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NL Council Must Stop The Micro-Management

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Add arborist to the list of qualifications necessary to run for New London City Council.

The latest instance of council micro-managing is delaying a citywide \$4 million, 10-mile road, curb and sidewalk improvement project to allow time for councilors to sign off on the maples and oaks slated to be felled as part of the work.

The seven-member council voted unanimously May 18 to reserve the right to inspect and approve the elimination of about 100 trees slated to be axed to make room for the improved roads and sidewalks.

Never mind that the city's public works director and staff spent months studying and planning the project, and that New London's tree warden is involved. Councilors are of a mind that they know better than the professionals.

Like they did when the council's Democratic majority dismantled the city's Office of Development and Planning last year, leaving a city desperate to build its tax base with a mishmash of marketing tools. They ignored the counsel of City Manager Martin Berliner and forged ahead on a promise of "reorganizing" development and planning strategies, which has yet to happen.

This same council of self-appointed tree experts are also specialists in law enforcement. On a 5-2 vote in February, with two Democrats objecting, the council "anointed" its pick for the city's next police chief, Capt. William Dittman, usurping both the City Charter and city manager, who wanted to do a wide-ranging search. In response to the council action, the manager narrowed the search to within the department. A decision awaits.

Repeatedly, this council has overstepped its bounds. It ignores the advice of well-paid, professional staff and this cadre of cab driver, engineering plant operator, mechanical engineer, developer, minister, state investigator, and retiree make emotional, politically-motivated decisions. They thumb their noses at the City Charter and disrespect department heads. And that type of behavior sends a stifling message.

With Mr. Berliner retiring, New London will soon hire a new city manager. Under the charter, the council has the job of enacting legislation, while the manager oversees the administration of government. But don't for a minute think that potential candidates for the job haven't considered the council's heavy-handed ways. Will a new manager run the city, or the know-it-all council?

Councilors have every right to ask questions and point out potential problems. It is perfectly appropriate to send a message to the public works director via the city manager urging caution in cutting down trees. But councilors go out of bounds when they appoint themselves tree dictators. The \$4 million city road project has been in the works for more than a year and the public works department hosted neighborhood meetings to keep citizens informed.

Then, on May 18, a half dozen property owners from the city's south end attend one City Council meeting to voice opposition to cutting down "their" trees and, voila, councilors toss aside the process and shut down the project.

"As bad as it sounds, I think that's what it's come to," said Republican councilor Adam Sprepace, when asked about the council making itself the city's tree arbiters.

It doesn't just sound bad, Councilor Sprepace, it *is* bad.

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