

**SPECIAL TOWN MEETING  
JUNE 9, 2008; 8.00PM  
SAMUEL STAPLES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
MINUTES**

**Present:**

Thomas A. Herrmann, First Selectman  
Scott S. Centrella, Selectman  
Robert H. Lessler, Selectman  
W. Derek Buckley, Town Clerk

**Other Town Officials:**

A.J. Afridi, Chair of the Land Acquisition Authority  
Robert Maquat, Chairman of P&Z  
John Campbell, Treasurer  
Andrew Kachele, Chairman, Board of Finance  
Ed Nagy, Director of Public Works  
Members of the local press, Easton Courier and Connecticut Post

**Others:**

Board members of the Land Acquisition Authority  
Phillip DiGennaro of Running Brook Farm, LLC, the developer  
Fred Zarelli of the New England Prayer Center and other board members.

~~Public – about 60 people in total excluding public officials~~  
Total attendance about 70 people including officials and press

The First Selectman called the meeting to order at 8.06pm. He called for nominations of a moderator.

Scott Centrella nominated Dennis Laccavole as Moderator and Robert Lessler seconded the nomination. In the absence of other nominations, it was approved by unanimous voice vote.

The Moderator called upon the Town Clerk to read the Notice of the Meeting. The attached Notice was read to the audience.

The moderator then addressed the agenda items.

Thomas A. Herrmann, First Selectman presented an overview of the South Park Avenue proposal. He noted that the town had a court date to settle the outstanding affordable housing appeal, but it had been postponed pending the result of the vote on 6/17/2008. If the vote

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were negative, the court would decide if the developer could go ahead with an affordable housing project on the site. In the state of Connecticut 70% of these applications are approved by the courts.

This was not a proposal to buy the land for open space. Although the town would purchase the land, it would simultaneously sell a two-year lease/purchase option to the New England Prayer Center for \$300,000. This amount would cover the town's cost during the option period. If the lease/purchase option was not exercised, the town could sell 14 one-acre lots to cover the cost of the purchase and retain the remainder of the land as open space. The New England Prayer Center [NEPC] would use the two-year option period to design the center and go through the approval process with Easton P&Z. The terms under which NEPC would acquire the property restrict the way in which it can be developed and used.

A copy of the lease/purchase option agreement is attached.

The moderator next asked the Land Acquisition Authority to comment.

Anjenette Afridi described the work done by the Land Acquisition Authority. She explained that they had retained an outside consultant to examine the financial impact on Easton of the proposed transaction. A copy of the report prepared by Dr Ernest T. Kendell of the Commonwealth Research Group, Inc. is attached.

In essence, they estimated the net revenue impact on the Town of a tax-free church, compared to a 72 unit affordable housing development. He noted that in Connecticut, and Easton, there are, on average, 0.7 children per household in the school system. This is equivalent to 2.3 school age children in homes with children. The estimates used are very conservative. The proposed development of 72 units could easily produce even larger increases in school age children. The net present value cost to the town of educating these children, over 20 years, is summarized below for differing numbers of additional schoolchildren:

50 additional children	\$ 8,000,000
100 additional children	\$16,000,000
150 additional children	\$24,000,000

Using the most conservative estimate, the South Park Avenue purchase would result in net savings to the town of \$3,000,000.

The moderator next asked the NEPC to comment.

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Fred Zarelli, a board member of the NEPC, noted that the center was six to eight years old. It provide for retreats, seminars and conferences in a peaceful relaxing environment. It had only existed formally for about two years. They have relationships with several local and regional churches.

He also presented the attached material that includes answers to frequently asked questions, a list of board members, and endorsements and testimonials. Also included is a concept of what the center might look like. More information is available on the NEPC website [[www.newenglandprayercenter.com](http://www.newenglandprayercenter.com)].

The moderator then turned the meeting over to public discussion.

Dori Wollen asked if the study included the cost of police, fire etc. It was not because it had been determined that the impact would be minimal.

John Broadbin wanted to know if the town was tying itself to one developer. Tom Herrmann responded that the purchase option gave them an exclusive legal right to purchase from the town. They have two years to exercise the option. If they do not, then the town can do what it wants with the property.

Clindy Blum wanted to know if the proposed cluster homes would be taxed at a higher rate than single family homes. Thomas Herrmann responded that all homes are taxed at 70% of the appraised value and he knew of no exception for cluster homes.

She also wanted to know if the sale of 14 units, if the NEPC does not exercise the option, was included in the report. She was told it was not. She was also told that the agreement provided that, if NEPC sells any lots, then Easton would receive any monies in excess of \$439,000.

Grant Monsarrat asked, and was told, that the transaction would not affect Easton's bonding status.

In response to a question Rob Maquat responded to him, and others, that in Easton watershed is zoned three acres and the remainder is zoned one acre. South Park Avenue is zoned three acres because it used to be part of the watershed. Because of the construction of dams and reservoirs, it is no longer so. It can now be rezoned one acre to be consistent with the surrounding properties.

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Fred Zarelli responded, to Grant, that NEPC had experience in raising money and anticipated no difficulty funding this transaction. He noted that there is not a detailed business plan for the project in the traditional sense. NEPC is a charitable foundation.

Eric Eitel, a NEPC board member, said he had been fund raising for 20 years. NEPC had accumulated many interested prospective donors over the last six to eight years. These are charitable donors and, unlike business investors, do not expect to get their money back.

Ira Bloom was retained by the town to represent them in the court case. He noted that a positive vote on this proposal would cause the developer to withdraw the affordable housing proposal and the sequencing batch reactor septic application would be withdrawn.

He noted that the affordable housing statutes put the burden on the town to show why the application should be refused. The court recognizes very few reasons for denying such applications, and they must outweigh the need for affordable housing. Statewide towns have lost more than 70% of these cases in court. Shipman and Goodman, who represent the developer, have won more than 80% of the cases they have pursued. This is an excellent opportunity to solve the problem and avoid a court decision. The trial is imminent if the proposal is rejected.

Polly Edwards asked how the NEPC sewage would be handled. Fred Zarelli said there would only be a handful of people most of the time and so it would not be a problem.

John Jones, NEPC architect said the center had not been designed but it would probably include an auditorium about as big as Samuel Staples Media Center. It would use about one acre for 120 to 150 parking spaces, and on few occasions have meetings of up to 400 people.

Mike Grove asked if the affordable housing problem would return on other sites in town. Bob Maquat said this is the last significant parcel, off watershed, in town. Watershed development has much more restrictive development statutes.

Gowan Dacey asked a number of questions including the propriety of using town money to finance NEPC. Thomas Herrmann responded that was not correct, the town keeps the \$300,000 even if NEPC does not

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exercise the purchase option. Attorney Ira Bloom confirmed that there was no legal conflict.

Wiley Mullins spoke at length in support of NEPC. He has attended their programs and benefited from them. The services they provide to people in need make Easton a special town and community. He has heard only positive things about them.

Bill Kupinse, former First Selectman, spoke strongly in favor of the proposal and urged that the town approve. He noted that it was now known that, of the eight sequencing batch reactors septic systems installed, all had operating problems.

Chris Michos of Protect Easton spoke in favor to the proposal and urged a yes vote.

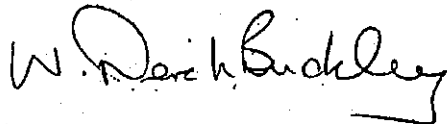
Thomas Herrmann, in response to several people, reiterated that the town was not lending NEPC any money. The town was receiving \$300,000 for a purchase option. The town will retain the \$300,000, even if the purchase option is not exercised.

In response to a direct question from the Town Clerk, Fred Zarelli confirmed that NEPC had the \$300,000 in hand to proceed immediately, if the transaction is approved by the voters.

Ira Bloom said that any development from NEPC to develop the property is subject to P&Z approval and deed restrictions. Bob Maquat noted that P&Z meetings are open to the public.

In response to a request from the moderator, a proposal to adjourn to a machine vote was proposed, seconded and passed by unanimous voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 10.35pm



W. Derek Buckley  
Town Clerk

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