

**EAST LYME BOARD OF FINANCE  
PUBLIC HEARING – INFORMATIONAL SESSION  
Wednesday, SEPTEMBER 8th, 2010  
MINUTES**

Members In Attendance: Robert Kleinhans, Chairman  
Steve Larcen, Secretary  
Steve Harney  
Raymond Hart  
Steve Kelley

Also In Attendance: Attorney Edward O'Connell, Town Counsel  
Paul Formica, First Selectman & Ex-Officio  
Anna Johnson, Finance Director

Absent: Lisa Picarazzi

**A. Call Meeting to Order**

Chairman Kleinhans called this meeting to order at 6:33 PM. He noted that while it was originally scheduled as a Public hearing that they have changed it to a Public Informational Session which is essentially the same as the Board of Finance is under no obligation to hold a Public Hearing. This is meant to hear comments from the public. He noted that Ms. Picarazzi was excused this evening as she had a family emergency.

**B. Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge was observed.

**C. Comments from the Public - Bonding Resolution Appropriating \$740,000 for Acquisition of Real Property at 224 Main Street**

Mr. Kleinhans outlined the format of the meeting; asking that those who wish to speak please raise their hand to be recognized and state their name and address for the record. He explained that the Board of Finance charge is to determine the Town's ability to pay and that this is not a debate period. They are here to hear comments from the public.

Patricia Sher, 4 North Pine Street said that she is speaking in support of the purchase of the Mobile station on Main Street. The property has been an eyesore for too long and it is the first impression that a visitor to Niantic gets. Creating an attractive vista at the end of Penn Ave. is not a luxury, but an ingredient for economic development of the downtown. Leaving this prime piece of waterfront property in a commercial zone overlooking Long Island Sound would be shortsighted while purchasing it would give the Town control over what goes there. Tourism is one of the industries East Lyme is poised to grow and this parcel is the keystone to downtown's future appearance. She asked that they please not allow this once in a lifetime opportunity to pass them by. (Letter submitted – attached to end of Minutes)

John Hoye, 15 Monticello Drive said that he wanted to speak to let them know why they should all be in favor of the purchase of the 'infamous' gas station. He recapped back to the 1960's, the Newton Farm, then the Smith Harris House, McCook Park all properties that in looking at them now – no one can say that they are not happy to have them. They need this property to complement the downtown district.

Colleen Gresh, 47 Grouse Circle said that she was also speaking for Candy Shapiro. They are in favor of the purchase of this property as the Yale Charrette has been in support of this for some time. She cited the sewers that people were initially against having and then they became more costly to have and people wanted them. She said that they are in the process of a great revitalization of the downtown district and that the revitalization cannot happen without moving forward. The Boardwalk was something that some people were initially against having and it is the most used area of the Town and brings people to the Town. She asked that they think past today to the future.

Joe Mingo, 397 Boston Post Road said that he is not opposed to buying this particular piece of property and that he was in the gasoline business for many years. He sold his gas business for \$200,000 and if this property were to be sold as a gas station they could probably get \$1M as that is what they go for today. So – what you really have over there is one-third of an acre of waterfront property as the gas station is worthless. The owner should be made to strip the property clean and then adjust the price. He said that he does not like what happened to the Town Green as it is all signs and when you go downtown, all you see is signs all over the sidewalks and nobody is enforcing the rules. He asked if that is what is going to happen to this piece of property. He said that it is worth about half of what you would be paying for it now. They should renegotiate the price and get it for what it is worth as it is grossly overpriced.

Marge Caste, 4 Windfall Lane said that she has not lived here very long and that she does not know the history of the property but it seems to be grossly overpriced to end up as a parking lot. The Town's people cannot afford to back this project.

Ron Rando, 194 Boston Post Road said that the Town of East Lyme does not need this property to take it off of the tax rolls and they cannot afford to bond it. In speaking about Main Street – they spent all that money for those lights and left the conduit above ground – they should have buried it. The property has been a gas station for a long time and if the owner wants to sell it have him take the tanks out, clean it up and renegotiate a price.

Allan Taylor, 10 Lakeview Circle said that he has lived here all of his life and he remembers the first time when they had the change to buy this property from Mr. Hillyer for less than \$100,000 and they did not do it. The cost here – if bonded at 5% for 20 years would be \$57,000 - \$59,000 per year – and they would not be paying 5%. That is about \$3 per taxpayer. This property is probably one piece that people most identify with as being Niantic. In speaking about price – anyone buying a gas station today knows that it is about \$1M so to get this chance is a great opportunity. He said that he also understands that there was an environmental study done five years ago and that it was okay and that a sum is set aside for the Phase I and Phase II studies.

(Note: 6:55 PM – Steve Kelley Joined the table)

Ken LeCara, 29 Black Point Road said that he thinks that they are going into this blind. The country is in a recession. He asked what the cost will be for a hole in the ground. He said that he walks from his home to the hole in the wall beach all the time and that he thinks that they should provide transportation for people around Town.

Karen Rak, 27 Black Point Road said that she has spoken before and that she is not in favor of this as she does not see a clear plan and she thinks that they are asking too much for the property. She said that she is not in favor of taking more property off the tax rolls and that the credit card called bonding has to stop as we do not have a revenue problem – we have a spending problem.

Bob Bulmer, 99 Lovers Lane said that this property is not a necessity like a fire engine. He has heard it said that this would be nice to have – but no one has been able to say what will be done with this particular property. He asked if a real estate appraisal has been done recently on this property as his guess is that it is over-priced. He suggested that they get an assessment. He said that he also does not know if the property is contaminated as while a study was done five years ago – five years is a long time. The only thing that he has heard is that the interest rates will never be lower – well maybe that is so – but what is this land going to be used for. Also, in terms of commercial area – they only have 3% of land that is commercial in this Town and so perhaps they should consider keeping it commercial. He said that he went to the Amtrak informational session months ago and that people asked about an underpass there and Amtrak said no. He said that he thinks that they need to clear up more items before going ahead with this.

Robert Gadbois, 358 Boston Post Road said that he was speaking for Mike Schulz this evening as he could not be there. Mr. Schulz said No – they should not buy this property and he agrees with him. He said that as a taxpayer he does not want his taxes to keep going up and there is only 3% commercial area in this Town and they need to keep it that way.

Ed Jutila, 23 Brainerd Rd., State Representative for East Lyme and Salem thanked them for having this session. He said that he conceptually supports the purchase of this property and cited the Yale Study noting

it as a starting point for the Town. He said that sometimes something becomes available and you find that you have to strike while the iron is hot. They had an opportunity long ago and they did not do it and while it may come up again, why wait. The purchase price in today's standards probably equates to what it was so many years ago. Regarding the contamination and/or remediation costs – if necessary – he said that the fact that five years ago they got a clean bill of health does not make him comfortable as a lot can happen in five years. He thinks that there are a lot of great opportunities for this parcel and for something this important he said that he thinks that it deserves to go to a Town Meeting.

Mary Lycan, 14 North Washington Ave. said that in 1956 this property was a railway station. Today the transportation hub of Niantic is the SEAT bus so the possibility of this as a transportation hub is important for people to drive less and walk more. She thinks that they should go to Town Meeting for people to decide.

Ed Shapiro, 8 Irving Place said that the reason for purchasing this parcel is to control it as it is the Gateway piece – the jewel in the crown that will aid the business community and provide another possible access to the Boardwalk. It could also be an extension of the Town Green. The Charrette Study in 1997 supported this and a 2005 study also cited this parcel as desirable. He said that for every \$150 that is spent locally, \$68 stays local and if we do not buy this then we do not have the choice in what it can be.

Gary Orefice, 49 Columbus Ave. said that as was noted from the outset by the Chairman – the purview of this Board is if the Town can afford this and he recalled that a bond proposal was presented at a previous meeting on how we could afford this. He said that he know from real estate that this is the best time to buy. This is a piece of land that will be around for generations to come if you were to look back on this from time in the future. People will say what a wise decision it was to buy this. He said that they should send this to a Town Meeting for the people to decide. If they lose control of it, they could be putting the Town at risk – he said that he would urge the Board to move this on to a Town Meeting. He hopes that they do not let this opportunity go by.

John Drabik, 18 Drabik Road asked what is affordable. The property is over priced, no one wants it and the guy can't sell it. Pollution – it probably is not polluted – but could have PCB's. Last fall they bought the Colton Road property and took \$40,000 off the tax rolls – how many hits are you going to make the taxpayers take? The Boardwalk, sidewalks, etc. - there is a lot of talk about money spent but there are no hard numbers on what it all generates. The property is worth \$300,000 - \$350,000 tops.

Robert DeSanto, 16B Center St., Waterford, CT thanked them for having this meeting. He said that he is the President of the East Lyme Public Trust Foundation and that 75% of the membership is from East Lyme and 25% are from Waterford. Of the 3000 donors over the years to their organization, most are from East Lyme. He expressed the interest of the ELPT in moving this forward and concurs that it deserves input from the voting public of East Lyme. He said that regarding the possibility of an underpass that up until 1938 there was an underpass and that it was wiped out with the hurricane of '38. However; from an engineering perspective (he has been an engineer most of his life) it is perfectly feasible to construct an underpass. If you question it – you should go to Point O' Woods as they have one that carries people and it was built by Amtrak years ago. It is not that Amtrak is against it – they just do not want to pay for it! East Lyme is a vibrant community that can make this happen – the difficulty is not the money – it is the vision – looking beyond the box to the concept of it as a Gateway. It is very important that they seize the opportunity at this time.

John Whritner, 4 Blueberry Lane said that he has heard a lot of these arguments and has been wrestling with them as it is a lot of money and we are in difficult times. But – he comes back to his own experiences sitting where they are now and it comes down to whenever communities have made purchases they have looked back 5 to 10 years later at what a good idea it was to make that purchase – and – when they have not made the purchase they have looked back 5 to 10 years later with regret for not making the purchase.

Bob Jones, 5 Applewood Common said that he was speaking as he wants to make sure that they approve this and send it on to the people at Town Meeting so that what happened to the Public Safety Building does not happen here. This is not the decision of the six people on the Board of Finance – it is for the people of the Town to make the decision and have input on. He said that if he sounds angry that it is over what happened before with the Public Safety building as that never should have happened that way. He said that he is in favor of this purchase and that he wants to see them pass this to Town Meeting for the people to decide.

Joe Kiah, 59 Attawan Ave. said that he and his wife own Village Wines and that they have a vested interest in this Town. The like how the Town has been moving forward and thinks that this property is important to furthering strong economic growth in Town and he strongly supports the purchase of it. Further, the \$59,000/year he thinks that they can afford \$3/taxpayer/year.

Keith Neilson, 5 Village Drive said that he has a small business operation in Mystic and has come to realize that if you want a vital downtown that you have to make people want to come and you have to make it a vital hub. He thinks that the sense of community is strong here and that East Lyme is growing and he likes how it is growing. They need to do everything possible to make East Lyme be as good as it can be.

Ellie Hazen, 24 West Society Rd. said that she originally came from Flushing NY and that Town has changed and is not something that you would want to go back to. She said that she does not want us to regret not doing something 10 years from now that we could have done. She is in support of the purchase of this property.

Mr. Kleinhans asked if anyone else wished to speak from the public. He noted that if people wished to speak a second time that he would like it to be new comments and not something that they have said before.

Allan Taylor, 10 Lakeview Circle said that they could go to the EPA and check their data on this property.

John Drabik, 18 Drabik Road said that the Town owns a lot of land and he would like this to be forwarded with the condition of a referendum vote. It seems that they want this land for the 'view' and they have a lot of land with views. He also would like the Town to sell off some of the property that they own. Some is landlocked, and there is some on Ancient Highway – sell off some to offset the purchase of this property.

Pauline Lord, 83 Upper Pattagansett Road said that she owns Whitegate Farm. She congratulated Paul Formica and the Town for even considering purchasing this piece of land. She said that she thinks it will be superb and she wholeheartedly supports it.

Robert Gadbois, 358 Boston Post Road said that he keeps hearing that they only have to pay for 20 years – what about the people losing their homes – why not put the \$4 in to keep those people in their homes here in East Lyme.

Dave Labrie, 60 Grand Street said that he owns the Inn at Harbor Hill Bed & Breakfast and also does the Discover East Lyme website where he spends a lot of time supporting business in East Lyme. He said that he is in full support of purchasing this property.

Ted Denesha, 170 Flanders Road said that he would like to add something that was touched on. It is the job of the Board of Finance to look at the dollars and cents and what they can afford – but beauty has to also be considered. He said that he came here in 1974 and every time he drove down Pennsylvania Ave. he thought what a beautiful sight it would be if that damn gas station was not there. They have the opportunity to make that happen here.

June Hoyer, 15 Monticello Drive said that she has been keeping track of the people who have been speaking and that 29 people have spoken in favor of the purchase and 8 people have spoken against it.

Leo Roche, 247 Main Street said that he is the owner of the Black Sheep and that he would like to make it #30 in favor of the purchase of the property.

Bob Jones, 5 Applewood Common said that at the last meeting of the Board that Mr. Formica brought up a way to afford the property so it looks like they can afford to purchase it.

Luane Lange, 160 Pennsylvania Ave. said that she went on-line looking to see if the new zoning allows a building of 30' tall in this area and she thinks that it does. She said that she is against someone building something 30' tall on this property and supports the purchase.

Mr. Kleinhans called for anyone else wishing to speak –  
Hearing no one –

Mr. Kleinhans closed this Information Session at 7:45 PM and called for a five minute recess prior to the start of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Finance.  
He noted to the public that they were welcome to stay as they would be taking this item up during their regular meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Zmitruk,  
Recording Secretary