

WHERE I STAND

Questioning mayor's effectiveness

By David McCarthy

What does our mayor do all day?

After a few recent letters I have read, the thought popped into my head. I can't imagine what Harry Rilling does all day. He effectively hired someone (however inexperienced in Norwalk and municipal functions outside legal issues) to do the job of the mayor, and by all accounts, just by showing up, she is doing a better job than he is. Even Board of Education Chair Mike Lyons complimented the mayor's chief of staff and all she did was walk back and forth between the BOE and union groups while the mayor was off flip-flopping on school repair policies.

The mayor certainly isn't representing Norwalk. We all know he said he would go to Hartford and fight for more ECS money every day before he was elected. When he won, he never went, and instead said all our hope rested in a court case. The court case happened, but the governor is taking away money left and right and threatening to raid our rainy day fund, so that's not going too well.

He certainly isn't fighting for neighborhoods. He was willing to settle and let the mosque be built 24 hours before the council leadership forced the settlement that led to the city buying the property. I was in the room.

He certainly doesn't spend much time on the Walk Bridge. It has already claimed parts of our city, it will tie traffic up, make it difficult to do business, have an



impact on all of us, and part of the aquarium is going to be destroyed. When there were discussions, Mayor Harry was going to stand up for us and he hired lawyers and spent some money. Now that the project is steamrolling Norwalk, we realize that all he did was spend money and got nothing to show for it. When the governor told him to be quiet and sit down, that's exactly what he did — and now a citizen-run board is having to do what our mayor should be doing and fighting Hartford.

He certainly hasn't spent any time on the schools. He avoided the board meetings like the plague, not attending any of them to speak of until he was called on it. He fought the changeover to the new health care plan and actively campaigned against the board's well-researched construction and repair program in favor of an ill-thought-out nonsense approach put together by someone with zero experience in facilities management. The fact that he seemed to take credit for the BOE's progress, which happened entirely in spite of his efforts, literally made me laugh.

He didn't spend any time on the library, actively turning down the opportunity to purchase the neighboring lot, then panic buying

it for twice its value and now seemingly botching that deal, a deal that could have been handled with a boilerplate option agreement. Maybe we are better off when our mayor doesn't get involved.

Our mayor, ribbon-cutting Rilling, a neighbor and friend called him this week, doesn't seem to do anything but continuously campaign. Ever ask him a question? He is the CEO of Norwalk, but every person I speak to has a story of something he is just not aware of, not responsible for, unable to fix, change, or even talk about.

Between the giveaways to developers, caving in to Hartford, not doing anything to make our schools run any better (and quite frankly, playing a part in supporting a scheme that would have made them worse), I still don't know what our mayor does besides shake hands all day.

I don't see any plans for Norwalk, nor any demonstration of leadership. Yet, when anyone dares criticize our Fundraiser-in-Chief, we are being mean to him! We don't know about all the secret meetings he has to go to. We don't know about everything he is doing behind closed doors to let things run on autopilot.

The pressure that the next cut from the state or the inevitable downgrade from the ratings agencies after the rainy day fund gets tapped might happen before the election must be terrible.

David McCarthy is a former Common Council member.