



Newtown Democratic Town Committee General Meeting

Alexandria Room, Edmond Town Hall

January 9, 2025 at 7pm

1. Call to Order

Alex Villamil called the meeting to order at 7:07pm with the Pledge of Allegiance

2. Attendance and Welcome of Guests

Members Present:

Tristan Filiato, Kathy Quinn, Vanessa Villamil, Jim Gaston, Jeff Schult, Richard Eigen, Alex Villamil, Alex Copp, Prerna Rao, Joe Bojnowski, Peter Schwartz, Ned Simpson, Don Lococo, Michelle Embree Ku

Members Present on Zoom:

Lynn Hungaski, Jordana Bloom, Don Mitchell, Betsy Litt, Ed Randall, Laura Miller

Guests Present:

AG Tong, One member of the press, Josh Adams, Kristen Cadoff, Beth Young, Agni Pavlidou

3. Acceptance of Minutes

Jim Gaston moved to approve the minutes of the December 12, 2024 minutes. Joe Bojnowski 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.

4. Treasurer's Report

John Fletcher reported that the December balance was \$13,000.

Election spending and fall activity bills drew on the account; payment for program ads added to the account.

January balance is \$11,652

Clint DePaolo moved to approve the minutes of the December 12, 2024 minutes. Joe Bojnowski 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

5. DTC Membership

The motion to approve Jeff Schult to become a NDTC member passed unanimously (motion made and seconded at the December 12, 2024 meeting)

6. Microphone purchase

Richard Eigen moved to approve 123.36 to reimburse Alex Copp for the purchase of a new microphone for meetings. Joe Bojnowski 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.

New Business

7. Remarks by AG William Tong

AG William Tong shared his thoughts about challenges that Connecticut may face in the next four years and how federalism and the justice system will play a role in the response.

8. Website Plan Renewal

Current bill (\$180 Wordpress) is due on Feb. 7. Instead of renewing with the current plan at \$180 with Wordpress.com for the next two years, Jeff Schult recommends switching to namecheap.com @ \$53.88 for the first two years. After the two years the price goes up to \$74 per year. Namecheap provides more services and the ability to host multiple domain names/websites. Everyone could have a dtc email. Technical support is good.

Richard Eigen moved to approve \$53.88 for webhosting. Peter Schwarz 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.

9. Newtown Allies for Change Update

Don Lococo reported that although the DEI committee was discontinued at library, the new director has been very helpful. NAFC will be hosting a book discussion for White Fragility (by Robin Diangelo) and is looking forward to seeing the anti-hate program hosted by NAFC (FBI/police) presented as a school program.

10. Endorsing Unaffiliated Candidates for DTC Slate

The DTC bylaws do not require endorsed candidates to be registered Democrats (except for the town committee). There was discussion about the advantages and

disadvantages of endorsing people who are registered as unaffiliated or Independent. Generally, there were no objections.

11. Funding a Welcome Packet for People New to Town

The Outreach Committee requested allocating \$500 for postage, envelopes and paper to go towards a “welcome packet” for new Newtowners

Jim Gaston moved to approve \$500.00 for postage and printing for welcome packets. Prerna Rao 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.

Reports: written reports are in **Attachment A**

12. Communications

Matt Blumenthal, House Chair of the Government, Administration and Elections Committee will be joining the DTC at the February meeting to talk about upcoming voting reform legislation.

13. State Central Report

Betsy Litt indicated that all delegates to the Senate District 28 Convention to elect Democratic State Central representatives would be reconvened to elect a replacement for Jeff Galdenzi who has turned in his resignation. Convention will be by Zoom on January 15th at 8pm.

14. Fundraising

Tong Tasting event being planned for March 28

15. Outreach

July picnic planned for July 19

Social media team is organizing

DTC hosts lunch at the Senior Center – Jan 24

16. Membership

Kathy Quinn indicated that the membership committee supports membership for Agni Pavlidou. She was actively involved in campaigns this last cycle.

Kathy Quinn moved to approve Agni Pavlidou as a member to the DTC; Prerna 2nd. Vote will take place at the next DTC meeting (per bylaws)

17. Candidates

Laura Miller indicated that the candidates's committee supports Josh Adams for the Cultural Arts Commission. He is a talented, Pulitzer Prize winning artist with an interest in connecting the teen center with Cave Comics.

Jim Gaston moved to recommend to the BOS the approval of Josh Adam for Cultural Arts Commission; Peter Schwarz 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.

18. Boards and Commissions Reports

There was discussion about the public requests for a moratorium on dense and high impact development, the new “pay as you throw” plan to be implemented at the transfer station in July, and the Legislative Council’s adjustments to the CIP.

Don Lococo reported that BOE is doing a good job with DEI

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:50pm.

Attachment A - Reports

Board of Selectmen - Submitted by Michelle Embree Ku

The Annual Comprehensive Financial report is complete and will be presented at the January 22 Legislative Council meeting. The Unassigned Fund Balance is 9.4% of the annual budget (a decrease from recent years due to the Water and Sewer Fund shortfalls).

A grant from the state for \$610K has been received to improve the duplex structure at Fairfield Hills for economic development and Parks and Recreation offices.

The Community Center HVAC costs have increased from \$1.7M to \$2.5M

The BOS approved a Special Appropriation for \$600,000 to address leaks in the High School roof. This will address part of the roof replacement project in the CIP (which previously totaled \$4.3M – with \$1.5M anticipated reimbursed by the state - because of the emergency nature, though, the state will not reimburse any of the \$600K)

Based on a presentation by the Newtown Public Schools Facilities Director at a previous meeting, the town Finance Director requested “closing-out” \$450,000 for planning, design, and engineering of an HVAC system at the Middle School (the project was approved by referendum in 2021). Action was postponed based on:

- No immediate need to “deauthorize” the approval
- The Board of Education did not vote specifically to request deauthorization – the BOE intent was to change the description of the project
- An alternative plan for addressing the air quality at the Middle School has not yet been solidified
- A changing long-term plan makes it difficult to know the costs and benefits (initial estimate was \$8M, now is \$20M, facilities study is ongoing)

The BOS approved the recommendation of the Employee Medical Benefits Board - an 18% increase in premiums for the High-Deductible Health Plan/ Health Savings Account and 22% increase in the Copay plan for 2025-26 budget planning. This high increase is due to higher than expected claims over several years without a commensurate increase in the fund. The deficit is exacerbated by a large increase projected in the stop-loss insurance premium (due to the recent high claims). There is currently a projected \$3.7M deficit in the medical self-insurance fund balance. This will be a major challenge in budgeting for 2026.

The BOS approved the implementation of “Pay As You Throw” plan to replace the annual permit fee (\$100) for the transfer station, effective July 1, 2025. The plan has been discussed by a tri-board committee with Fred Hurley representing the administration. Bag Fees \$1.05 13-gallon bag (kitchen bin); \$2.60 32-gallon bag; \$4.40 55-gallon bag (estimated cost of \$107/yr). BOF and LC will have to approve the plan as well.

The First Selectman requested a legal opinion from the town attorney regarding the possibility of a moratorium on dense housing. The attorney had not provided a response by the January 6 meeting. The First Selectman has initiated efforts to ask someone from the state to come in to answer questions about 8-30g and dense development.

Attachment A - Reports

A petition to designate a portion of Stone Bridge Trail a scenic road was discussed. Four residential homes are requesting that about 900 feet of the road coming off of Route 34 be declared scenic. The subsequent 1500 feet of road will be paved and drainage added (by a developer of 8 new homes). The Legislative Council has the authority to grant/reject the petition.

Appointments and re-appointments to boards were made, following a discussion of the interview process and assurance that people who had expressed an interest, but who were not appointed, would be contacted.

On a lighter note, the BOS accepted Holly Lane (a newer development off of Rte. 34) into the town's road inventory (Dan asked whether the name would be confused with existing roads with "Hawley" in the name, but Emergency Communications assured us that it would not be a problem).

Board of Education - Submitted by: Alison Plante, Chair

January 2025 Update

- Budget

We are kicking off our budget discussions on January 14th, when the Superintendent will present her proposed budget to the Board. The Board will discuss the budget on January 28th and 30th, and expects to vote on a budget to send to the Board of Finance on February 4th.

There are significant, non-discretionary pressures on our budget this year that are driving a sizeable increase. While the specifics are being finalized and our administrators are deliberating on difficult trade-offs and offsets, I expect the Superintendent to present a budget with an increase in the 5-7% range.

A few key drivers of the increase are:

- Employee Medical Insurance – the Town and School District are self-insured, and premiums are expected to rise 24% in the upcoming fiscal year. This translates to a ~\$2.4 million increase for the District. (This alone is 2.77% increase over our current budget.)
- Facilities Projects – the District typically budgets \$400-500k per year for facilities projects that are important to maintain our buildings but fall below the \$200k threshold for inclusion on the CIP. For the last ~5 years, the Town has paid for these projects out of its capital reserves, thus (artificially) decreasing the District's budget. The Town has its own financial pressures this year and has informed the District that we cannot cover these project from capital reserves, so this line item will remain in the District's budget.
- Electricity – Just as many of us have experienced with our own homes, the District and Town are experiencing significant spikes in electricity costs (Public Benefit charges, increased demand charges) and we are budgeting for these to continue into the next fiscal year.

It's important to underscore that these pressures are non-discretionary and before the District makes any enhancements to our existing educational programming. The Superintendent and her team are currently discussing offsets to reduce the bottom line, but at this point, there is no way to present a palatable, fiscally-responsible budget without making very difficult decisions that will impact staffing and programming.

- Infrastructure

The NHS auditorium roof was replaced over the winter break. The condition of that section of the roof had deteriorated rapidly such that we didn't believe it would make it through the winter. The BOF and LC

Attachment A - Reports

approved a special appropriation in early December to fund this work, and we appreciate their partnership to get this done urgently.

More broadly, the Superintendent is beginning the planning phase for a Facilities Master Plan process that will take place over the next 12-18 months. Coming out of a district-wide facilities conditions study completed last year, the Board recognizes the need for more comprehensive facilities planning to address our aging buildings in a manner that is consistent with enrollment expectations and town-wide priorities. We expect this to be a collaborative effort with other boards, commissions, and organizations in town, with ample opportunity for public input (an likely even a working group). Stay tuned for more specifics over the coming months.

Legislative Council – Keith Alexander, Chair – Submitted by Jordana Bloom

LC Last meeting was 12/18/24 and next meeting is 1/8/25

-We approved a change to the codebook that was a work product from the Ordinance Committee regarding Senior Tax Relief and essentially we increased the application dates to match the state's language and also provided more leeway for the Tax Collector to deal with any issues requiring extensions.

-We endorsed the POCD with the recommendation that P&Z follows through on the recommendations from WestCog letter as they see fit.

-We are looking to approve the CIP by 1/22/25 meeting when we hopefully have a number from the library regarding the HVAC estimate so we can budget properly for that very big project.

- We are beginning the Budget season and there are a number of big issues looming that we will be facing on all the town boards involved. We will keep everyone posted as we move forward. LC Last meeting was 12/18/24 and next meeting is 1/8/25.

More details are available in the LC Minutes for the 12/18 meeting online.

Board of Finance – Submitted by Chair Jim Gaston

December meeting was cancelled so nothing to report.

Planning & Zoning Commission - David Rosen, Chair - Submitted by Peter Schwarz

1. The Vessel 8-30(g) project. Public hearing continues January 13 on 130 unit multi-family residential building between Berkshire Road and Green View Road. Developer may be presenting a modified proposal at that time to address concerns over traffic safety issues.
2. Stone Bridge. LC to consider designation of Stone Bridge Trail as scenic road. May or may not impact previously approved eight (8) unit development.
3. Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). Final P&Z approval January 23.

Attachment A - Reports

Borough Zoning Commission - Don Mitchell, Member

Deliberations continue on January 15 regarding Castle Hill development.

Fairfield Hills Authority - Ross Carley, Chair

1. Developer Winn Development circulating draft land lease and access agreement for potential development on campus. Town to consider those drafts and negotiate over next two months. Town moving forward to secure buildings so that proposal development can begin.
2. Development of website FAQs and revitalization of community access page continues.

Fundraising Committee – Submitted by Alex Villamil

We will be focusing on a March “Tong Tasting” event with AG William Tong, a May event honoring a local Democrat and our 4th Annual Picnic will be on July 19.

Outreach Committee – Submitted by Alex Villamil

1. Working with Media Director and “round table” (Jeff Schult, Alex Copp, Michelle Embree Ku, Agni Pavlidou, and Alex Villamil) on developing the DTC website, facebook and Instagram. Presentation and content.
2. Developing a “welcome packet” for New Movers.
3. Upcoming January 15 Senior Center lunch.
4. Development of 2025 Calendar of events by February DTC meeting.

Membership Committee – Submitted by Kathy Quinn

Membership - Vote on Recommendation of Newly minted Democrat Agni Pavlidou as a member to the DTC.

Candidates Committee – Submitted by Laura Miller

CC present—Laura, Peter, Heather, Jim, Jordana, Betsy, Alex

- Interviewed and recommended Josh Adam for Cultural Arts Commission. Invited him to DTC meeting. Will vote at next DTC meeting.
- Set Saturdays at 1:00 pm for recurring meetings.
- Discussed endorsing or running Unaffiliated candidates. Alex to put on DTC agenda.
- Discussed developing profile and expectations for any First Selectman candidate.