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Council debates Sachem Fund late into the night

By [Claire Bessette](#) Published on 7/22/2008

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- Sachem Fund:**
- \$612,950 in funding recommended as follows in the Sachem Fund:*
 - Artworks Expressive Art: \$10,000.*
 - Chelsea Gardens Foundation: \$40,000.*
 - Children First Norwich: \$5,000.*
 - Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc.: \$10,000.*
 - Downtown Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Committee: \$10,000.*
 - City of Norwich, repair roof at 26 Shipping St.: \$40,000.*
 - Norwich Fire Department smoke detector program: \$3,950.*
 - Norwich Public Works to restore Buckingham Memorial: \$30,000.*
 - Norwich Recreation Department rowing program: \$40,000.*
 - New London County Historical Society: \$12,000.*
 - Norwich Arts Council window replacement: \$30,000.*
 - Norwich Arts Council symphonic band: \$5,000.*
 - Norwich Cultural Arts & History, two programs: \$10,000.*

Norwich -- A prolonged debate at Monday's City Council meeting resulted in approval of about \$600,000 in Sachem Fund grants but nearly dismantled the process for vetting applications.

The fund was created last year by the city and the Mohegan Tribe - each agreeing to contribute \$200,000 per year for five years - to fund economic development and arts and cultural programs in Norwich. It now has \$800,000 available, and the grant recommendations totaled \$612,950.

Alderman Robert Zarnetske argued that the listing be divided into 26 separate resolutions, thus requiring a vote on each of the 26 items separately. Aldermen reluctantly agreed, launching a 90-minute debate and voting process.

In anticipation of the long night to come, Alderman William Nash, chairman of the Sachem Fund review committee, tried instead to suggest that the entire package be tabled and that all applicants be asked to come and make their funding arguments directly to the council, foregoing the review made by the committee. His motion failed.

Zarnetske then criticized the grant proposal list, arguing that more serious issues needed to be addressed than the numerous arts, historic preservation and cultural programs approved by the governing committee June 24.

Zarnetske attempted to reduce every line item by 15 percent and use the total saved - about \$90,000 - to fund emergency heating aid next winter.

Alderman Jonathan Jacaruso objected to Zarnetske's stance, calling it last-minute "grandstanding" and saying Zarnetske should have raised such issues at previous meetings when the guidelines for the grant process were being formed. Zarnetske's resolution died without a second.

He rejected Jacaruso's accusation, saying it was appropriate to bring up the issue on the council floor during a public meeting.

Nash pointed out that the Sachem Fund still would have money left over in the account available for future grants. The Sachem Fund committee plans the next round of grants for January, but those grants wouldn't be allocated until next July.

The council continued by reviewing each item separately, discussing the merits of each proposal and calling for individual votes. Zarnetske

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Fourth of July Committee for fireworks: \$22,000.

Huntington Place: \$15,000.

Norwich Historical Society partnering program: \$5,000.

Norwich Historical Society timeline project: \$5,000.

Norwich Historical Society Founding Fathers Library: \$50,000.

Norwich Winter Festival: \$30,000.

Otis Library: \$50,000.

Rose City Renaissance: \$20,000.

Society of the Founders: \$75,000.

Southeastern Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence: \$5,000.

Spirit of Broadway: \$50,000.

United Community and Family Services: \$40,000.

requests, including funding for various arts and historical promotion projects and proposed renovations at a historic house that neighbors the Leffingwell House Museum.

c.bessette@theday.com

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READER'S COMMENTS

Posted - 7/22/2008 9:57:05 PM

Marie, I attended the one Sachem Committee meeting that I knew about. I had no opportunity to ask questions because it was a work session for the Committee and I am not a member of the committee. I sat and listened. The proper place for council members to discuss the Sachem account was the Council meeting where the Sachem account was on the agenda for discussion -- that is last night's meeting. I disagree with those who think discussion of public matters should happen before the public council meetings. While it's more comfortable to go through a meeting knowing that there's a preformed consensus, that's not how open government is supposed to work. Open government, as I understand it and try to practice it, is about discussing the issues, being open ideas and yes changing your mind (even in full public view) when somebody makes a persuasive point. During the discussion last night it became apparent that we were funding a project for which no specific request was made (paying down library debt), an organization that does not exist (an LLC we're going to require neighborhood residents to establish, even though we don't have the authority to require it) and a municipal project that the council has not yet approved (a \$40,000/year lease for a public boat house). When we don't engage in full discussion, we make mistakes -- that's true for councils, municipal departments, and all organizations. I understand that many in Norwich value consensus, or apparent consensus, more than effectiveness or productivity. I do not share that view. I value getting to the right answer. I have never believed that I have the all the right answers, but I have always believed that full public debate was the surest way to get to the right answers. All of that having been said, I have read your comments for the last couple of months and see the virtue of many of your points. My goal is not create confusion, but to help move us (the city and the council) toward a more complete understanding of the issues we face. We cannot be lazy, just because it feels good. That's why I engage in debate. But you're right -- my strategy hasn't worked as well as I would have liked. I remain open minded and will try to adjust my approach, though not the goal of achieving better policy through more open government. Thank you for caring enough to share your thoughts. I really have found them enlightening and helpful.

*Bob Zarnetske
Norwich, Connecticut
- 7/23/2008 8:57:44 AM*

Posted - 7/22/2008 3:02:36 PM

Mr.Zanetske;You were present at all the hearings of the Sachem fund so you had your opportunities many time over to ask questions. You change your mind as you speak. You are interested in yourself image not the citizens of the city of Norwich. You had difficulties when you were city manager because of the same behaviors you are exhibiting at the city council meetings. you want to be the only councilman with any authority or opinion. you are not a team player. You like to cause confusion with any issue in discussion. You agree with one thing and then change your mind when it comes up for a vote. Mr. Z you claim to have the public interests at hand but it is really your own interest for re-election to the council or to be elected city mayor. It is a shame to put a negative connotation on the Sachem Fund awards after all the work the committee did to make these awards. Re-examine the tapes and records of all the previous city council meetings, and decide for yourself if what is being written in these comments are true. Listen more and talke less. You will learn much by listening.

*marie
norwich, ct
- 7/22/2008 7:39:06 PM*

Posted - 7/22/2008 10:20:46 AM

When my daughter was about 4 years old, she fell and tore open her lower lip. Her mother and I rushed her to the hospital with her lip bleeding badly. When we got to the emergency room the doctor had me hold my daughter down on the examining table while he stitched her up. She was scared and frantic and holding her there, not being able to stop the pain and suffering, knowing that I was doing it for her own good, but that it must have felt like torture, was one of the worst experiences in my life. Last night's meeting brought that memory back to me in a big way. Not everything worth doing is easy. A full statement on the Sachem Resolution is available at www.zarnetske.com/ctblog/

*Bob Zarnetske
Norwich, Connecticut
- 7/22/2008 12:13:48 PM*

Posted - 7/22/2008 8:47:31 AM

that's right piss it all away. how about concentrating the funds so it can have a noticeable impact?

John

opposed funding several items - each time on the losing end of a 5-1 vote. Alderman Christopher Coutu was absent from the meeting.

The council added money to one recommended grant total, relying on actual bids received to give the Norwich Arts Council \$51,800 to replace windows in the council's headquarters building at 60 Broadway, rather than the \$30,000 originally recommended by the committee. Nash pointed out that the committee asked NAC to submit actual bids to support their original request for \$60,000 for the windows and agreed to half the total at the outset.

In the end, that was the only change made to the final funding list.

At the start of the marathon four-hour meeting, several speakers addressed the council during public comment period, supporting the committee's recommendations for specific funding

Norwich

- 7/22/2008 9:45:06 AM

Posted - 7/22/2008 8:18:51 AM

As I understand it, there are specific benchmarks that requests must address when submitted to the Sachem Fund. I'm torn between an admiration of the flexibility of the fund's purpose that allows both the Spirit of Broadway and the CT Pardon Team to receive money (both deserve support), and dismay when wondering why the Sachem Fund seems to be an ancillary of the Community Development Block Grant Program, without the controls of that program. I would hope those on the Sachem Fund Committee would continue to better articulate expectations and goals for their financial support to those seeking it and to explain its assistance and applications to those who live in Norwich. It would be sad to see negative or unkind perceptions of the program's purpose and mission color the reality of the assistance and enhancement such a program can provide.

Bill Kenny

Norwich, CT

- 7/22/2008 9:41:04 AM

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