

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.theday.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Oct 25, 2009

New London City Council endorsements

In the end, personality clashes and big egos detracted from what otherwise was a productive New London City Council tenure.

Six of the seven current council incumbents are seeking re-election to a two-year term. This council did meaningful work: supporting passage of a \$61 million rebuild of two crumbling elementary schools as magnet schools, with the state covering 95 percent of the cost; passing a \$10 million bond package that is rebuilding city roads and sidewalks, refurbishing municipal buildings and parks, and replacing maintenance-prone, gas-guzzling vehicles.

Councilors did yeoman's work to scrutinize every line item before passing a \$79 million municipal budget that lowered taxes for some residents (because of revaluation there was an adjusted tax rate) and beefed up police and firefighting levels. And just recently, they adopted single-stream recycling, cutting city expenses and encouraging recycling.

But when this council failed, it did so in a big way. A year ago it missed the opportunity to send a clearly worded question to voters on whether New London should switch from a city manager to strong mayor form of government. And a few months later, it overstepped its authority by trying to force its choice for a new police chief, rather than abide by the city charter and leave the appointment to the city manager.

But the biggest fumble was the council's handling of hiring a new city manager. It miserably failed and the fallout resulted in a squabble between two Democrats, Michael Buscetto III who applied for the job, and Mayor Wade A. Hyslop Jr., who opposed Mr. Buscetto.

Their disagreement became public when Mr. Buscetto's camp locked Mayor Hyslop out of a campaign meeting, shifting attention from New London's forward momentum to an embarrassing political tiff. And the damage was exacerbated when the two councilors' dislike for one another was cast as a racial issue.

It is going to require teamwork from Mayor Hyslop and Mr. Buscetto to undo the damage. Both are strong leaders in separate camps and bringing their armies together is in the best interest of New London. By providing an unambiguous choice to voters, the city needs to decide once and for all if it wants a strong mayor rather than a city manager. But there will be no progress without peace first. New London is too small for fragmented camps.

The turmoil ending this otherwise productive council term would likely not have occurred if the mayor vs. manager issue had been resolved last November. The newspaper would like to see leadership from Mayor Hyslop and Mr. Buscetto to settle the question and therefore endorses both for re-election.

Mayor **Wade A. Hyslop**, 64, is pastor of Trinity Missionary Baptist Church and served as a former, longtime state representative for the 39th District. He has leadership skills and should use them. The city needs to hear his voice on issues more often and he must commit to giving more to the job of being a councilor. We are disappointed that as chairman of the council's important Public Works Committee, the public record shows he convened just one meeting in the last year. But he knows how to get things done.

Michael Buscetto, 38, is a developer. A newcomer to politics, he quickly became the city's face and voice after garnering the most votes two years ago. He is fearless, outspoken and willing to challenge the status quo so it's not surprising that people either like him or dislike him. He led the city's effective, new approach to budgeting and gets credit for several other initiatives, like

the downtown rental subsidy program that is helping to fill empty storefronts.

We were glad to hear that Mr. Buscetto abandoned his attempt to become city manager. It was a poor fit. His decision to lock Mayor Hyslop out of a meeting over a perceived slight showed poor judgment and surprisingly thin skin. It would serve Mr. Buscetto well to temper his drive with a modicum of diplomacy.

Republican **Adam Spreca**, 39, is a mechanical engineer at Electric Boat. He is a bright, thoughtful one-term councilor who always does his homework and thinks before speaking. Mr. Spreca played an important role in soothing tensions between the council and advocates for the city's homeless community. He is a model of what a city councilor should be.

Republican **Rob Pero**, 40, works as an investigator for the state Department of Consumer Protection and has served on the council since 1995. Already he is eyeing the additional \$2.1 million in tax revenues that Pfizer Inc. will pay in 2011-12 and maintains the city should use it to reduce the tax burden on ordinary citizens and cut the city's debt service. Mr. Pero brings institutional knowledge to the council.

Republican **Martin T. Olson**, 55, works as a sales/estimator for TJ Nelson Home Improvement and as an adjunct business instructor at Mitchell College. Previously he served on the council from 1987-91. He believes the city's salvation is rooted in improving its schools and said success will require community-based support and fiscal transparency. Development of Fort Trumbull is also a priority.

Democrat **Michael E. Passero**, 53, is a city firefighter and a labor and employment attorney. An ardent supporter of a strong mayor form of government, Mr. Passero maintains New London's success will come with the election of a popular elected leader who is accountable to taxpayers. While we see him as a strong council candidate, The Day has some reservations about Mr. Passero's ability to act on the city's fiscal matters while also serving as a municipal employee. He would certainly have to exempt himself from any matters directly pertaining to the fire department and its union.

The final endorsement is a difficult one. We like both Democrat Marie Friess-McSparran and Green Party candidate John W. Russell Jr., who is cross-endorsed by the Republicans. Ms. Friess-McSparran, 47, is a self-described community activist with an eye and ear to the city's schools and neighborhoods, both important constituencies. Mr. Russell, 58, is a former technical liaison at Electric Boat and former restaurant owner. Currently he is manager of the Homeward Bound Treasures Thrift Store on Golden Street, which benefits the local homeless population. Either candidate would do a good job, but by our point system, **John Russell** gets the endorsement by a hair.

Other candidates include Democrats Margaret "Peg" Curtin, John Maynard, both incumbents, Mark Matson and Republicans Andrew Lockwood Sr., Mark Battista and Bruce Rinehart.
