



What's Happening Rocky Hill & Cromwell?

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Candidates For Mayor Disagree Over Tax Abatements, Planning

By **Liam McLoughlin**
Staff Writer

ROCKY HILL — With election season now in full swing, the town's mayoral candidates put each other's ideas to the test in a unique debate last week.

Mayoral candidate Allan Smith and current Mayor Lisa Marotta battled it out last Wednesday in a respectful, yet tense, discussion produced by Rocky Hill Community TV and aired on their YouTube channel on Sept. 17. It was moderated by League of Women Voters Director Carole Mulready.

The just over an hour-long talk had its moments of contention, which mainly saw Smith on the offensive in which he attempted to show the flaws in Marotta's last six years in office, while she attempted to defend her work.

One of the biggest points of controversy between the pair was the Kelson Row situation, namely the tax abatement given to the developer. Full taxation of the property is not to begin until 2032, Smith explained, and prevents the town from receiving close to \$1.1 million dollars per year.

"The tax incentive that we offered to Kelson Row is unique," Marotta said. "That project would have never happened without a tax incentive and the reason being that was the only developer who was willing to take a risk, a huge economic risk, and bring in retail and commercial space along a corridor that doesn't get a lot of traffic."

According to Marotta, the cleanup and remediation of the site has been a step in helping address rising taxes, which Smith showed concern for.

"My concern with this though is when I'm knocking on doors, and I'm talking to residents...what I hear a lot is that they got huge tax increases," he said. "Granted, their values went up

a lot during that time, but they don't get to see the benefit of that until they sell their house. What other towns have found as a solution is to not hit everybody with that all at once, so some of our surrounding communities have stairstepped into that change in value."

Marotta agreed with Smith, saying that the required 2023 revaluation "shifted the burden onto residential taxpayers and off of the commercial taxpayers." But, Kelson Row, she used as an example, "is going to be one of Rocky Hill's top three tax payers" when the tax incentive runs out.

It's part of the current administration's "long-term vision."

"It's not meant to do that today, but right now that property is bringing in more revenue than it did when it was blighted," she said.

But, this highlighted aspects Smith was very critical of — speed and proactivity. He highlighted infrastructure grants and affordable housing projects left sitting without "shovels in the ground," pointing out sidewalk projects meant to improve pedestrian safety.

"We got these grants (to improve pedestrian safety) years ago. We got the one on Century Hill three years ago, we got the one on Glastonbury Ave., I believe, three years ago, maybe two," Smith said. "As far as I know, there's only one new sidewalk that I've found anywhere in town over the last couple years, and it happens to be on the road that leads to the mayor's house."

Marotta responded to this notion of a sluggish pace, saying, "That's just how government works," citing elongated approval timelines and extensive documentation procedures.

Additionally, Smith believes that the town needs to be more proactive with affordable housing developments, citing that the percentage of

Rocky Hill housing was only at 4.68%, compared to neighboring municipalities that are getting close to 10%.

And, as Marotta stressed throughout the debate, the decisions her administration have made up until this point are part of their long-term plan — an idea she ran on from when she was first elected in 2019.

"We have 700 rental units coming online in various parts of the community," she said. "When we talk about doing this wisely and meeting needs, we have to look at balance, right? And, so, 700 units coming on around the same period of time, that's a lot of traffic...So while we want to meet a certain goal, we have to do it over time and we have to be practical about its impact on our infrastructure. That's why long-term planning is so critical and that's really what my administration has brought in."

Smith also stated he would reconfigure the Board of Education to decrease administrative funding and strive to bring in more economic opportunities through new businesses.

As the night crept along, it seemed more and more likely the pair of candidates could continue the tet-a-tet for hours longer.

"It is now time for your closing statements, and unlike the rest of the evening, these are

timed," Mulready chimed in with laughter.

During the closing statements, Smith returned to many of his points made throughout the debate, explaining that too often they were talking about endeavors to be done in the future, rather than what the administration had accomplished in years gone by.

"Families are feeling the squeeze, taxes keep going up, and the Marotta Administration's plan is to just keep doing what we've been doing," Smith said. "I plan to make the government more responsive, transparent, and people centered because you all deserve a voice in how your town is run...This election is about whether we accept more of the same or choose a new direction that protects affordability."

Marotta had this to say in her two-minute long closing statement: "One of the things I have learned over the years...is it's really important to listen to what somebody has to say. But, you know what's equally as important? It's important to listen to what they're not saying and Mr. Smith has given us a lot of complaints tonight, and fair game — that's what he should be doing. But, he hasn't told us what he's going to do differently...I would be very honored to have the voters trust again"

Local Police Make Arrest In Major Fraud Scheme

By **Liam McLoughlin**
Staff Writer

ROCKY HILL — The Rocky Hill Police Department was hard at work at the beginning of the month after arresting a main player in a fraud scheme.

On Sept. 9, the Detective Division of the department "arrested a courier involved in an elaborate fraud scheme." This courier was identified as Dmytro Olkhovski, 30, a Ukrainian residing in Brooklyn, NY.

According to reports, a 77-year-old Rocky Hill resident was being targeted and lured into giving away significant amounts of money, supposedly totalling \$257,000, by an unnamed suspect.

"The suspect had been impersonating a federal agent and the courier was sent to collect cash from a victim under false pretenses," police said. It's believed the victim believed he was working with federal agents to safeguard his assets from hackers.

Olkhovski was responsible for collecting the cash at various drops, and was apprehended in the CVS parking lot on Main Street in an opera-

tion set up by the police. He was subsequently charged with criminal attempt of first-degree larceny and was held on a \$100,000 bond.

As stated in police reports, the victim withdrew money from his savings accounts, 401K, and certificate of deposits. He also refinanced his home.

"The Rocky Hill Police Department would like to remind the public that these scams are becoming increasingly more common and often arrive as text messages, phone calls, or emails. Legitimate government agencies will never demand payment in cash, gift cards, or wire transfers," police warned.

Olkhovski is due back in New Britain Superior Court on Sept. 26, and currently remains in custody. The investigation is ongoing according to police.

People with any information or who have experienced similar circumstances are encouraged to reach out to Rocky Hill Police at (860) 258-7640.

School Bus Driver Strike Set To Begin Next Week

By **Liam McLoughlin**
Staff Writer

CROMWELL — October 1st will mark the first day of the intended strike of the Teamsters Union Local 671 if no agreement with DATTCO is reached.

On Monday, Aug. 25, union members unanimously voted to "authorize a strike of the over 100 Teamsters" serving Middletown and Cromwell Public Schools.

Talks have been ongoing since then, yet no agreement has yet been made at the time of writing.

"Our union has been meeting with both DATTCO, the company, and elected leaders of the City of Middletown to move contract negotiations along," the Teamsters 671 Communications Organizer Bryan Chong said recently. "We are making progress towards an agreement that is acceptable to our members."

Chong also explained that the organization couldn't discuss any specific contract disagreements at the time of speaking.

According to a press release published Aug. 25, the agreement of a strike came after the East Hartford School Bus Teamsters rejected DATTCO's contract offer in a 96% vote. The reason for this rejection was due to DATTCO's "unreasonable, unusual, and unjust offer that creates tiered healthcare — limiting healthcare to workers based on seniority."

Under this configuration, only five workers would have access to healthcare until Jan. 1, 2028, the press release said.

In the same release, Teamsters 671 states that all their drivers, working for companies such as All-Star, M&J, and First Student, are covered with healthcare. The union represents over 4,000 UPS workers, construction workers, school bus drivers, municipal service workers, and others in Connecticut.

"Our union remains prepared to take any and all actions — up to and including a strike — needed to secure a contract that recognizes the dignity of our members, and the invaluable labor that our members perform for students and parents," Chong added.

Contract extensions were secured until Sept. 30 for Cromwell, Middletown, East Hartford, and Bloomfield — each contract remains in renegotiation. Teamsters 671 also represents employees of DATTCO in Windsor, Coventry, and Hebron.

The picket line will extend to any DATTCO bus yard if the strike commences on Oct. 1.

"We need to stick together as brothers and sisters — of different unions and different backgrounds — to say to management: treat us with respect because without us, there would be no you," Cromwell Mayor James Demetriades said at a June 6 practice picket.

Vaccine Clinics Scheduled In Multiple Area Locations

By **Margaret Radman**
Freelance Writer

AREA — With flu season right around the corner, it's time to get vaccinated for seasonal illnesses — not only the flu, but other common seasonal communicable illnesses like Covid 19, RSV, pneumonia, and shingles, depending on age and individual health needs.

To get maximum protection through the peak of the flu season between December and February, the CDC recommends getting vaccinated in September or October for a full six months of immunity.

The Central Connecticut Health District (CCHD) offers flu vaccinations as follows for Wethersfield, Newington, Berlin and Rocky Hill, with other vaccines available at select locations. Check the CCHD website for details at <https://www.ccthd.org/flu>.

Wethersfield Pitkin Center:

-Wednesday, Oct. 1, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

-Thursday, Oct. 2, drive-thru, 2-6 p.m.

Newington High School Family Clinic:

-Saturday, Oct. 4, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Newington Senior & Disabled Center:

-Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2-6 p.m.

-Thursday, Oct. 9, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Berlin Senior Center:

-Wednesday, Oct. 15, 2-6 p.m.

-Thursday, Oct. 16, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Rocky Hill Senior & Community Center:

-Tuesday, Oct. 21, 2-6 p.m.

-Wednesday, Oct. 22, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Schedule an appointment at www.ccthd.org/flu; or call 860-785-8380, option 216.

Special accommodations or quiet space for sensory sensitive individuals are available at all clinics. Contact CCHD at 860-335-7158 for further details.

For Cromwell, seasonal vaccination clinics are as follows:

Saturday, Oct. 4, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Coles Road Firehouse, 105 Coles Rd.

Wednesday, Oct. 15, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Town Hall Gymnasium

Wednesday, Nov. 5, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Town Hall Gymnasium

Vaccines are offered on a first come, first served basis.

For additional information, contact the Cromwell Health Department at 860-632-3426.

Consultation with a personal health care provider is advised to assess for individual vaccination needs.

Library Clothing Swap Returning This Month

By **Cathy Maldonado**
Freelance Writer

CROMWELL—The Belden Public Library is bringing back their community clothing swap on Saturday, Sept. 27, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., giving residents an opportunity to refresh their fall and winter wardrobes at no cost. The event is open to adults and teens, and participants can both donate and take home gently used items.

Those who wish to contribute clothing may drop off donations on Thursday, Sept. 25, and Friday, Sept. 26. The library will accept up to two bags or boxes of fall and winter apparel per participant.

Items should be clean and in good condition before being brought in.

On the day of the event, participants are welcome to browse through the collected clothing to find new-to-them pieces.

The program is designed to encourage reuse and reduce waste while providing an affordable option for those looking to update their seasonal wardrobe.

Organizers emphasized that donations are not required to participate. Anyone is welcome to stop by the library on Sept. 27 to pick out clothing, regardless of whether they contributed items ahead of time.

The swap will take place inside the library during the scheduled hours, with tables set up for easy browsing.

Community members are encouraged to arrive early for the best selection.

For more information you can contact the library at (860) 632-3460