing the income limits because we have
10 no current ability to track that data. So, there is some
11 question as to exactly what this will cost. I believe we
12 did an estimate based on the best data we had, I just
13 don't remember what the number came up to.

14 MR. FELDMAN: It's a relatively
15 insignificant number when you look at, again, the
16 shifting that goes on in the benefit that's provided to
17 veterans from World War II forward. And that's really, I
18 think, the issue that's before you tonight if you wish to
19 expand the eligibility criteria.

20 MR. ALAIR: The only other thing I would
21 want to make clear on the record is, because it was an
22 issue with the last time we adopted this, based on the
23 timing of this ordinance this would become effective with
24 the October 1, '05 grand list. Applications would be

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1 submitted so that people would get this benefit on the
2 October 1, '05 list and those, again, are the taxes that
3 are payable in July 1 of '06 and January 1 of '07. So if
4 you adopt this tonight, people will not see a benefit
5 until their tax bill of July 1 of '06. I just wanted that
6 to be clear for you and for the public as well.

7 MAYOR SLIFKA: Pat, if I could just recap,
8 and Barry too, we've been at this a couple of times. I
9 just want to see if I can give a quick summary to
10 everybody to make sure they know where we've been. The
11 first time we adopted this a couple of years ago, well,
12 the genesis of all of this is a state law. The state
13 allows us to do this and we can choose to opt in. A
14 couple of years ago we elected to implement whatever was
15 -- whatever limits were allowed under state law at that
16 time.

17 Later on, we went a little bit further
18 than state law, came back and -- because we didn't like a
19 piece that the state had done where they sort of -- they
20 split the pool, I think, from what we originally had and
21 it became instead of one giant pool it became an either
22 or question. We didn't want to sort of play God on that
23 one, so we adopted -- we amended our own ordinance to say
24 we're going to have the -- keep the pool broad. And now

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1 we have come back again, based on another change in the
2 state law subsequent to the first one that caused us to
3 get here initially. Is that a long convoluted explanation
4 accurate?

5 MR. ALAIR: Essentially there are -- yes,
6 there are two components, the amount of the exemption and
7 the pool of people who are eligible for the exemption.
8 And the state statute changed both of those features. The
9 first time around we adopted the piece that increased the
10 exemption to 10,000 dollars or 10 percent of assessed
11 value. And that's the either or situation that you
12 referred to.

13 At the time, however, you'll recall that
14 we were in a situation where if I recall correctly, the
15 timing was -- it was budget season. And we really,
16 again, don't have data on what the impact of expanding
17 the pool is. We can compute what the increase in
18 assessment is or the increase in the value of the
19 exemption because we know our existing pool. But we
20 don't know how to -- we didn't know how to expand the
21 pool. And as I recall it, the discussion was that we
22 didn't want to adopt that piece at that time because we
23 were in a budget season and we didn't know what the
24 implications were for the budget that you currently have

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1 in front of you.

2 Now, we are back. We are in a position we
3 can -- we have some handle on that. We know that the
4 applications will come in. They won't affect us until the
5 '06 year. So when you do your budget next year, the '05
6 grand list, which is the '06 - '07 budget year, so we
7 will know at the time you're adopting your budget what
8 the impact of this is and you can factor it in. So it's
9 a logical time to be doing the second piece.

10 MAYOR SLIFKA: And we have, just for the
11 record, we have adopted the maximum level of limit
12 allowed by the state, correct, in both areas.

13 MR. ALAIR: That's correct.

14 MAYOR SLIFKA: Okay. Anything from the
15 Council? Mr. Spada.

16 MR. SPADA: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Question
17 perhaps for Town Manager Feldman, but open, would this
18 change -- be seamless to the veteran or does the veteran
19 have to be proactively seek out, complete some form some
20 application?

21 MR. FELDMAN: Mr. Mayor, Mr. Spada, I
22 believe they do have to apply. In other words, it's not
23 automatic even though it may require an extra step, it's
24 something that the veteran will have to do on his or own.

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1 MR. SPADA: And to follow up, Mr. Mayor.

2 MAYOR SLIFKA: Sure, Mr. Spada.

3 MR. SPADA: And not that we're looking for
4 a definitive answer tonight, but if we could perhaps give
5 some thought on what would be the best most economical
6 way to get that information out and maybe that's through
7 Channel 5 or a flyer.

8 MR. FELDMAN: Well, actually through our
9 own assessment office there is fairly good contact and
10 ability to let veterans know. So I think they have a
11 fairly good handle on how they want to do it.

12 MR. SPADA: Thank you.

13 MAYOR SLIFKA: Just to clarify, Mr.
14 Feldman and Mr. Alair, I believe what the assessor has
15 said it's within the current pool of people we know
16 they're going to be advised because they're already in
17 the system. Our question is since this is now not
18 affecting income, but affecting eligibility, there is a
19 whole pool of people who have never been eligible before
20 that we have to try to -- we have to try to advise and
21 that's the task before us, correct. Okay.

22 MR. SPADA: Thank you.

23 MAYOR SLIFKA: Anything further from the
24 Council? Do we have a sign up sheet?

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1 MR. O'BRIEN: We do, but it is blank, but
2 I do believe we have somebody here who wants to speak.

3 MAYOR SLIFKA: I do believe we do. Mr.
4 DiGalbo, you're up.

5 MR. DANIEL DiGALBO: I haven't been around
6 awhile. I've had a plethora of health problems and just
7 to top it off I had pulmonary embolism surgery on the
8 lungs and just for an incidental item, they said why
9 don't we do bypass at the same time. That's why you
10 haven't seen me around.

11 I'm glad to see that you're thinking about
12 the veterans. The last ordinance you passed, I believe
13 it was something about a 100,000 dollars for pretty that
14 would get 9,000. I don't recall. I'm lucky I remember my
15 name. And it's good you're thinking about the veteran,
16 however, that increase in exemption I don't think it
17 affected very many veterans. I think anything -- any
18 ordinance you pass this is not -- it might be a little
19 misleading. When I read this very quickly, I see oh
20 we're getting a bigger exemption. I'm sorry to say that
21 unless I see, I don't believe it will help many veterans,
22 maybe a handful. I don't see it.

23 But what I would like to say is that I
24 don't understand what these ordinances -- I don't

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1 understand it all and I would like to get something that
2 I can look at and debate it with you people, but I can't
3 do it because I don't have it here. But I want to remind
4 you again World War II veterans are disappearing very,
5 very fast. I'm one of the youngest that was in combat
6 with World War II. I'm 79. And World War II veterans
7 need help badly and I hope when this ordinance is finally
8 comes down with clarity or writing or something that it
9 will affect World War II veterans as well as other
10 people.

11 But it seems all the time that the ones
12 that benefit are the ones down here, the ones up here
13 really don't care. The guys in the middle are paying all
14 the big taxes. They never seem to get consideration. I
15 would like to -- I would like, first of all, I would like
16 to see this ordinance and I'd like to have some input
17 into it, not that it would go in, but I'd like to know
18 what it's about and I could -- I could speak with more
19 knowledge and bring my ideas before you with something --
20 with knowing what's going on.

21 But I do really want to thank you for even
22 thinking about it. And, you know, I told you I wouldn't
23 be gone -- by the way is that older gentleman still
24 around. Oh, I'm glad to hear that. A lot of people have

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1 told me I'm over the hill. And I'll end this by saying
2 Art Linkletter, who is 93 years old, he says, when they
3 say that to you, you say, better to be over the hill than
4 under the hill.

5 Thank you for your time and I hope I can
6 get a copy of whatever is happening.

7 MAYOR SLIFKA: They'll arrange for that.
8 Thank you, Mr. DiGalbo.

9 Are there any members of the public who
10 wish to speak in favor or against or neutral to this
11 proposed ordinance change?

12 Seeing none, is there anything further
13 from the Council? Mrs. Carpenter.

14 MS. BARBARA CARPENTER: Yes, Mr. DiGalbo,
15 the information that you have, we really looked at
16 thoroughly in our budget and finance meeting who would be
17 exempt from the increase from this ordinance. So at some
18 time we can share that information with you, but they did
19 do a fairly thorough study as to how many veterans would
20 have an impact, financial impact by this ordinance. And
21 it was substantial.

22 MAYOR SLIFKA: Thank you, Mrs. Carpenter.

23 MS. CARPENTER: Thank you.

24 MAYOR SLIFKA: Anything further from the

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1 Council? Okay, with that we'll close the public hearing.
2
3 (Whereupon, the hearing was adjourned at
4 7:45 p.m.)

CERTIFICATE

I, Paul Landman, a Notary Public in and for the State of Connecticut, and President of Post Reporting Service, Inc., do hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing record is a correct and verbatim transcription of the audio recording made of the proceeding hereinbefore set forth.

I further certify that neither the audio operator nor I are attorney or counsel for, nor directly related to or employed by any of the parties to the action and/or proceeding in which this action is taken; and further, that neither the audio operator nor I are a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties, thereto, or financially interested in any way in the outcome of this action or proceeding.

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and do so attest to the above, this 23rd day of may, 2005.


Paul Landman
President

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