

**MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING ON AN ORDINANCE
INCREASING THE LOCAL TAX EXEMPTION FOR VETERANS.
(PUBLIC HEARING CONTINUED FROM 5/11/04).**

MAY 25, 2004

COUNCIL CHAMBERS

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President Jonathan Harris called the hearing to order at 6:33 p.m.

Present were Councilors Rob Bouvier, Barbara Carpenter, Kevin Connors, Chuck Coursey, Jonathan Harris, Maureen Kelly McClay, Scott Slifka, Art Spada and Carolyn Thornberry.

President Harris: I believe we already know the subject that was put on the record. Do we have a sign up sheet Mr. O'Brien?

Mr. O'Brien: Yes we do.

President Harris: Mr. Slifka.

Vice President Slifka: Before we get to the speakers there has been a little confusion on this so I just want to put in the record what is going on and what we plan to do. We had originally brought this out to pass it kind of along with the budget and then when the change in revaluation occurred it was the recommendation of the Assessor that we take a second look at how that was going to impact the subject group. I believe her statement at our meeting at that time was that fewer veterans would benefit under the ordinance as proposed than they would under the ordinance as it stood so we were going to take some more time to study that. We still need to do that.

There are some questions lingering about that and then there is a second piece regarding the eligibility requirements of the veterans. There are two pieces to this legislation, an expansion of the benefit of who is eligible to get it and then an expansion of the benefit itself and what I was just talking about was the benefit itself. As far as the eligibility when we reviewed this in committee a few months back there was I believe a statement from the Assessor that however the timing worked out from when this came from the state that you couldn't adopt the entire ordinance immediately, that the eligibility benefit might have to roll over into the next year so that remained an open question. Simply put what we are going to do is go back and look

at that again, look at the income benefit again, and hopefully bring it back in a couple of weeks for the final vote.

President Harris: Thank you Mr. Slifka. Mr. Madfis I believe left. Mr. DiGalbo.

Mr. DiGalbo: I'm here tonight with one eye open but I still wanted to come down. I want to bring to your attention this is being presented as resolution 41. If I recall properly I would like to bring up the fact that under, besides the tax exemption for veterans there were two other people, two other categories that came under resolution 41 which would be seniors and individually disabled handicapped. I hope you still have that in mind because they need the benefits as much as the veterans and I hope you haven't closed that door.

I spoke to Mr. Slifka, Mr. Slifka spoke to me and I understand there are problems with this thing and there probably won't be much happening on it tonight but I want to say I'm extremely disappointed in the way the ordinance was presented. Look, how can you present an ordinance that says local veterans to receive increase in tax benefits? That says to me that local veterans are going to get an increase which is far from the truth. I think these bills or these ordinances should be presented especially the headline which people see should be presented in such a way so that people can interpret that. If you hear that statement about this increase you would say oh I guess we are all getting an increase. In fact the guy that was sitting there thought we were.

In order to qualify the way it was presented if you had a house that was worth \$140,000 no more and then it had to be assessed at \$100,000 or less and today in West Hartford a two car garage is \$140,000 if you are not careful with heat so what I am saying is this whole, the way this ordinance is written at the moment, now I understand changes are being made and I'm very happy to hear it, but I would still like to be under this public hearing I would like to make my suggestions.

It has to be approached differently and maybe this is a way you are going to approach it. I spoke to the Mayor in January. I have been speaking to Mr. Slifka in various ways. I think to benefit the veterans of West Hartford you have to hit the income. You have to increase that minimum income from \$32,500 I believe it is for married; it can go up to \$51,000 as of last July.

You don't have to push it up to \$51,000. Push it up \$10,000 and I think you will get a lot more veterans qualifying and I think I'm still looking for a real veterans benefit advocate on the Town Council. I really haven't found one. I know everybody shows an interest but I am looking for an advocate for the veterans and right now as bad as I am I am it. Well, my friend Vincent is here tonight and I wish someone would help, the Councils and politicians, and people in government they get their favorites and I would also like to say, just bear with me another couple of seconds, I know you people all turned me down to represent this town with \$500,000 of insurance and a backing of an organization. Mr. Mayor I know just bear with me another few minutes.

The Town of Simsbury just adopted volunteers, no experience, three, four or five of them to help veterans with their questions and I want to present this to you tonight and then I'm going to shut my mouth. I'm proud to say today I received a diploma for a veteran in West Hartford. This veteran was in Weaver High School in 1955, 1944 and left for the service. I got a call from his wife, he didn't graduate, I got a call from his wife, Dan I'm trying to get my husband a diploma and I can't seem to get anywhere with it. I say I will take it. Today I received a diploma for this veteran and that is what we need in this town. We need someone like me or someone else who is interested in helping the veterans and also I would like a report on what this guy is doing every once a week on Wednesday. The other thing I want to say is I also have my fourth veteran who has been increased in compensation up to one hundred percent which means \$2,345 a month for as long as he lives and if he dies from that disability his wife will get it. If he lives ten years his wife will get half of it so...

President Harris: Mr. DiGalbo I have given you a lot of leeway if you could come back.

Mr. DiGalbo: You gave me too much. I appreciate it.

President Harris: Thank you.

Mr. DiGalbo: You are welcome.

President Harris: And congratulations to the graduate, too.

Mr. DiGalbo: Thank you.

President Harris: Any other members of the public that would wish to speak on this item? Any questions by Councilors?

Councilor Thornberry: Mr. Mayor.

President Harris: Dr. Thornberry.

Councilor Thornberry: I know Mr. DiGalbo is frustrated and we are too about this situation but it wasn't that long ago that I know that Councilman Spada and I over one particular weekend wrote a veteran's resolution for this town out of a state statute that the ink wasn't even dry on, that I had found out about it. It had not even made I don't think the newspapers yet and we said that we were going to do it. We wrote it up and we filed it for the first available Town Council meeting. This is taking longer than anyone wants to and the reason it is is because we want to do it right and we want to do it so that the most veterans have the best benefit from it and it just got a little quirky because of the state statute involved in this and when the budget was passed but it will be resolved and we ask your patience and please know that we are working on it truly.

Mr. DiGalbo: Thank you very much, that's all I ask.

President Harris: Thank you Dr. Thornberry. Any other questions or comments? We will close the public hearing.

The hearing adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Norma W. Cronin
Town Clerk/Council Clerk