



## Philosophical ideas change Town Council meetings

Daniel Jackson | Posted: Friday, June 15, 2012 11:50 am

In years past, the Town Council consistently passed a resolution to waive the light fee to allow the women's softball league to use Hubbard Field after dark. At its June 5 meeting, the Town Council discussed this request, questioned Park and Recreation Director Stephen Kelly on the topic and eventually voted against paying \$222 to keep the softball lights burning.

Mayor Adam Salina said the council has moved resolutions dealing with small fund appropriations and fee waivers from the consent agenda to part of normal business in order to have an opportunity to debate those resolutions.



"This is a relatively new council," Salina said, and with new members come different philosophies about government.

At the beginning of its meetings, the council votes on its consent agenda, small resolutions that the town must approve and that usually don't need discussion. For example, the council needs to formally accept donations

given to, say, the library.

Some councilmembers say the town shouldn't be waiving fees or donating money in some instances.

"A government body isn't supposed to be charitable," Councilmember Eric Buhrendorf said. Last November, the Republican councilmember replaced Karen Drost, also a Republican, in the general election.

At the recent council meeting, Buhrendorf abstained from voting on two resolutions regarding waiving fees at Timberlin Golf Course. In the first, the Hospital of Central Connecticut asked the town to donate a round of golf so that they could raffle it off during one of their fundraisers. The second, the town waived the green and cart fees for an expected 16 realtors as part of a meeting in Berlin of the Society of Industrial and Office Realtors, one of the premiere associations for commercial realtors.

Both resolutions passed.

He argues that while these actions are well and good, they are not the council's job. The government's job is to collect tax and provide essential services, he said.

In waiving fees and picking up tabs, Buhrendorf said the town is forcibly collecting money from residents and then giving it away based on emotion.

"We shouldn't be lobbied for fundraising efforts," he said.

According to Buhrendorf, the council has been too ready to waive fees and donate money in the past. He believes in free-markets, he said, which means he wants the government to stay out of situations as much as possible.

Buhrendorf said he donates thousands of dollars to charities personally and through his business. He said he wants to make decisions in the best interest of taxpayers.

But while Buhrendorf disagrees with some of the other members, the meeting "was constructive. We're all colleagues up there."

While Salina disagrees with Buhrendorf's philosophy, he restructured the meetings to allow for debate on more resolutions.

"We will certainly debate the topics," he said.

Salina believes government is a service and should be used to provide assistance to organizations or people so that they can contribute to the community and the overall benefit to the town is greater.

For example, the green and cart fees for 16 realtors attending their meeting in town totaled \$840.

In order to attract businesses to town, especially in the current economy, the town needs to play the part of a salesperson, said Salina. While the town doesn't advertize directly to businesses, they go through brokers and realtors.

Councilmember Rachel Rochette said even if one of the brokers decided to relocate in Berlin or decided to bring a commercial business to Berlin, the fees associated with the golf game would pay for itself.

"To me, that's not a charity, that's an investment," said Salina.

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