

Residents bid adieu to Carl Amento

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Author: LISSETTE RODRIGUEZ | Section: News

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After three terms in office, Mayor Carl Amento's tenure ended on Sunday. As one of his final acts of office, he hosted a public forum at the Miller Library complex to address ongoing projects and issues.

Residents bid farewell and thanked Amento for his leadership during some tough financial times for the town.

"He did a lot for us," said Bernice Scaramuzza, a Woman's Club and Veteran's Commission member. "He was wonderful to us all."

Using a power point presentation, Amento showed possible locations for new police and fire stations and a town center and ongoing renovations to Memorial Town Hall.

He urged residents to continue to offer comments and suggestions for projects at hand.

"We need some guidance," he said. "What should we do with these projects? It takes the citizens being involved to make things happen."

Amento mentioned some of the battles he fought to get funding for projects. One example was the difficulty he encountered in trying to get funding for the town's involvement in the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding (CCJEF).

Amento said the cap on the Education Cost Sharing grant the town was supposed to receive put a burden on local taxpayers for school funding. This had a negative affect on the mill rate and caused it to rise.

"We've got to get more money from the state for education funding," he said.

Amento, who serves as CCJEF president, said the coalition last week filed a lawsuit against the state to acquire the approximately \$45 million dollars the town has lost over an eight-year period.

In his discussion of finances, Amento addressed criticism of directed at him as being a "big spender" by looking at projects already in place such as the Meadowbrook pavilion.

This past summer, the pavilion was the center of the summer concert series where thousands of residents showed up to enjoy the festivities and music, he pointed out.

Amento spoke briefly about the controversy over the new middle school and the veterans' memorial.

Many residents and veterans were up in arms over the construction of the middle school being directly behind the monument. Because of the controversy, the school had to be built several feet behind the monument, Amento said.

Now that he is no longer running for a political office, he said he feels free to say what he wants.

"I don't know why the monument is not with the school," he said. "It should go together. I hope all the controversy will die down."

"You can only do a little at a time. To get us back to where we need to be, we need to confront ongoing projects," he said.

Amento brought up the need for a town animal shelter along with the new police and fire departments.

"There are not that many sites, and the ones that we have, many of them are not accessible," he said. "There are some parts in the northern part of town for possible projects, but everything has to be looked at carefully."

One resident expressed her gratitude with the steps Amento has taken toward getting the shelter going.

"You've gotten the ball rolling for the animal shelter," said Jean Murray. "With 2,000 registered dogs, it seems deplorable that we cannot afford a shelter for animals."

Veterans Commission President Abner Oates said farewell to the mayor and his staff.

"I would like to thank you and Gerry and Darlene for all your work with the Veterans Day celebration," Oates said. "You have done so much for the veterans, and I thank you."