

## Meeting to focus on labor options for Meriden school projects

**Dan Brechlin | Posted: Wednesday, March 7, 2012 8:00 pm**

MERIDEN — City officials do not expect it to be hard to find contractors for the proposed \$220 million high school renovation projects. With a near standstill in state construction, officials should expect to receive plenty of proposals for the restoration of Maloney and Platt high schools.

On Saturday, the City Council and School Building Committee members will hear from labor union officials and the Associated Builders & Contractors of Connecticut, which advocates against unions. The “informational session,” as it has been labeled, could lead the city to a decision for or against a labor agreement. That agreement could result in only union workers renovating the schools.

“It will be an opportunity for trade unions to present why the city of Meriden should do this and an opportunity for an association of non-union workers to explain why we shouldn’t,” said Lawrence Kendzior, Meriden’s city manager. “We have never done this in the past. It’s not common.”

If the city were to enter into a labor agreement, it would require all contractors on the project to use union labor, except for their “key employees,” Kendzior said. That would require contractors to offer normal benefits and abide by union rules, he added.

Both sides of the argument will be heard for 30 minutes each, according to the Saturday morning agenda. City staff, including Kendzior, will be allowed to weigh in for an additional 30 minutes. The council and committee will then have an opportunity to ask questions, as will the public.

Kendzior has already taken his stance against the union labor agreement.

“They typically result in higher prices because they are anti-competitive,” Kendzior said.

Already attempting to trim down the project, the city may not be able to deal with higher prices. The schools are well over the required size for state reimbursement funds, and city officials are seeking a waiver from the state to obtain funding. The Board of Education has also been asked to review the schools’ educational specifications to see if any possible cuts can be made to decrease the size and save money.

The state waiver and funding prompted Republican State Sen. Len Suzio to call for a summit on the high schools that would include the committee, council members and elected state officials. The summit did not happen, though it was suggested that Suzio should request it be held during Saturday’s meeting. He, however, was not met with much response.

“I would love to be able to have a discussion not just with committee members, but with my fellow legislators,” Suzio said. “I just ask that they keep me involved.”

More than 500 people are expected at Saturday’s session, including mostly construction workers and contractors. Lelah Campo, the president of Associated Builders & Contractors of Connecticut, said she expects it to be an important meeting.

“It’s always dramatic when the two sides come together,” she said,

Saturday’s meeting will be held in the Maloney auditorium beginning at 10 a.m.

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## Meriden officials expect a crowd for and against project labor agreement

Dan Brechlin | Posted: Friday, March 9, 2012 7:29 pm

MERIDEN — A crowd of union and non-union construction workers are expected at a meeting today to discuss the possibility of using a project labor agreement for renovations to Maloney and Platt high schools.

The City Council and School Building Committee will hear both sides of the debate on project labor agreements beginning at 10 a.m. this morning in the Maloney auditorium. PLAs are collective bargaining agreements for specific construction projects that guarantee the use of union labor. Though they have been used in cities like Hartford and Waterbury, one has never been used in Meriden, according to city officials.

“The issue was raised whether or not it made sense to use a PLA for these projects,” said City Council Majority Leader Brian Daniels, who noted he hopes to formulate his own opinion during the session. “As people were having these discussions, it became clear that everybody had different information.”

Those in attendance will hear from local union officials who support PLAs, as well as Lelah Campo, president of the Associated Builders & Contractors of Connecticut, which opposes them. With a renovation budget of about \$220 million and plenty of construction and trade workers looking for work, the high school projects are getting a lot of attention, said Michael Rosario, assistant business manager for the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 777.

“As far as school construction goes, these are large projects, the largest in Connecticut right now,” Rosario said.

Those who favor project labor agreements, like Rosario, argue that a PLA for Maloney and Platt will provide workers with uniform wages and benefits, ensure the projects are finished on time and within budget and bring in more qualified contractors.

“The biggest thing is that it offers the community a chance to go back to work,” he said. “It’s good for the economy...It will be Meriden workers and local workers going to work and spending their paychecks in Meriden and Connecticut.”

Campo, however, argued that PLAs unfairly exclude non-union workers and drive up costs.

“If there is a PLA, it will cut out 80 percent of the workforce,” Campo said, noting that PLAs require only union labor. “If you put a limit on the people who can work on the project, the prices can go up.”

The extensive projects have already been called into question by state legislators for size overages and various committees have suggested cutting excess square footage. Because of the size overages, it remains unclear how much reimbursement the projects could receive.

Cost is a concern, but Rosario disputed the notion that paying prevailing wage under a PLA would increase the overall price tag. The only costs likely to rise are materials and management, which almost always come within one or two percent of any other bidder, Rosario said.

Local construction company owner Robert LaRosa, of LaRosa Building Group, said he does not support PLAs.

“I cannot support anything that doesn’t have a level playing field,” LaRosa said. “If there’s no PLA, you have a pretty level playing field...The only thing the PLA does is knock out competition.”

LaRosa said it was more likely that local contractors would be working on the high schools if they were open to bids from any company. But Rosario said that a PLA would require at least 30 percent of the workforce be from Meriden, at least 15 percent be minority and another 15 percent be part of apprenticeship programs.

“We’re not looking to give anyone a job, we offer careers,” he said.

PLAs are most commonly used in the private sector, with several states banning or considering a ban on them for public projects. In 1992, then President George H.W. Bush signed an order to prohibit PLAs before President Bill Clinton rescinded it. President George W. Bush then prohibited them again, before President Barack Obama rescinded the order in 2009. When \$140 billion was allocated in 2009 for federal, state and local construction projects, PLAs were encouraged.

In late 2011, John Moran, deputy assistant labor secretary, issued a report to the state weighing the pros and cons of PLAs.

“There is considerable debate between the opponents and proponents of PLAs. Opponents say PLAs are anti-competitive and increase costs,” Moran wrote. “Proponents say they ensure decent wages, a quality workforce, and timely completion of projects within budget.”

Also in the report, Moran wrote: “The non-partisan Congressional Research Service issued a report on PLAs on July 1, 2010, indicating the evidence is inconclusive regarding the cost of PLAs on construction projects.”

## Meriden session on labor agreements gets testy

Dan Brechlin | Posted: Saturday, March 10, 2012 10:34 pm

MERIDEN — The City Council and School Building Committee wanted an informational session on the pros and cons of project labor agreements as they would apply to the \$220 million renovations of Maloney and Platt high schools.

But Saturday's meeting, which drew nearly 1,500 people, was more of a "debate" as councilor Bob Williams put it. One resident termed it a "wrestling match," with proponents and opponents struggling for an advantage for more than four hours.

PLAs are collective bargaining agreements for construction projects that guarantee the use of union labor. They have been used in Hartford and Waterbury, but never in Meriden. Officials are considering them for the high school projects, but are looking for more information.

"These projects have to come in on time and within budget," said City Council Majority Leader Brian Daniels. "We need qualified, skilled workers on this job that can be compensated with a fair day's pay for a fair day's work."

U.S. Rep. Christopher S. Murphy and state Speaker of the House Christopher G. Donovan, both Democrats, opened the meeting with support for PLAs. Republican state Sen. Leonard F. Suzio also spoke, not taking a side but saying the city must make sure it gets a high level of reimbursement from the state should agreements be approved.

The pro-PLA representatives were the first to argue their side, with Jeremy Zeedyke of Sheet Metal Workers Local 40 leading the presentation. Zeedyke said the meeting was taking place because 2,200 residents had signed a petition calling for a PLA on the high school project. The PLA would require that 30 percent of workers on the project be from Meriden.

"Will Meriden utilize its greatest asset: local contractors and local workers?" he asked. "Or will it use a small group of contractors interested in maximizing their profit?"

Lelah Campo, president of the Associated Builders and Contractors of Connecticut, represented PLA opponents. She said this is the worst economy for construction since the 1800s, and that non-union contractors would be discouraged from bidding on the projects because union labor is required.

"You will get the most competitive price as long as you let everyone bid on it," Campo said.

The room grew tense when Campo began talking about work safety, something she said the two sides had agreed not to discuss. But, because the pro-PLA speakers did, Campo did as well, bringing up the Kleen Energy plant explosion in Middletown, in which five people died and 12

were injured. That project was done under a PLA, with O&G Industries the construction manager. O&G was also hired to be the construction manager on the Platt job.

“A PLA is not going to guarantee you a quality project, a safe project. ... Most deaths happen on PLA projects,” Campo said, drawing boos and jeers from an audience heavily weighted toward PLA supporters.

Deputy Mayor Matthew C. Dominello Jr. had to step in several times to settle the audience, even threatening to adjourn the meeting.

After the two sides stated their cases, City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior spoke, stating his opposition to PLAs. Kendzior cited research that he said shows PLAs drive up costs on projects. He also cited a recent court case in Hartford where a non-union contractor sued the city after bidding lowest on a project, but not being awarded it. Kendzior asked what is preventing contractors from doing the same at the high schools in Meriden and putting the city at risk.

Kendzior stressed to councilors and committee members how important it is for the projects to be completed without issue.

“If we are going to ask residents and businesses to support these projects, we need to have beautiful, well-functioning schools,” Kendzior said. “It’s just as important they are executed flawlessly. The only thought should be is ‘What a great project this was,’ and they should only have a feeling of pride.”

Councilors and committee members took turns asking questions, which sparked more give-and-take between the pro and anti-PLA members. Several times they cut each other off, veered away from the questions and toward their own agendas.

Daniels had the last word for the City Council, urging that an agreement be made that would please everybody and ensure that the projects employ local workers. He noted that many of the people in the audience went to school, grew up and live in Meriden, no matter which side they are on.

“This is about what is good for the community,” Daniels said. “We are all neighbors. We are all friends.”

The meeting closed with public comment, in which about 30 people received two minutes to speak. All but three spoke in favor of a PLA, saying that it was important to keep the jobs in Meriden.

“Why not have the people who care most about the schools work on them?” asked Kenneth Ford.

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# Donovan, Murphy vocal in support of labor pact

**Dan Brechlin | Posted: Wednesday, March 14, 2012 11:10 pm**

MERIDEN — Politicians Chris Murphy and Chris Donovan are among the biggest supporters of a project labor agreement that would guarantee union workers are selected for the Maloney and Platt high school renovation projects.

Murphy, the U.S. representative from the 5th District, and Donovan, the state House speaker from Meriden, were the first to speak during an informational meeting Saturday at Maloney High School that drew 1,500 people, many of them from the construction industry.

The city is considering using a project labor agreement for the Maloney and Platt projects, which have a combined price tag of \$220 million. Murphy and Donovan maintain that a PLA is the best way to make sure that the renovations run smoothly and that a percentage of the work goes to local contractors.

“We need the projects done correctly,” Donovan said at the meeting. “We’ve had labor violations and work stoppages in Meriden in the past and can’t have them again.”

“This will ensure it’s on time and under budget,” Murphy said, noting that several large companies, like Toyota, use PLAs.

Murphy and Donovan, both Democrats, are strong supporters of organized labor and have each accepted thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from unions in their current campaigns. Murphy is running for U.S. Senate. Donovan is running for Murphy’s seat in Congress.

Through Dec. 31, Donovan had brought in \$708,815 in campaign contributions, according to OpenSecrets.org, a website maintained by the Center for Responsive Politics. Of that amount, about \$124,000 came from organized labor, including trade unions such as the Service Employees International Union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Sheet Metal Workers Union and the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union. In total, industrial unions have contributed more than \$30,000 to Donovan’s war chest, while building trade unions have given \$22,500. Of his 20 largest donors this year, 12 are unions.

Donovan defended his support of project labor agreements in a phone interview Wednesday. PLAs offer job training, apprenticeships, a “decent wage” and ensure local workers, he said.

“Those are all good things for the community,” he said.

Donovan also cited previous construction projects in Meriden, such as Edison Middle School, where a PLA was not used and problems occurred. Edison, a magnet school on North Broad Street, opened a year behind schedule and ran \$7.5 million over budget.

Of the \$3.4 million Murphy has raised for his Senate campaign, nearly \$300,000 has come from unions, with more than \$70,000 coming from building trade and industrial unions.

Murphy said he has been a supporter of Community Workforce Agreements, another name for PLAs,

throughout his political career and well before he received any of the recent contributions.

"From the beginning of my time in office, I've been a proud supporter of Community Workforce Agreements," Murphy said in a statement Wednesday. "There are tens of thousands of Connecticut construction workers out of work, and CWAs ensure that local people get hired for local jobs — that's my number one concern. CWAs also help ensure that projects get done on time and on budget."

State Sen. Len Suzio spoke after Murphy and Donovan during Saturday's meeting. He did not advocate for or against a PLA, but asked that the projects be approved by the state and that the construction be done by Connecticut workers. Suzio, a Republican from Meriden seeking re-election, has not received union support, according to FollowTheMoney.org, the website of the National Institute on Money in State Politics.

Lelah Campo, president of the Association of Builders and Contractors of Connecticut, opposes the use of PLAs, which she says unfairly favor union contractors and drive up costs. Campo, a Republican in Murphy's hometown of Cheshire, criticized the statements by Donovan and Murphy at the meeting. She said she had never seen politicians make opening remarks that favored one side of the argument.

"One is running for Senate and one for Congress, that's what those were about," Campo said. "It was all a campaign speech."

Campo added that many of the workers affiliated with the Association of Builders and Contractors "took exception" to Murphy and Donovan's appearance at the meeting. The politicians' remarks could have an influence on the city's decision, she said.

Ben Marter, Murphy's spokesman, dismissed Campo's criticism as politically motivated.

"It's no secret that Lelah is an active Republican partisan," Marter said. "She's been trying to defeat (Murphy) for years, so it's no surprise that she's launching another political attack against Democrats."

Donovan said it made sense for him to be there Saturday since the Platt and Maloney renovations are the largest set of projects in Meriden's history.

"I've been involved with this project from the beginning," Donovan said.

## **Donovan**

Service Employees International union \$16,100

National Education Association \$15,000

American Federation of St/Cnty/Mnc Workers \$10,250

United Auto Workers \$10,250

American Federation of Teachers \$10,000



International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers \$10,000

Machinists/Aerospace Workers Union \$10,000

Unite Here \$10,000

Sheet Metal Workers Union \$6,250

International Association of Fire Fighters \$5,000

Iron Workers Union \$5,000

Plumbers/Pipefitters Union \$5,000

United Food & Commercial Workers Union \$5,000

### **Murphy**

Sheet Metal Workers Union \$15,000

American Federation of St/Cnty/Mnc employees \$10,000

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers \$10,000

United Auto Workers \$10,000

Machinists/Aerospace Workers Union \$10,000

Teamsters Union \$10,000

SOURCE: OpenSecrets.org

# Meriden high school petition may be invalid

Mary Ellen Godin | Posted: Thursday, March 15, 2012 7:34 pm

MERIDEN — The City Council may not be required to act on a petition seeking a labor agreement that would direct work on the Platt and Maloney high school renovation projects to union contractors, officials said Thursday.

But city councilors said they would likely take some action on the proposal once questions about the proposed labor agreement can be answered.

The petition was submitted under the initiative provision of the City Charter by the Greater Hartford-New Britain Building & Construction Trades Council, which coordinates the activity of building and construction trade unions.

The petition did not contain the precise language petitioners wanted the council to act on, said City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior, who has referred the petition to the city's corporation counsel for a final ruling on whether it is valid.

"It does not set forth the text of the proposed resolution or ordinance," Kendzior said. "I think it's a good thing that people know what they're signing. But that doesn't mean the City Council shouldn't bring it up."

The initiative provision allows residents to petition the City Council to take action on a proposed resolution or ordinance via a petition bearing the signatures of a certain percentage of local voters.

Shortly after the City Council approved the combined \$220 million high school renovation projects last June, members of the trades council met with Kendzior and City Councilor Matthew Dominello, who is also chairman of the School Building Committee.

Luke Ford, a member of the trades council and the United Steelworkers Union, presented a community workforce agreement, also known as a project labor agreement, based on a similar one now under judicial scrutiny in Hartford. The draft agreement stipulates that the "Contractor recognizes the Unions as the sole and exclusive bargaining representative for all craft employees within their respective jurisdictions working on facilities within the scope of this agreement" and that "Applicants for various classifications covered by the Agreement ... shall be referred to the Contractor by the Local Union."

The agreement would set a goal of hiring 30 percent of all contractors from Meriden and that 15 percent be minorities.

"They were not interested," Ford said of Kendzior and Dominello.

Kendzior has said he's concerned a labor agreement will drive up costs and expose the city to liability, citing the recent court case in Hartford where a non-union contractor sued the city after bidding lowest on a project, but not being awarded it.

After Kendzior and Dominello rejected the proposed agreement, the trades council got to work collecting

the necessary signatures to bring the matter before the City Council under the initiative provision of the City Charter. Ford contacted Meriden resident David J. Waskowicz, of the Sprinkler Fitters Union, and others to gather signatures.

“He asked if I would help out with signatures,” Waskowicz said. “The key to it is jobs for residents. I’m out of work, my son is out of work. Thirty percent workforce in Meriden is a nice target to get people back to work. The city councilors said they would like to listen to both sides to form an opinion.”

Waskowicz and others gathered 2,136 signatures with 1,970 signatures verified through voter registration records. They needed only 1,597 or 5 percent of the city’s electorate.

The City Council agreed to host an informational session with members of the School Building Committee on March 10 to hear both pros and cons of the labor agreement before making any decision on its merits. More than 1,500 people attended the meeting, many of them construction and trade union members in favor of the labor agreement. Opponents of the agreement also attended, arguing that it would unfairly exclude non-union contractors from working on the projects.

“The City Council is free to hold a meeting and that’s what was done,” said City Council Majority Leader Brian Daniels.

If the petition is invalid, the City Council avoids having to meet a 90-day deadline to take action on the labor agreement.

But city officials say they want more time to do their homework, anyway.

Daniels said the city is exploring several options and is closely watching developments in the lawsuit challenging the Hartford labor agreement. The state Supreme Court recently ruled that a non-union group had the right to bring a lawsuit against the union agreement with Hartford. Meriden officials are also looking at possible legislation governing project labor agreements and reviewing how the city can legally get as many local workers involved in the Platt and Maloney projects as possible.

“My understanding is that we don’t have to vote on this petition,” Daniels said. “But the issues are going to be addressed one way or another.”

# Meriden councilors want to hire locally for school renovations

By Dan Brechlin, Record-Journal staff | Posted: Friday, March 16, 2012 8:41 pm

MERIDEN — City councilors might not know yet whether they want to enter into a labor agreement for the Maloney and Platt high school renovation projects, but one thing is clear — they want to see as much of the work as possible go to local contractors, several councilors said Friday.

The city has received a petition from the Greater Hartford-New Britain Building & Construction Trades Council, which coordinates trade union activity. The group wants a project labor agreement that would direct most of the renovation work to union contractors and set a goal of hiring 30 percent of the contractors locally. The city manager has raised concerns that a PLA would drive up costs and expose the city to liability, but councilors are in agreement that the goal of hiring locally is appealing.

“There’s a high probability it will come down to a vote on the council floor,” said City Councilor Bob Williams. “No matter how you look at it, 30 percent of the workers being Meriden residents sounds pretty good ... I don’t think there’s anybody on the council that would go against that.”

The two renovation projects have a combined budget of \$220 million. That makes them some of the biggest construction jobs in Connecticut at a time when many contractors are out of work. A City Council information session last Saturday, to study the pros and cons of a PLA, attracted about 1,500 people, many of them union contractors hoping for work. Also attending were non-union contractors who argued that an agreement favoring the unions would be unfair.

The City Council will likely act on the PLA question at some point, according to Majority Leader Brian Daniels, but on Friday Daniels said other options are being considered, including several agreements that would not require union labor but would include a clause about hiring local workers.

“We want to make sure the pile of money gets spread around locally,” Daniels said.

Council Minority Leader Dan Brunet said the strong cases on both sides of the PLA issue make it a difficult decision.

“Both sides presented their case very well,” Brunet said. “It’s a difficult situation with an overwhelming crowd in favor of PLA.”

Although the council and city officials continue to do research, City Councilor Hilda Santiago said she does not want the project to go entirely to the unions, or entirely to non-union shops.

“A lot of construction people are out of work. Those are the ones we need to take care of,” Santiago said. “The ones that live here, that are paying their taxes, but facing foreclosure.”

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## Donovan gets lots of support from building trades

Mary Ellen Godin | Posted: Saturday, June 16, 2012 10:45 pm

Connecticut House Speaker and 5th Congressional District candidate Christopher G. Donovan has accepted more than \$75,000 in campaign contributions from political action committees representing building trade unions that may be in line for jobs on the \$220 million Maloney and Platt high school renovation project.

More than a third of the \$235,680 in total PAC contributions the Meriden Democrat has received comes from the building trades, according to filings with the Federal Election Commission.

In April and May, Donovan helped negotiate passage of legislation allowing cities and towns to use project labor agreements, which give preference to trade unions in bidding on public projects. At the same time, Donovan strongly advocated using a PLA for the high school renovation work, speaking at a City Council-School Building Committee joint public hearing in March and attending a council meeting last month at which Mayor Michael S. Rohde broke a tie vote in favor of using a PLA.

Donovan's campaign manager, Tom Swan, said Donovan's support for project labor agreements is consistent with his decades of advocating good wages and benefits for working families.

Compared to other politicians, "Chris is the most principled," Swan said. "You can predict in advance how Chris is going to vote. He negotiated a settlement. He was able to bring those parties together," Swan said, referring to Donovan's role in the PLA legislation. Swan said the bill originated in Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's office and Donovan brokered a settlement between the governor and the unions.

Donovan did not return a request for comment.

In his last campaign as a state representative, Donovan used public financing, which prevented him from accepting PAC contributions. But a run for Congress allows candidates to accept special interest money.

Art Paulson, chairman of the political science department at Southern Connecticut State University, said direct contributions from PACs are of less importance following the 2010 Supreme Court decision in the case of Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission. The court's ruling allows corporations to use money on behalf of candidates.

Quinnipiac University business professor David Cadden said unions evaluate candidates on a number of issues, such as trade agreements, immigration and health care, before deciding whom to support.

"They've seen what's happened to their membership as jobs have gone overseas," Cadden said.

Cadden said union PAC funds — mostly drawn from union dues — can't compete with the sums spent on campaigns by large corporations.

According to the FEC website, there have been no expenditures for or against federal candidates in Connecticut. In the 5th District, both Republicans and Democrats have primary elections on Aug. 14, when the national party money is expected to start flowing to the winning candidates.

Donovan's 20-year public service career was hit by a political tsunami last month when his campaign finance director, Robert Braddock, was arrested May 30. The FBI says he conspired to hide the source of campaign contributions from an undercover agent posing as an investor in roll-your-own smoke shops.

A Senate bill that would have imposed additional taxes and fees on such shops passed in committee during the last session, but never came to a vote in the Senate. Donovan has said he had no involvement with the legislation and was not aware of Braddock's activities. He has since fired Braddock, his campaign manager and another staffer. The FBI is still investigating.

Donovan's acceptance of legal PAC contributions is not part of that investigation.

#### PLA legislation

The issue of whether Meriden would use a project labor agreement was first raised by Luke Ford, a business representative for Sheet Metal Workers' International Association Local 40, who submitted a petition to the City Council along with a draft agreement. The Sheet Metal Workers' Political Action League has made three separate contributions to Donovan's congressional campaign totaling \$10,000.

Ford has donated between \$300 and \$350 to the Sheet Metal Workers' Political Action League every year since 2003, according to FEC records.

Donovan spoke at a joint public hearing on March 9 that drew more than a thousand people, many of them from the construction industry hoping that a PLA would mean jobs on the Platt and Maloney project. Donovan joined U.S. Rep. Christopher S. Murphy in urging the council to use a PLA.

"We need the projects done correctly," Donovan said at the meeting. "We've had labor violations and work stoppages in Meriden in the past and can't have them again."

During the same month, the Donovan campaign accepted a \$5,000 contribution from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Political Action Committee. That PAC has made three contributions totaling \$15,000, which is the federal limit.

Local officials were concerned a PLA would expose the city to liability since the city of Hartford had been sued over a similar agreement. Donovan said lawmakers would be addressing the issue through legislation authorizing PLAs. In the final week of the legislative session, a strike-through amendment was passed in the Senate allowing municipalities to use PLAs on projects they deem appropriate.

Senate Bill 33 began as a transportation project bill that came out of the General Assembly's Transportation Committee, aimed at offering choices in how construction projects are put out to bid.

The Labor Committee had previously held an informational hearing on PLAs, even though there was no bill pending at that time. State Rep. Bruce (Zeke) Zalaski, D-Southington, House chairman of the Labor Committee, said the Hartford lawsuit had made him curious about PLAs and what they entailed.

Zalaski said he was asked by the governor's office to host the information session about PLAs. On March 19, the same union leaders who addressed Meriden's City Council and School Building Committee on March 9 made a similar pitch to state lawmakers.

Lelah Campo, president of the Associated Builders and Contractors of Connecticut and a PLA opponent, told the Record-Journal at the hearing that she anticipated PLA language to be presented as an amendment.

"That's why we're here today," Campo said at the time. "We are bypassing the legislative process ... to change the state bidding statutes."

On April 20, the initial transportation bill was referred to the Labor Committee.

According to Zalaski and Senate Labor Committee Chairwoman Edith Prague, D-Columbia, a request for the PLA amendment came from Malloy's office.

But Adam Joseph, a spokesman for Senate President Donald Williams, D-Brooklyn, said the PLA amendment originated from House and Senate leadership.

"It was a team effort, something we had been working on for a long time," Joseph said.

The amendment did not actually take place, however, until the day of the vote, May 2.

State Sen. Leonard Suzio, R-Meriden, said he had been lobbied by union officials to support a PLA amendment three weeks before the end of the session. Suzio said he hadn't seen an amendment yet and tried to get a copy.



He contacted Donovan's office and was told by his chief of staff, Mildred Torres-Ferguson, and another aide that it was being negotiated with the governor's office.

"They were keeping it very close to the vest," Suzio said. "They said they hadn't finalized the language and were discussing it with the governor's office. (Donovan) was definitely behind it. We all knew this was a relevant controversy in Meriden."

Suzio along with 31 other senators, voted for the bill on May 2. Suzio said he supported it because the measure didn't require PLAs, it just gave municipalities a choice. Three senators opposed it.

On May 7, Donovan called for a roll call vote in the House and the PLA amendment passed 109 to 37. By session's end on May 9, Donovan had also overseen passage of a waiver that would reimburse Meriden for \$170 million of the \$220 million cost of the high school project, even though it exceeded state guidelines.

### Back at City Hall

In Meriden, the debate over the use of a PLA was heating up among city officials. City Council Majority Leader Brian Daniels and most of the Democratic majority supported a PLA, but City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior advised the council that, despite the approval of legislation, the city could still face a lawsuit. The city's purchasing director, Wilma Petro, also advised against it.

Republicans on the council opposed the PLA resolution, as did the two members of the We the People Party. The council voted as a committee of the whole on May 17, deadlocking 6-6.

Two Democrats, Matthew C. Dominello Sr., chairman of the school building committee, and first-term councilor Steven Iovanna voted "no" on the PLA resolution. Dominello, a veteran lawmaker with 35 years on the council, said he agreed with the city manager and believed using a PLA for the Platt and Maloney projects would drive up costs.

Iovanna, an architect with BL Cos., agreed with Dominello.

Iovanna said he felt pressure to side with fellow Democrats in favor of a PLA. Donovan's chief of staff, Torres-Ferguson, who is also Meriden's Democratic town chairwoman, was at the committee of the whole meeting, as were several union heads. She did not return a request for comment.

The City Council again took up the PLA resolution during its regular meeting May 21, but this time the tie was broken by Mayor Rohde, a Democrat. Donovan attended the meeting and shook hands with councilors and union members afterward.

Daniels, who is also a member of the Democratic Town Committee, said after the meeting that he and other Democrats didn't bully members of their caucus, but that he would expect Democrats to stay in line with party principles when a vote gets close.

But Craig Hanson, treasurer of the Democratic Town Committee, tweeted to Iovanna that his vote was a “slap in the face to Chris Donovan.” The tweets were later deleted.

State Sen. Andrew Roraback, R-Goshen, the GOP-endorsed candidate in the 5th District, said Donovan’s support for PLAs is consistent with his longtime support for organized labor.

“I’m not surprised,” Roraback said, adding that he didn’t accept PAC money until the special session ended last week.

Donovan campaign spokesman Gabe Rosenberg said Donovan’s support for PLA legislation and using one for the high school projects was not influenced by campaign contributions.

“Chris has fought for families for 30 years,” he said.

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## Meriden school project: Some say PLA isn't the best way

**Dan Brechlin | Posted: Saturday, March 17, 2012 8:38 pm**

MERIDEN — From Luke Ford's house, he can see Maloney High School, which his sons attended. One of those sons, Ken Ford, has chosen to follow in his father's, grandfather's and great-grandfather's footsteps as a sheet metal worker. He could be one of the many contractors selected for work on the \$220 million renovation of Maloney and Platt high schools.

"I'm born and raised here. It would be great to work on these schools," the 2005 Maloney graduate said.

The work would mean a lot to him, as he's had difficulty finding a job since graduating from Roger Williams University in Bristol, R.I., where he majored in psychology. Having grown up practically in Maloney High School's backyard, Ford said, it would be a source of pride to work on the renovation.

Luke Ford, a business representative for Sheet Metal Workers' International Association Local 40, is trying to convince the city to use a project labor agreement for Platt and Maloney. The agreement would ensure that the jobs go to union contractors and set a goal of giving 30 percent of the work to city residents.

Miguel Castro, of Prestige Construction Home Improvement, also hopes to work on the high school renovation projects, but he does not belong to a union. Like Luke Ford, Castro's children have gone through Maloney and one more, a daughter, is a few years away from attending.

"When I drop my daughter off, I can pull in and say, 'I helped build that. I put the windows in,' or 'I helped with the ventilation system,' " said Castro, a member of the Democratic Town Committee.

City officials face a difficult decision. The PLA would not prevent non-union companies ("open shops") from doing work, but it would require that unionized workers be used on the project.

Castro is hoping to be hired even if a PLA is used. He said he's worked on other PLA projects and there was no issue with union and non-union contractors working side by side.

"I don't take sides," Castro said. "The only sides that should be taken are the sides of Meriden residents. The children need better schools built."

Luke Ford, and others at Local 40 in Rocky Hill, say they're not trying to discourage non-union contractors like Castro from bidding on the high-profile projects. They simply oppose companies from out of state coming into the city and taking the work.

“It’s going to be a complicated project,” said Ford, noting that the renovations will be done while students are still attending school. “The manpower on the projects will ramp up and go back down and there will be holiday and summer breaks... You don’t know where these workers are going to be coming from.”

Several city councilors have discussed the possibility of “keeping it a level playing field” by ensuring that at least 30 percent of the work go to Meriden residents, but without using a PLA. It’s an idea that Jeremy Zeedyk, the Local 40 marketing representative, said the unions would not support.

“You may get local companies working on the project, but the workers may not be from Meriden,” he said.

The unions also would allow for apprenticeships for people still training, like Ken Ford. They have also partnered with technical schools in the past, which would open opportunities for students at Wilcox Technical High School on Oregon Road, near Platt.

“We can get them in and offer kids apprenticeships and then give them careers afterward,” Luke Ford said.

Castro said it’s difficult to compete with what many of the unions offer, but he’s hoping for a “fair chance.”

“I can’t take anything away from them; they are highly qualified,” Castro said. “But so are open shops. I’m licensed and certified. ... We want to show we are qualified, capable, competitive and as professional as anyone else.”

Zeedyk gave a presentation in favor of using a PLA during an informational meeting at Maloney last Saturday. The crowd of nearly 1,500 was primarily pro-union, many being union members themselves. Some criticized the crowd for becoming rowdy when an opponent of PLAs, Lelah Campo, of the Associated Builders and Contractors of Connecticut, suggested that the Kleen Energy Plant in Middletown had exploded because it had been a PLA project.

“A lot of those people in that room worked on the project,” Zeedyk said, defending the unionized workers.

Castro gave a different account of the meeting, as have others, saying that union members acted unprofessionally, which he believes should give the city pause as it considers a PLA. He compared it to a contractor who is rude when giving an estimate for home improvements.

“Would you want to let those people build your deck?” Castro asked.

Castro also speculated that the crowd's response might have been due to the pressure created by the shortage of construction jobs in the state. There are not many large projects being planned either, Zeedyk said.

Both Castro and Luke Ford agree that when it comes time to break ground on the schools, possibly by the end of the year, they hope to see Meriden residents working.

"By increasing local participation you are putting money back into Meriden," Luke Ford said. "As a taxpayer, it's a no-brainer."

The best way to make sure that happens is through a PLA, he said. When Bristol renovated its two public high schools, a PLA was not used and the rate of local residents working on the project was low, Zeedyk said. Luke Ford cited the construction of Edison Middle School, a magnet school on North Broad Street, saying the lack of a PLA contributed to excess costs and delays.

"You have a chance to do it right this time," he said.

For Castro, though, the right decision is to go without a PLA. Castro said he feels he is well qualified and should be given a "fair shot" in the bidding process, as should other open shops.

Whichever way the City Council decides to go, Castro said, the schools need to be built to last and with the interests of Meriden residents in mind.

"This has really been reduced to a quarter-billion-dollar discussion," he said. "The ones that will benefit most have been taken out of the discussion. You can't take the star out of a movie and the star in this movie is the kids. They are the ones who will benefit. We have to do it right."

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## Lawmakers learn about project labor pacts

**Dan Brechlin | Posted: Monday, March 19, 2012 6:43 pm**

HARTFORD — The state Labor and Public Employees Committee held an informational meeting Monday on project labor agreements, similar to a meeting held in Meriden on March 10.

The Meriden meeting was directly related to the \$220 million in renovations proposed for Maloney and Platt high schools. Monday's meeting at the Legislative Office Building was a general session for advocates and opponents of project labor agreements to make their cases.

Project labor agreements designate labor unions as the sole and exclusive bargaining representatives on a particular project and require that job applicants be referred to the contractor by the local union.

Meriden officials are considering using a PLA for the high school renovations after receiving a petition from the Greater Hartford-New Britain Building & Construction Trades Council, which coordinates union activity. Meriden officials have said they like that a PLA would set a goal of giving 30 percent of the work to local contractors, but they have concerns that the agreement would expose the city to liability in light of a pending lawsuit in Hartford, in which a nonunion contractor is challenging a PLA.

House Speaker Christopher G. Donovan, D-Meriden, said at the Meriden meeting that legislation was being drafted to address the liability question, but several officials Monday said they did not know specifically why the informational hearing was being held. Even state Rep. Bruce "Zeke" Zalaski, D-Southington, who co-chairs the committee, said he was unsure of the purpose of the hearing. Zalaski noted that the deadline has passed to submit proposed legislation, and the committee is meeting today to issue joint favorable reports on legislation that has already been discussed. Nothing concerning PLAs is on the agenda, Zalaski said.

"I learned more today than I ever knew before about PLAs," he said.

Lelah Campo, the president of the Associated Builders and Contractors of Connecticut, said the two meetings likely have a lot to do with each other. She said a measure regarding PLAs might be added as an amendment, rather than a new bill.

"I believe that's why we're here today," said Campo, who opposes PLAs. "We are bypassing the legislative process ... to change the state bidding statutes."

Campo spoke for about 15 minutes in front of a crowd consisting almost entirely of PLA supporters. There were also two overflow rooms for the hearing. Campo said she was "glad to

shed light on PLAs,” but critical because there was no specific legislation she was providing testimony on.

Speaking in favor of project labor agreements was John Olsen, president of Connecticut AFL-CIO, Ed Reilly of the Iron Workers Union Local 15, and Jeremy Zeedyk of the Sheet Metal Workers Union Local 40. The combined presentation lasted well over an hour, including questions.

The union officials spoke at length about the value of PLAs, which they said guarantee a qualified workforce and prohibit strikes and lockouts.

“Those who choose PLAs recognize the importance of on time, on budget and without work stoppages,” Reilly said.

Zeedyk said a PLA is the best way to make sure work is given to local residents, a point which Campo disputed.

Labor Commissioner Glenn Marshall began and concluded the meeting. Marshall, former president of Carpenters Union Local 210, spoke in favor of PLAs. Marshall also spoke highly of the jobs funnel programs in the state, which provide training for aspiring trade workers and help ensure employment for local workers.

“There’s no program,” he said, “more effective than the jobs funnel program in conjunction with labor agreements.”

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## Skip the PLA

**Eric Cotton | Posted: Friday, March 23, 2012 7:59 pm**

In this economy, it doesn't make sense for the city of Meriden to use a project labor agreement for the planned renovations to Platt and Maloney high schools.

The local building trades unions are looking for an exclusive deal that would guarantee they receive the lion's share of \$220 million in renovation work, overriding the normal bidding process. In return, the city would get access to qualified union contractors, a guarantee of no work stoppages and assurances that 30 percent of the work would go to local residents, if possible.

But there's already an abundance of qualified contractors available. With jobs in the construction industry so scarce, it won't be difficult to find good people — union or non-union — to work on the high schools. Strikes and other work stoppages are also unlikely. And city officials are already looking into other ways of setting goals for hiring local workers.

There's little need, at least from the city's perspective, for a project labor agreement, or PLA.

"I believe firmly, if I was ever to be in favor of a PLA, it would be at a time when the economy is booming," city purchasing officer Wilma Petro told me last week, stressing it was her personal opinion. "In this economy, there are tons of qualified workers out there."

Of course, that's why so many union contractors are clamoring for the agreement — they need the work. But even without a PLA, you have to figure a good number of those contractors will be hired for the high school renovations, in light of the scale of the projects and their own qualifications. It just won't be at the exclusion of non-union workers.

The city has to protect the interests of taxpayers. Residents can hardly afford to shoulder additional costs from the high school projects as they struggle to make ends meet. Controlling costs is a big part of making sure the renovations go smoothly and it starts with the competitive bidding process. But PLAs, by their very nature, eliminate competition.

"When you eliminate competition, prices go up," Petro said.

The unions argue that non-union companies are welcome to bid on PLA projects, which is true. But those companies would need to abide by the terms of the agreement, which means they have to rely on the unions to provide most of the workers, all but a few essential supervisors. That makes submitting an accurate bid nearly impossible since the non-union companies will be using workers they're unfamiliar with. Fringe benefits are also handled differently in union and non-union situations, putting non-union shops at a disadvantage when bidding on PLA projects. This effectively eliminates them from the equation.



Since Meriden happens to have a lot of non-union contractors, that could make it more difficult to meet local hiring goals.

By no means am I disputing all that the unions have to offer. They provide training and apprenticeships, not to mention support and protection for members. The old line about the trade union offering a career rather than a job is true.

If the economy were stronger, the city might want to use a PLA to ensure access to qualified workers, as Petro suggests. Of course, that's when the unions are less likely to want one, since their services would be at a premium.

At any rate, in this climate, the city will be better off handling the school projects through the normal bidding process and with union and non-union contractors ultimately working side by side at Platt and Maloney.

## Labor petition linked to Meriden high school renovations not seen as concern

Dan Brechlin | Posted: Thursday, April 5, 2012 8:16 pm

MERIDEN — There will be no ruling by the city corporation counsel on whether a petition seeking a labor agreement for renovations at Maloney and Platt high schools is valid. Instead, the City Council will move forward and consider whether to enter into a labor agreement on the \$220-million school project.

City Corporation Counsel Michael Quinn said Thursday that he has not issued any rulings on the validity of the petition and is not planning on any ruling because he feels city officials have met with those behind the petition. In his opinion, that session satisfies what petitioners were requesting, Quinn said.

The city received the petition from the Greater Hartford-New Britain Building & Construction Trades Council, which coordinates trade union activity. The group wants a project labor agreement that would direct most of the renovation work to union contractors and set a goal of hiring 30 percent of the contractors locally.

The city manager and others have raised concerns that a PLA would drive up costs and expose the city to liability, but councilors agree that the goal of hiring locally is appealing.

The petition did not contain the precise language that petitioners wanted the council to act on, but was submitted with a sample project labor agreement.

“The council has already held that large event on the subject,” Quinn said, in reference to a March meeting with hundreds of union and PLA supporters, as well as many in opposition.

“They really accomplished their goal to have it considered, putting on a presentation,” Quinn added. “It did what the petition was seeking.”

The council can now determine the fate of labor on the project because Majority Leader Brian Daniels has submitted a resolution that addresses the use of local workers.

“It was not a PLA specific resolution,” Daniels said. “It was generic in the sense that it says we do want to maximize, to the extent that we can, the local residents on these jobs.”

As the debate continues over labor on the project, planning work continues, said Assistant School Superintendent Michael S. Grove.

“They are close to finalizing plans on Maloney,” Grove said of architectural firm Fletcher Thompson.

The regularly scheduled update for the School Building Committee was rescheduled from last night to next Thursday at 7 p.m. due to the lack of a quorum, Grove said.

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## **PLA debated, tabled by Meriden City Council Finance Committee**

**By Dan Brechlin, Record-Journal staff | Posted: Tuesday, April 24, 2012 10:18 pm**

MERIDEN — The debate over whether or not to use a Project Labor Agreement for the proposed renovation of the city's two high schools continued at Tuesday's City Council Finance Committee meeting.

City officials have been weighing how to maximize the amount of local labor on Maloney and Platt High School projects, including the use of a PLA. A PLA, or Community Workforce Agreement, would require at least 30 percent of the labor to be from local workers, but also require most of the labor be done by union workers.

After more than 90 minutes of debate and additional advice from lawyer Michael Donnelly of Murtha Cullina LLP in Hartford, they voted to table the matter. Though the resolution to maximize labor was tabled, the signing of a PLA was opposed by several councilors.

"I don't understand why this can't be an open agreement between the private contractors and union?" questioned Deputy Mayor Matthew C. Dominello. "Why are they so insistent that it has to be a PLA?"

Donnelly spoke about a lawsuit from Electrical Contractors Incorporated against Hartford after submitting the lowest bid for a PLA project. After refusing to sign the PLA, ECI was not awarded the job, which eventually went to the next highest bidder — a union contractor.

The case is ongoing with antitrust claims being part of the lawsuit. Some legislation has been proposed at the state level to prevent the ECI case from having an effect on potential PLAs in the future, but it is yet to be debated by the House of Representatives or the Senate.

Without any clear ruling as to whether the case is valid, the city could be at risk if they choose to go with a PLA, Donnelly said.

"In these particular circumstances, I would flat out say the city will be sued if you enter into a PLA," he said.

City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior said it would be difficult to write into a contract with contractors for the high schools to require a certain percentage of local bidders. It would also be unlikely to include items that guarantee no work stoppages and percentages of minority and female workers.

If the committee voted in favor of the resolution, Kendzior said he would be unsure what would happen because it was not specific enough.

“I believe it was a vehicle to promote a discussion, get information and get questions answered,” he said.

City Councilor Cathy Battista questioned why the discussion was even on the agenda because it had no dollars attached to the resolution. Dominello added that he was unsure where the resolution came from and said he did not remember the City Council referring it to the Finance Committee. The resolution was not on the City Council’s most recent agenda, May 16.

Opposed to even tabling the item was Walter A. Shamock, of We the People, who suggested voting the resolution down.

“I haven’t heard any valid arguments to have a PLA,” Shamock said.

In other business, the Finance Committee approved a resolution that would allow Kendzior to sign documents for a solar farm to be placed on the city’s landfill on Evansville Avenue near the Wallingford town-line border. The agreement would be with Greenskies Renewable Energy LLC.

The solar farm would take up about three acres of the landfill and come at no cost to the city. The solar panels would generate energy, which would be sold back to the city to help power the adjacent water pollution control facility. It would save the city about \$50,000 per year and \$1 million over the 20-year contract.

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## Meriden councilors warned against labor pact

By Dan Brechlin | Posted: Thursday, April 26, 2012 11:22 pm

MERIDEN — City councilors are still considering whether to sign a pact allowing trade unions to be the “sole and exclusive bargaining representative” for the high school renovation projects — despite concerns that the agreement would expose the city to liability.

The City Council Finance Committee discussed the issue for about 90 minutes Tuesday after council Majority Leader Brian Daniels asked Finance Chairwoman Hilda Santiago to add it to the agenda. An attorney attended the meeting to brief committee members.

“In these particular circumstances, I would flat-out say the city will be sued if you enter into a PLA,” attorney Michael Donnelly told the committee.

The decision over whether to use a Project Labor Agreement, also known as a Community Workforce Agreement, has been a controversial one. Luke Ford, a member of the local trades council and the United Steelworkers, requested that the city use a PLA requiring that at least 30 percent of the labor on the projects be done by city residents, among other conditions. The agreement would also allow the unions to refer all potential workers on the project to the construction managers. That has drawn objections from non-union contractors.

The renovations to Platt and Maloney high schools have a combined price tag of approximately \$220 million at a time when construction jobs are scarce.

A similar PLA is under judicial scrutiny in Hartford after a non-union company sued. The outcome of that suit, filed by Electrical Contractors Inc. against the city of Hartford, could ultimately determine what happens to the PLA proposed in Meriden. City Councilor Walter A. Shamock, of the We the People party, said the choice for the council should be clear at this point, for multiple reasons.

“I don’t even think it should go to a vote,” Shamock said. “Why vote when the city manager, purchasing agent and everybody else I have talked to in the last two months are shying away from it? It puts the city at risk, legally, and is only going to drive up the cost of the projects.”

The resolution Daniels submitted to Finance never mentions a PLA or CWA. It proposes that the city identify “the most appropriate method” for hiring local workers, local companies, women, minorities and veterans to work on the high school projects and incorporate that method into any construction agreements.

The resolution was brought up as a “matter not on the agenda” before the committee that made “logical sense,” said Daniels, a Democrat. The decision came down to the Finance Committee or

the Committee of the Whole, which allows all councilors to take part in the discussion and vote on a topic that does not fit into the purview of one of the five committees.

Democrat Cathy Battista questioned why Finance was selected to discuss the resolution, since there are no dollar figures attached to it.

“Reasonable minds could have differed on that,” Daniels said as to where the topic should have been brought up.

Santiago said she didn’t anticipate the 90-minute conversation that ensued and would have preferred a different setting.

“The only thing that I wanted to push for was for the issue to go to the Committee of the Whole so every city councilor could hear what (attorney Donnelly) had to say,” said Santiago, a Democrat. “I didn’t realize that it had to do with the workforce agreement ... We will have to wait for more information so that we can decide where to go next.”

Deputy Mayor Matthew C. Dominello, a Democrat, questioned at the meeting why Daniels was in possession of information other councilors did not have about the proposal and potential state legislation that could prevent municipalities from being sued for signing exclusive labor agreements. Shamock also questioned why it was on the agenda.

Whether or not the item should have been discussed, the meeting did answer some questions, Daniels said.

“We can’t consider the PLA if there is no legislation that deals with the (Hartford) lawsuit. I suspect that’s the conclusion,” Daniels said.

Donnelly had also told the group that it was unlikely it could write a contract for those bidding that would require a certain portion of local workers on the project.

“Courts have been universal in striking down quotas in respect to local workers,” Donnelly told them. “It sounds harsh, but don’t forget, it is state money, or at least a significant portion of it is, which trumps local concerns.”

The resolution has been tabled, for now, though Daniels said it is unlikely to die in committee. The City Council will probably wait to see if state legislation is passed before making a decision on what to do with the proposed PLA.

The legislative session ends May 9.

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# Senate bill on labor pacts could affect city school project

Dan Brechlin | Posted: Thursday, May 3, 2012 10:40 pm

MERIDEN — The chances of the city using a project labor agreement for the renovations of Maloney and Platt high schools may have increased after the state Senate Wednesday overwhelmingly approved a measure dealing with public construction projects.

Members of the City Council Finance Committee were recently told by outside legal counsel Michael Donnelly that the city would be sued should it enter into a PLA on the proposed \$220 million high school renovation projects.

Negotiated through unions, a project labor agreement, or PLA, sets forth conditions for the projects, including setting goals for hiring local, minority, women, veteran and apprentice labor. It would also prevent strikes and work stoppages, among other stipulations.

The measure passed the Senate with broad bipartisan support that included state Sen. Leonard Suzio, R-Meriden.

The legislation allows — but does not require — municipalities to negotiate with unions and set the terms and conditions of public projects before any bids are awarded. It stipulates that companies unwilling to accept the terms of a PLA are deemed ineligible for a contract award.

"It's done only if it's in the community's best interests," said state Sen. Edith G. Prague, D-Columbia, co-chairwoman of the Labor and Public Employees Committee.

Suzio said project labor agreements "have become one of the hot topics" of debate in Meriden, "but there's nothing coercive about the legislation."

Project labor agreements have drawn objections from non-union contractors because they put the unions in charge of referring potential workers on the projects to the construction managers.

City leaders have been wary of a PLA after the state Supreme Court allowed non-union Electrical Contractors Inc. to sue the Hartford Board of Education. ECI had submitted the lowest bid on a school construction project, but refused to sign the PLA. The new legislation, approved by the Senate 32-3, would disallow similar lawsuits as well as antitrust lawsuits.

"Any bidder for a public works project that does not agree to abide by the conditions of the project labor agreement or a requirement to negotiate a project labor agreement shall not be regarded as a responsible qualified bidder for such project," the legislation reads.

It also states that specific provisions are "severable and if any provision is determined to contravene state or federal law" and the city's requirement of a PLA "shall not be evidence of fraud, corruption or favoritism."



City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior has been a vocal opponent of a PLA because the Hartford lawsuit puts the city at risk of being sued. Despite the wording of the legislation, Kendzior said there would still be some legal risks.

“It is the opinion of our outside counsel, from the firm that has represented the city in our school construction matters, that the city would still end up in litigation,” he said.

“If legislation is approved, we will review that and make a recommendation to the City Council on how to best achieve the common goal of ensuring that qualified Meriden residents have an opportunity to work on these projects,” Kendzior said

A resolution submitted by City Council Majority Leader Brian Daniels calls for using the best method for maximizing the employment of qualified local workers and businesses, as well as qualified minorities, women and veterans, for the high school projects. After being debated by the council’s Finance Committee, it has been forwarded to the Committee of the Whole for further review. The Committee of the Whole will likely not debate the issue until after the legislative session ends on Wednesday.

Daniels said the city will be watching closely as the topic moves on to the House of Representatives.

“One thing it shows, with that type of overwhelming support, is that both the Democrats and Republicans recognize the value of a PLA on large-scale municipal projects,” Daniels said. “We will see what the House does and if there are any further amendments.”

Some councilors have continued to resist the PLA for multiple reasons, including possible litigation. We the People member Walter A. Shamock Jr. told the Finance Committee last week that it would put the city at risk and he believes it will drive up the cost of the projects.

“The bottom line is that a PLA drives up the price of the project,” he said. “There are plenty of qualified tradesmen looking for work ... Why even take a chance?”

Information from the Connecticut Mirror, an independent, nonprofit news organization, was included in this story. It originally appeared at CTMirror.org.

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## House passes bill allowing PLAs on public works projects

By Dan Brechlin, Record-Journal staff | Posted: Monday, May 7, 2012 8:49 pm

MERIDEN — The state House of Representatives Monday approved a bill that would allow municipalities to use a project labor agreement on any public works project, including school construction. The state Senate passed the bill last week.

The bill has a direct impact on Meriden, as officials consider the use of a project labor agreement for the renovations at Maloney and Platt high schools. The labor agreement, negotiated through unions, sets forth conditions for the projects, including setting goals for hiring local, minority, female, veteran and apprentice laborers.



Meriden is considering a proposed project labor agreement from the Greater Hartford-New Britain Building & Construction Trades Council. The proposal has received negative feedback from non-union contractors because they would be required to pay union dues and other fees.

As in the Senate, the bill received overwhelming support in the House, with a 109-37 vote. There was less bipartisan support, however.

The legislation allows — but does not require — municipalities to negotiate with unions and set the terms and conditions of public projects before any bids are awarded. It stipulates that companies unwilling to accept the terms of a PLA can be deemed ineligible for a contract award.

City councilors have been waiting for the state legislature to act on the bill before moving forward with a PLA decision. The bill awaits the signature of Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, who has voiced support for project labor agreements.

Once the legislation is signed, the city's Committee of the Whole will hold a meeting on whether or not to use a PLA on the proposed \$220 million projects at Maloney and Platt. The full council held a public hearing on the topic earlier this year.

In Hartford Monday, several legislators brought up a similar meeting about PLAs held earlier this year by the state legislative labor committee. The meeting did not include a public comment section.

"This gives people no benefit of a public hearing," said state Rep. Sean Williams, a Republican who represents Watertown and Woodbury. "This is the opposite of good government."

At the time, committee Chairman Bruce "Zeke" Zalaski, D-Southington, said he was

unsure why the meeting about PLAs was being held. A strikethrough amendment had not been proposed at the time.

The additional language in the bill will prevent some possible legal issues that could arise, similar to a case in Hartford. Electrical Contactors Inc. sued the Hartford Board of Education after having submitted the lowest bid, but refusing to sign the PLA. The portion of the project ECI bid on was then awarded to the next-lowest bidder.

City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior has said that despite the legislation preventing some legal liability, the city would likely still wind up in litigation should they choose a PLA.

"It is the opinion of our outside counsel, from the firm that has represented the city in our school construction matters, that the city would still end up in litigation," he said last week.

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## Meriden council nears decision on labor agreement for high schools

**Dan Brechlin | Posted: Wednesday, May 16, 2012 7:10 pm**

MERIDEN — The City Council is getting closer to deciding whether or not to use a project labor agreement on the proposed \$220 million renovations of Maloney and Platt high schools.

That choice could be made tonight.

The council's Committee of the Whole will meet this evening, immediately following a special City Council meeting at 5:30 p.m. A resolution to maximize local employment and encourage the hiring of local minorities, women, veterans and businesses, is the only issue on the agenda. The resolution has been directly tied to the use of a project labor agreement.

"The resolution I put in originally was not specific," said council Majority Leader Brian Daniels. "It was a resolution to identify and explore the options available to the city to maximize local labor on these projects."

The item was discussed at a council Finance Committee meeting and determined to be a topic better addressed by the Committee of the Whole because there were no dollar figures attached to it. A project labor agreement, or PLA, submitted by union workers, would be negotiated with each union involved in the project. It would set goals similar to those expressed in Daniels' resolution, but require non-union contractors to pay union dues and other fees and use some union labor if they were to win a bid.

The council held an informational meeting at Maloney in March that drew more than 1,000 people both for and against the use of a PLA. The meeting went on for more than four hours, and included presentations from the Greater Hartford-New Britain Building & Construction Trades Council and the state branch of the Associated Builders and Contractors.

The crowd was rowdy at times, causing Deputy Mayor Matthew C. Dominello to threaten to cancel the meeting. It also featured dozens of members of the public commenting. Dominello said he expects a different result at tonight's meeting in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

"It won't be like Maloney; that was an informational meeting," Dominello said. "Both sides will have a chance to talk, but will have a limited time."

The discussion will not revolve around whether or not to use a PLA, however. It will be focused on how recent legislation, passed by the state Senate and House of Representatives and expected to be signed by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, would affect agreeing to a PLA.

The legislation allows - but does not require - municipalities to negotiate with unions and set the terms and conditions of public projects before any bids are awarded. It stipulates that companies unwilling to accept the terms of a PLA are deemed ineligible for a contract award.

The recently approved legislation is based on an ongoing case in Hartford. Electrical Contractors Inc., a Hartford-based non-union company, was the lowest qualified bidder on a recent Hartford school project. ECI refused to sign a PLA, but the state Supreme Court has ruled the company would be allowed to sue the Hartford Board of Education.

The council discussed how it would be affected by the legislation at a recent Finance Committee meeting with outside legal counsel Michael Donnelly. The committees were nearly given a guarantee that the city would be sued, but that could change based on the new legislation.

Donnelly will be present at tonight's meeting. Those on both sides of the PLA issue will also be asked to address the labor agreement with regard to the new legislation.

"This committee, really, is very focused on looking at the last option available to us to maximize local employment in light of this legislation," Daniels said.

There is no guarantee of a vote tonight, Dominello said. Because the resolution is not specific, enforcing the measure could be difficult. It should, however, provide a better outlook as to whether or not the city will pursue a PLA.

"We will have to see the outcome of this meeting," Dominello said.

# Meriden Committee of the Whole to talk about project labor agreements tonight

**Record-Journal staff | Posted: Thursday, May 17, 2012 8:19 am**

MERIDEN — The City Council Committee of the Whole meets this evening to discuss a resolution to maximize local employment and encourage the hiring of local minorities, women, veterans and businesses -- language put forth in a resolution by council Chairman Brian Daniels -- through a project labor agreement.

The decision on whether or enter into a PLA concerns the proposed \$220 million renovations of Maloney and Platt high schools.

A PLA, submitted by union workers, would be negotiated with each union involved in the project. It would set goals similar to those expressed in Daniels' resolution, but require non-union contractors to pay union dues and other fees and use some union labor if they were to win a bid.

The discussion tonight will be focused on how recent legislation, passed by the state Senate and House of Representatives and expected to be signed by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, would affect agreeing to a PLA.

The legislation allows - but does not require - municipalities to negotiate with unions and set the terms and conditions of public projects before any bids are awarded. It stipulates that companies unwilling to accept the terms of a PLA are deemed ineligible for a contract award.

The meeting is tonight in City Hall council chambers, Room 206 at 142 E. Main St.

# Words and fists fly during PLA meeting at Meriden City Hall

**Dan Brechlin | Posted: Friday, May 18, 2012 12:00 am**

MERIDEN — There were arguments, verbal digs and even fisticuffs at City Hall Thursday evening as the City Council debated whether to use a project labor agreement for the \$220 million high school renovation projects.

The council, acting as a committee of the whole, was set to hear the pros and cons of a PLA, which is an agreement negotiated with unions in order to maximize the employment of local people, minorities, women and veterans on the projects. Councilors were also set to learn about recently approved state legislation that could affect their decision on a PLA.

Ultimately, the committee took up the option of voting on a resolution, brought forth by Council Majority Leader Brian Daniels, which set similar goals to a PLA. Before voting took place, however, an amendment was proposed to allow City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior to open negotiations on a PLA.

The vote on the amendment was 6-6, with Republicans Dan Brunet and Kevin Scarpati, We the People members Bob Williams and Walter A. Shamock Jr. and Democrats Matthew C. Dominello Sr. and Steve Iovanna voting against it.

With the tie vote, the amendment dies at the committee level. The resolution, however, will continue after Daniels called for a reverse roll call vote. The reverse roll call allowed Daniels, alphabetically near the top of the list, to see how it would play out and vote against his own resolution. The resolution will now allow the City Council to take up the motion at Monday's meeting.

With the resolution to be voted on Monday, it is likely the amendment to start negotiations on a PLA will be brought up again. If the votes are even again, Mayor Michael S. Rohde will have a rare chance to decide whether or not a PLA is in the best interest of the city. Thursday night, Rohde would not say which way he would vote.

"I'll be making my comments on Monday night," Rohde said. "I have studied this carefully and attended most of the meetings. I will be voting on Monday."

Throughout the night, the debate for and against a PLA was intense. The night kicked off with 40 minutes' worth of public comment, followed by time for Connecticut Central Labor Councils attorneys to speak, as well as Lelah Campo, who represents the Associated Builders and Contractors of Connecticut, which opposes PLAs.

City-hired attorney Michael Donnelly also spoke, noting that the city could still be sued under the recently passed state legislation. Donnelly suggested the council either hire someone to do an independent study on the issue or thoroughly discuss a portion of the legislation that addresses whether a PLA would be in the best interest of the city.

The council opted not to do so and each councilor had time to express an opinion. Daniels, who has said he wanted to hear both sides of the issue, spoke passionately about the use of a PLA. He noted that the state's Office of Fiscal Analysis wrote that a PLA would not increase the cost — contrary to what City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior has said he believes.

Councilor Dante Bartolomeo, a Democrat, added that, despite each of the six lawyers in the room having different takes, she feels the city likely would be sued if councilors opted for a PLA.

"You can get sued for pouring coffee these days," Bartolomeo said.

Trevor Thorpe, a Democrat, agreed. He noted that the city has been sued during school building projects, but all the suits have been thrown out.

Brunet spoke out against the PLA, citing legal liability, cost concerns and his view that a PLA could discourage contractors from bidding.

"The only lawyer here who thinks there are no problems and there won't be lawsuits is Councilor Daniels," Brunet said. "The city manager and the city's purchasing agent want no part of it. It's unnecessary and unwanted by the city leadership."

Iovanna, a Democrat and an architect, said he spoke from experience.

"I'm pretty sure I'm the only person on the council who can say they have managed a multimillion-dollar construction project," he said. "There are a million other factors not relating to a PLA that determine whether or not construction projects come in on budget or on time."

Multiple councilors took verbal jabs at each other, including Brunet toward Daniels after Daniels had taken a dig at the minority-party councilors earlier in the evening. Dominello and Councilor Anthony Tomassetti also had words when Tomassetti tried to put the amendment to a vote. Without all councilors having had a chance to speak, Dominello told him a vote would not happen yet, despite a motion having being made and seconded. Dominello later had words with Thorpe, who also asked for the vote to take place immediately.

A scuffle broke out during the meeting when city resident John York stood up in the middle of the meeting and pointed at the Connecticut Central Labor Councils' attorney and demanded he be able to work on the project. When York walked toward the crowd and continued talking, despite attempts to settle the situation, a union member stepped in between, ushering him away.

York began pushing back and struck him multiple times. Thorpe, a former police officer, got between the two and was able to take York out of the room and restrain him with the help of others. York was not arrested, but eventually led away by police.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, York was the first to speak and promised to "behave myself." York has, on occasion, been loud and vocal during public comment sessions.

Daniels' resolution will now go to the City Council at Monday's 7 p.m. meeting.



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## Meriden: Complicated issue led to simple vote: 6-6

Dan Brechlin | Posted: Saturday, May 19, 2012 10:37 pm

MERIDEN — With six lawyers attending Thursday's City Council Committee of the Whole meeting, and each offering different opinions, councilors were left to make one of the most controversial decisions in recent city history. When the vote on whether or not to use a project labor agreement for the \$220 million renovation of the city's high schools finally came in, it was a 6-6 tie.

A tie for any major resolution is rare for the City Council, with the Democratic Party having held a strong majority for years. Unlike many votes recently in which the Democrats were united, Democrats Steve Iovanna and Deputy Mayor Matthew C. Dominello Sr. voted against a project labor agreement. It is now likely that Mayor Michael S. Rohde, a Democrat, could have the final, tie-breaking vote.

Both former Mayor Mark D. Benigni, who is now superintendent of schools, and Council Clerk Lori Canney said they could not remember a vote that required a tiebreaker.

"The evenly divided vote reflects the diversity of opinions received from both the public and the interested parties," said City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior, who has opposed a PLA.

Kendzior was one of the six attorneys at the meeting. The others were Council Majority Leader Brian Daniels, city-hired attorney Michael Donnelly, Corporation Counsel Michael Quinn, a lawyer representing the trade unions, and another who is involved in pending litigation with a PLA. There were several opinions about the likelihood of litigation, and even the interpretation of new legislation.

A project labor agreement, or PLA, proposed several months ago by union laborers, would be negotiated through unions, and sets forth conditions for the projects. It would set goals for hiring local, minority, women, veteran and apprentice labor. It would also prevent strikes and work stoppages, among other stipulations, and would require non-union firms to pay union dues should they win a bid.

Recently enacted state legislation would likely limit possible litigation against municipalities should they choose to use a PLA. Most of the attorneys pointed to a section of the bill that contains six items the council would want to consider in determining whether a PLA was in the public's best interest.

The items include the efficiency, cost and direct and indirect economic benefits to the public entity, the availability of a skilled workforce, the prevention of delays on the project, the safety and quality of the project, the advancement of minority and women-owned businesses, and employment opportunities for the community.

Donnelly suggested the council either thoroughly address all six on the council floor or hire an independent firm to conduct a study. The study would likely cost up to \$50,000 and take "several weeks." Even then, Donnelly said, it could result in legal issues.

"I would at least debate amongst yourselves how this situation fits within these six items," Donnelly said.

Despite legal concerns, Daniels pushed heavily for a PLA. Daniels said the city should not be worried

about possible litigation and that the benefits outweigh the negatives.

“I can tell you the results of the study once you tell me who was hired,” Daniels said. “The city can be sued. It has happened in the past at Lincoln (Middle School). That was thrown out; there was no merit.”

Daniels, who proposed an initial resolution with goals similar to a PLA, discussed the six items while making an amendment for Kendzior to begin negotiations on a PLA. The rest of the council did not specifically speak about the six items in the legislation.

Each councilor was able to state his or her case, with Dominello and Iovanna two of the last to speak. Dominello suggested that a PLA would increase costs. Iovanna, an architect, said several other factors determine whether or not a project would be finished on time and on budget. Iovanna added that he was elected by the people and would make a decision for the people, taking politics out of the vote.

With a 6-6 vote, the amendment died in committee, but Daniels was able to keep his original resolution alive. It will be addressed at Monday’s council meeting, where the same amendment will likely be proposed. If it continues at 6-6, by City Charter, Rohde will have the final vote.

Rohde told the Record-Journal immediately following the meeting that he would not publicly address the vote until Monday night.

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An excerpt from the new law, Sec. 5, a:

Notwithstanding the provisions of any general statute, regulation or requirement regarding procurement of goods or services, a public entity may require a project labor agreement for any public works project when such public entity has determined, on a project-by-project basis and acting within its discretion, that it is in the public's interest to require such an agreement. In making such determination, the public entity may consider the effects a project labor agreement may have on (1) the efficiency, cost and direct and indirect economic benefits to the public entity; (2) the availability of a skilled workforce to complete the public works project; (3) the prevention of construction delays; (4) the safety and quality of the public works project; (5) the advancement of minority and women-owned businesses; and (6) employment opportunities for the community.

# Meriden City Council meets tonight on controversial project labor agreement issue

**Record-Journal staff | Posted: Monday, May 21, 2012 8:08 am**

MERIDEN — The City Council meets tonight and is expected to vote on a resolution amendment that, if passed, could lead Meriden to enter a project labor agreement on the renovation work at Platt and Maloney high schools.

Last week, verbal sparring and a physical altercation were followed by a tie vote during the meeting of the council, acting as a Committee of the Whole, on an amendment to allow City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior to open negotiations on a PLA.

The amendment was to a resolution by council Majority Leader Brian Daniels to maximize local employment and encourage the hiring of local minorities, women, veterans and businesses for the work on the high schools.

The resolution is set to be acted upon by the council tonight, and it is likely the amendment to allow Kendzior to open negotiations will be proposed again, and another tie vote would mean Mayor Michael S. Rohde will be called upon to cast a vote to break the deadlock.

Rohde declined Thursday to say which way he would vote if this were come to pass.

The meeting will be held in City Hall council chambers, 142 E. Main St. at 7 p.m.

## Meriden City Council approves labor pact

**Dan Brechlin | Posted: Tuesday, May 22, 2012 12:00 am**

MERIDEN — The city will be using a project labor agreement on the proposed \$220 million renovations of Maloney and Platt high schools.

Mayor Michael S. Rohde cast a rare tie-breaking vote at Monday's City Council meeting to ensure the use of a PLA. Republicans Dan Brunet and Kevin Scarpati, We the People members Walter A. Shamock Jr. and Bob Williams, and Democrats Steve Iovanna and Matthew C. Dominello Sr. opposed the PLA.

The vote to use a PLA, which came as an amendment by Majority Leader Brian Daniels, requires City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior and the legal staff to begin drafting a labor agreement. The amendment would also require the establishment of a three-person committee — Rohde and two people he appoints — should there be any labor disputes.

The PLA sets forth conditions for the projects including goals for hiring local, minority, women, veteran and apprentice labor. It would also prevent strikes and work stoppages, among other stipulations, and would require non-union firms to pay union dues should they win a bid.

Though there are “solid and compelling arguments on both sides of the vote,” Rohde said he would vote in favor of the PLA after recent legislation received bipartisan support, allowing PLAs and lessening the likelihood of litigation. He also said he supported the provisions set forth in PLAs.

Councilor Brian P. Daniels has been a firm supporter of the PLA for the projects, but his proposal drew heavy criticism. Brunet was the first to speak against it, noting that this version of the amendment had been reviewed earlier neither by the full council nor by Kendzior. Daniels was critical of Brunet earlier this month for proposing amendments at a City Council meeting that had not been discussed before.

Councilor Kevin Scarpati followed with an amendment to Daniels' amendment. His proposal was to put the pieces of the high school projects out to bid both through the PLA and without the PLA. The results, Scarpati said, would show which method would be cheaper for the city.

Daniels responded that Scarpati's amendment made “no sense,” before Councilor Steven J. Iovanna made a case in favor of it.

“What Councilor Scarpati proposed is actually done quite often on federal projects,” he said. “It would basically bid the project both ways.”

Iovanna added that the city has already hired construction managers at risk, architects and engineers to oversee the projects to ensure that they come in on time and on budget. The construction managers would be at fault if the provisions were not met. One of the highlights of the PLA would be to ensure that the projects are finished on time and on budget. The city is also set to hire program managers to oversee the projects.

Councilor Cathy Battista took exception to Scarpati's amendment, similar to Brunet's criticism of Daniels' proposal, noting that it had not been brought before the Council before Monday's meeting. Scarpati fired back, saying he had "done my homework," including meeting with Kendzior earlier in the day. Kendzior said he was not familiar with projects being done that way.

Kendzior remained opposed to the idea of a PLA at Monday's meeting.

"The data shows school construction projects done with a PLA have a higher cost," he said.

"From a staff position," he said, doing the project without a PLA "is the most effective and least likely to be legally challenged. We can set hiring goals within the bid packages and shape them so smaller companies in Meriden are able to compete."

Councilor Hilda Santiago defended the PLA and the goals it sets because of the success past ones have had in hiring local workers.

"We need to make sure we take care of our own in Meriden," Santiago said.

Shamock, however, noted that several professionals, including Kendzior, oppose PLAs.

"In all of my years on City Council," Shamock said, "I've never seen councilors disregard the professional opinions of the City Manager, the School Building Committee Chair (Dominello), the city's purchasing agent (Wilma Petro), the city-hired attorney, Councilor Iovanna, who is a professional architect ... After all of the professionals say not to go with a PLA, why would we put ourselves in this position to drive up the cost to taxpayers?"

Daniels' amendment was ultimately approved in a 7-6 vote, as was his original resolution to maximize local employment, along with other provisions similar to the PLA.

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How they voted

How city councilors voted on whether to use a PLA for the high school renovation projects:

Bartolomeo yes

Battista yes

Brunet no

Daniels yes

Dominello no

Iovanna no

Rohde yes

Santiago yes

Scarpati no

Shamock no

Thorpe yes

Tomassetti yes

Williams no

## Meriden city councilor felt pressure of PLA vote

Dan Brechlin | Posted: Wednesday, May 23, 2012 7:46 pm

MERIDEN — City councilors stood firm in their positions on whether or not to use a project labor agreement for the \$220 million renovation of the city's two high schools.

But that doesn't mean it was easy.

Democrat Steve Iovanna, elected this past November to an Area 1 council seat, made no secret that he felt pressure to side with fellow Democrats in favor of a project labor agreement, or PLA, that will direct construction work on the high schools to local trade unions. Iovanna, an architect for BL Cos., opposes using a PLA.

"Stomach in KNOTS!!" he wrote on the social networking website Twitter shortly before Monday's council meeting.

Iovanna is one of a handful of councilors who use Twitter to send out brief messages or Tweets about city business. Since last Thursday, when the City Council, acting as a Committee of the Whole, deadlocked 6-6 on a PLA, a number of Iovanna's tweets have dealt with the issue.

"To know what is right and not do it is the worst cowardice," Iovanna Tweeted Saturday, quoting Confucius.

The council voted again on Monday, and again it was 6-6. The tie was eventually broken by Mayor Michael S. Rohde, also a Democrat, in favor of going with a PLA. Iovanna and Matthew C. Dominello Sr. were the only Democrats to vote against the PLA.

The agreement negotiated between the city and local labor unions will set forth conditions for the high school projects, and include goals for hiring local, minority, women, veteran and apprentice labor. It would also help prevent strikes and work stoppages, among other stipulations, and would require non-union firms to pay union dues should they win a bid. Proponents say project labor agreements typically make jobs come in on time and under budget.

But Iovanna says he has extensive work experience with both PLA and non-PLA projects, and that other factors determine whether a project stays on schedule and on budget. He noted that the city has hired construction managers for each project who would be at fault for any major problems.

"I knew that, in my mind, a PLA was not the right thing for the city of Meriden," he said Tuesday. "I want to do what's best for the city and taxpayers. That's why I'm there."



Dominello said he opposed the PLA because he prefers that union and non-union contractors have an even playing field. He also believes there will be additional costs associated with the agreement and is concerned it will expose the city to lawsuits, as lawyers have warned.

Unlike the freshman councilor, Iovanna, Dominello has close to 30 years of experience on the council and serves as School Building Committee chairman. Dominello defended Iovanna Wednesday.

“Steve was 100 percent right,” he said. “He’s an architect and he knows the ups and downs with these kinds of projects. I have a lot of respect for him.”

Although Iovanna admits feeling pressure, he said no one tried to influence his vote.

“Nobody ever told me to vote or to do this or that,” Iovanna said. “All of the people who I’ve been working with (on the council) and who I’m close with, everybody in the room has got one viewpoint ... It’s a tough thing to stand up and say ‘I don’t agree.’

“It’s pretty clear how your party wants you to vote,” Iovanna added.

Majority Leader Brian Daniels said that since he joined the council five years ago, voting for what you believe in and for your constituents has been important.

“We’ve been very clear in our own caucus that people should be voting the way they believe they should be voting,” Daniels said. “We don’t bully or force the party-line vote.”

That said, Daniels was critical of Iovanna’s vote.

“If you go back and look at the statements by Councilor Iovanna on the floor, there’s not one legitimate concern that showed he should have voted against it,” Daniels said. “He had the opportunity last Thursday and last night to bring (the concerns) out specifically.”

While Daniels said he and other Democrats would not bully members of their caucus, he said he would expect Democrats to stay in line with party principles when a vote gets close. Daniels said the healthcare provided with unions and a “safe work environment” fall under those principles.

But Dominello said other concerns, such as the effect on taxpayers, can outweigh party allegiance and that councilors have to vote their conscience. He took issue with Daniels’ comments.

“That’s not being honest and fair with the community,” Dominello said. Iovanna “voted his conscience. No one was going to push him into it and no one was going to push me. (Daniels) should answer why he was so adamant to get this passed. ... Just because you’re in politics for the party doesn’t mean you have to vote that way all the time. What kind of system is that? That’s saying forget the people, forget the taxpayer.

“You don’t have to be a college graduate to figure this stuff out,” Dominello added, “you just need common sense and experience. Our principles are the taxpayer No. 1. (Daniels) better start learning.”

But Democratic Town Committee Secretary Craig Hanson also criticized Iovanna shortly after Thursday’s committee vote.

“I am very disappointed on your vote re(garding) PLA This is not the Democratic Party I know,” Hanson Tweeted to Iovanna.

**“Anti-PLA does NOT equal anti-union. It equals PRO-competition!” Iovanna Tweeted later on.**

Iovanna’s wife, Julie Giantonio, who serves on the Democratic Town Committee, responded to Hanson on her Twitter account, saying, “Sometimes Mr Hanson, people need to do what they feel is right.”

**Hanson, who later deleted his Tweets, added that “this is the slap in the face (for) Chris Donovan” and “The Dems are supposed to be for Unions.” Donovan, the state House speaker and a Meriden Democrat running for Congress, is a former union official who supports PLAs. He attended Monday’s council meeting.**

The PLA had been proposed by Daniels through an amendment to a related resolution. Along with the party principles, Daniels said he thought he could sway some votes by adding to the original PLA amendment. The final resolution includes a committee to handle labor disputes, which he discussed with some of the council before Monday’s meeting.

Rohde, who will chair the committee with two appointed councilors, said it was a good idea. He was not surprised when the votes remained the same, however, despite hearing rumors of councilors changing their positions.

“Everybody made their stand pretty forcefully,” Rohde said, referring to Thursday’s Committee of the Whole meeting. “It’s pretty hard to pull back once you do that ... You never know until all of the votes are in.”

Daniels said he felt the right decision was made. A PLA will not drive up costs, he said, and is favorable because of its focus on hiring local laborers.

**“A lot of the concerns that were raised were theoretical,” Daniels said.**

But Rohde also acknowledged that Iovanna was in a difficult position and said a vote of this magnitude only comes up every “five or six years.”

“He was in a position he had never been in before; it has a lot of different influences,” Rohde said. “He has his own take as an architect, there’s the politics of it. It was a very difficult position and he tried to do the best he could with it.”

Following Monday's vote, Iovanna Tweeted: "Gonna sleep good tonight!!" On Tuesday, he sent out several other Tweets thanking people for supporting him.

"I want to thank everyone who called, emailed and texted words of support today! Feels great #sticktoyourguns," he Tweeted.

With councilors no longer stressing over the PLA vote, the pressure now shifts from the City Council to the trade unions, Rohde said.

"There's a sense of relief," he said. "Because it's such a high-profile case, the trade unions will be under the microscope in this project. They understand the implications. There's a lot at stake to bring this in on budget."

Record-Journal Managing Editor Eric Cotton contributed to this report.

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# Meriden council debate getting harsh

By Dan Brechlin | Posted: Saturday, May 26, 2012 11:33 pm

MERIDEN — In the past month, the City Council has been faced with one of its most important decisions of the year, the city budget, and one of its most important of the last five to 10 years: whether to use a project labor agreement on the renovations of Maloney and Platt high schools.

Difficult decisions often come with tense and in-depth debate, but the latest arguments have been some of the most heated in recent memory. There have been direct confrontations, calling out of certain councilors and very few members seeing eye-to-eye on the issues.

Disagreement began May 7 at the council's annual meeting to approve the city budget. There, Minority Leader Dan Brunet, a Republican, proposed a series of amendments. While none would have a dramatic effect on the budget, if any, some took issue with the proposals and their timing.

At the meeting, Democratic Mayor Michael S. Rohde and others voiced disapproval of the amendments because they had not been brought up at other meetings. City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior called them "irresponsible." Rohde followed the meeting two weeks later with a prepared statement about the importance of the city budget meeting and need for thoughtfulness, seriousness and commitment.

"This year, we have not seen this from members of the minority party," Rohde said, reading the statement. "To just vote no on the budget and claim you are looking out for the interest of the taxpayer when you offer no alternative to meaningfully cut taxes is without substance, and an insult to those who make serious and thoughtful budget decisions mindful of balancing the needs of the city with the taxpayers' ability to pay."

Rohde and Councilor Dante Bartolomeo, a Democrat, questioned Brunet's attempt to not fully fund the refurbishment of City Park. The questioning continued from others as Brunet and other minority councilors proposed amendments.

Then came a questionable vote, in which Brunet, fellow Republican Kevin Scarpati, and We the People members Walter A. Shamock Jr. and Bob Williams voted in favor of the budget. All were confused about what they had voted on, and their votes were reconsidered and changed so that the budget vote was split between Democrats and minority parties.

The following day, council Majority Leader Brian Daniels, a Democrat, was critical, calling it the beginning of the 2013 election process. With few reasons to complain about the city, Daniels said nitpicking the budget could begin a negative campaign. Daniels and Rohde have also pointed out that Shamock voted for the budget at a council Finance Committee meeting before voting against it the following week.

After the budget passed, the council had to approve the tax rate. A usually quick meeting included a handful of comments aimed at other parties.

Daniels noted he would vote in favor of the tax rate after the minority parties offered unsuccessful amendments that could have raised the tax rate. Shamock was quick to take exception.

“I’ve never seen a political statement, or what (Daniels) tried to do on the budget rate,” Shamock said. “That’s the first time I’ve seen somebody chastised for making amendments.”

After its approval and Rohde’s comments calling the minority parties’ efforts an “insult,” Brunet and Scarpati stormed out of the room, clearly upset by the remarks. The Committee of the Whole meeting with a proposal for a project labor agreement followed.

There, the digs between councilors continued and included Deputy Mayor Matthew C. Dominello, a Democrat, who was responding to Councilors Anthony D. Tomassetti and Trevor Thorpe, also Democrats. Tomassetti and Thorpe were trying to put the matter to a vote after more than two hours of debate before Dominello cut them off, despite a motion to vote. The two sides argued, with Dominello stating that not everybody on the council got a chance to talk.

“You’re out of line,” Dominello told Thorpe.

A similar argument took place four days later when it was clear the City Council meeting would not be a short one.

“We have explored all of the roads that can be traveled last week,” Dominello said.

Corporation Counsel Michael Quinn, however, advised that every councilor should be given a chance to speak.

Brunet had been one of the first to speak after Daniels brought an amendment to the table that had yet to be reviewed by Kendzior.

“I think it’s rather inappropriate to do without the city manager being aware of it,” Brunet said, alluding to the same thing he had been told two weeks prior.

Scarpati proposed amending Daniels’ amendment, to no avail. Democrat Cathy Battista quickly responded, nearly quoting Brunet, chastising Scarpati for his proposal. Scarpati, having talked with Kendzior and some other councilors, returned the favor.

The vote eventually supported a project labor agreement, 7-6, with Rohde casting the tie-breaking vote. With the dissension among voters, the pot was further stirred and some, including Shamock, were left upset.

“It left a bad taste in my mouth,” he said, discussing Kendzior and other city officials going against a PLA and still seven councilors voting in favor of it. “It was a slap in the face to every taxpayer in the city of Meriden.”

Dominello was also perturbed by the vote, discussing the possibility of the PLA becoming more about politics than the taxpayer.

“Our principles are the taxpayer No. 1. (Daniels) better start learning,” Dominello told the Record-

Journal.

With the two significant votes over with and final, and few votes as noteworthy coming up, the bad feelings could soon die down. After the budget vote, however, Daniels said it may not and anticipated further disagreements between councilors and, specifically, political parties

“The sad thing is, I expect that this will just be the beginning,” he said.

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# Non-PLA Hanover job shows 47% local labor

Dan Brechlin | Posted: Saturday, June 2, 2012 10:55 pm

MERIDEN — One big advantage to using a project labor agreement are the goals it sets for local and minority hiring, according to city councilors who supported a PLA for the \$220 million renovations of Maloney and Platt high schools.

Without a PLA, some members of the council said they worried that few if any local workers would gain employment on the large construction jobs. A PLA, also known as a community workforce agreement, is a pact with local trade unions making them the sole bargaining agent on a project. While non-union companies are still allowed to bid on work, critics say PLAs create an uneven playing field.

City Purchasing Agent Wilma Petro was one of a few members of the city's professional staff who, along with the city manager, recommended against using a PLA at Platt and Maloney. The council deadlocked on the question and Mayor Michael S. Rohde broke the tie in favor of reaching an agreement with the trade unions, which is now being negotiated. It will likely set a goal of hiring local contractors for 30 percent of the work.

Meriden already has a school construction project under way at Hanover School. Though on a smaller scale, valued at about \$7.3 million, the non-PLA Hanover project shows nearly half of the hours worked on the project from its inception through March were by Meriden residents.

Since ground was broken in early December, nearly 2,100 hours had been logged on the project through the end of March, according to certified payroll documents. More recent documents were not yet available.

Over the span of those hours, 47 percent, or close to 1,000 hours, were logged by Meriden residents. All of the Meriden residents worked for a single company: ACV Concrete LLC. ACV, which also hired a Wallingford man and Waterbury man for the project, was in charge of the building foundation work at Hanover.

The other workers to log significant hours were from out of the area, including those doing site work from Coastland Enterprises LLC, based in Middlefield. Coastland logged more than 500 hours of labor through three employees over the four-month span.

The Hanover project, which includes the addition of a wing for all-day kindergarten, is scheduled to be completed by Nov. 2 of this year. While the 47 percent is a good number, Petro said, it will likely dip. Petro, however, said she would not be surprised to see more local workers doing construction on the project.

Several area companies have won bids for work to take place later on in the construction process. They include a Plantsville company that will do all of the painting, a Berlin company that will install insulation and a Wallingford company that will construct the ceilings. The architect for the project is also a Meriden resident, the surveying company is from the city and the asbestos and PCB abatement were performed by

a company owned by Meriden residents.

City Council Majority Leader Brian Daniels, who was a firm supporter of a PLA, said he did not have any thoughts about the number of hours logged by Meriden workers so far. Daniels did, however, point to the redevelopment of Chamberlain Heights. Despite Meriden-based LaRosa Building Group being the general contractor, many have speculated that few city residents are getting work on the more than \$25 million project.

“That was the one I know caused a lot of concern,” Daniels said.

The Chamberlain Heights project does not require certified payrolls to be submitted, said David McCarthy, the project manager, who works for Jonathan Rose Cos. McCarthy supplied a list, noting that of the 47 subcontractors, 11 were from Meriden or adjacent towns. Some of the local companies performed work that includes supplying lumber, installing drywall, installing heating and air conditioning, and some painting.

“I think the above list demonstrates that a meaningful proportion of the Chamberlain Heights workforce either lived in Meriden or immediately surrounding towns, or worked for businesses based in the Meriden area,” McCarthy wrote in an email.

City Council Minority Leader Dan Brunet, who opposed a PLA for the high school projects, said the information about local workers for the Hanover project is encouraging.

“Obviously it’s much smaller in scope than the high school projects,” Brunet said. “Forty-seven percent of the labor being from Meriden residents is great news, though.”

Petro, confident that plenty of local non-union companies would bid on the project, suggested the city place its own goals into bidding documents for the high school projects that the construction managers and city could help to enforce. She pointed to the renovations at Bristol’s two high schools, which do not have a PLA and had no language from the city setting goals.

“Bristol did a scope review on the number of local guys working on the jobs and they still had about 20 percent of their workers from the city,” Petro said.

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# Career fair in Meriden attracts job seekers in construction

By Dan Brechlin, Record-Journal staff | Posted: Tuesday, July 31, 2012 11:59 pm

MERIDEN — Construction workers will be needed in Meriden. The city is about to renovate its two high schools, a high-speed rail line and new train station are on the way, redevelopment of the downtown Meriden Hub site is expected to start soon, and there are other significant projects planned over the next five to 10 years.

The city held a construction career fair Tuesday in the hope of recruiting workers for some of the local projects, as well as other jobs across the state. The Greater New Britain Building & Construction Trades Council hosted the fair at Platt High School, for people interested in construction jobs.

“This could be a future for me,” said Robert Breton, a 43-year-old Meriden resident looking to join the painters union. “The money seems good ... Things haven’t been good for me in a while, but (the union officials) said they expect things to turn around next year.”

The fair, which included representatives from 14 labor unions across the state, follows the recent vote by Meriden’s City Council in favor of a project labor agreement for the \$220 million renovation of the city’s two high schools. Project labor agreements are collective bargaining agreements with trade unions for specific projects.

“We do this any time there is a project labor agreement,” said David Roche, president of the building trades council.

The council’s decision was based heavily on the union goal of having at least 30 percent of the workers on the project come from Meriden. While it is a goal, Roche said 30 percent is a low number compared to what he is hoping for.

“We will take whatever we can get,” Roche said of those visiting the fair. “Hopefully it will be 40, 50, 60 percent.”

Attending the fair and passing a test, which Breton said he would take Saturday, does not ensure that people will work on local projects, because many already involved in the unions would be hired first. There is a possibility of joining the projects as an apprentice for people new to the unions, or joining other projects around the state.

Dante Bartolomeo, the City Council deputy majority leader, helped to organize the event and said she was proud to be a part of the changing city.

“This is another new beginning,” Bartolomeo said of the high school renovations. “We are offering people more than jobs; we’re offering them careers.”

Bartolomeo is opposing state Sen. Leonard F. Suzio in the 13th District. Suzio, who also supports job growth, said he was skeptical of the number of people who will be hired as a result of the job fair.

“Why are they encouraging more people to get into a sector with record unemployment?” Suzio questioned, noting that more than 1,000 union workers, many unemployed, showed up at a March hearing about the city’s consideration of a project labor agreement. “There were plenty of local union folks claiming they needed work.”

Mayor Michael S. Rohde cast the tie-breaking vote to accept the project labor agreement. The ability to set a goal of hiring local workers and confidence in getting the project done were key reasons he was in favor.

“We are going to do things and do things right,” Rohde said.

There will be a second installment of the career fair on Saturday, at Platt, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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