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Serving Eastern Connecticut

New city manager spends first day in Norwich driving, listening

By Claire Bessette

Norwich – New City Manager John Salomone spent Sunday night setting several new “favorites” in his GPS to get ready for his first day on the job Monday.

The city's new top administrator started at 7:15 a.m. at the Public Works Department headquarters, and with half-hour time periods blocked out for each inaugural visit, Salomone trekked to Norwich Public Schools, the Rose City Senior Center, Norwich Public Utilities, the Norwich Fire Department, Police Department, City Hall to meet with the assessor to receive the new grand list and then on the road again to Norwich Housing Authority.

“I found everything,” Salomone said at about 2:30 p.m., shortly before a meeting with Mayor Debercy Hinchey. “And I’m on schedule.”

He had time to haul a few boxes and wall hangings into his second floor office at City Hall, but admitted the room is “a mess” at this point.

Salomone concluded his 15-hour day Monday night by summarizing his day for his first report to the City Council, apologizing at the outset if it sounded like a review of his first day at school.

Salomone, who was named city manager on Jan. 19 and signed an open-ended contract Jan. 27 at a salary of \$150,000 per year, called his first day on the job “a full immersion day.” Salomone said he spent most of the day listening and getting quick look at the various city facilities.

“Terrific employees,” Salomone said of his first impressions of the whirlwind tour. “And that’s the real basis for community service, employees who go the extra mile. That was evident right away.”

Salomone called himself a “hands-on” administrator. He has a police scanner in the car and pays attention to emergency incidents. He will keep meeting with individual departments in the coming days and weeks.

Another early impression is that Norwich's governmental facilities are very spread out, with locations throughout the city. Consolidation can be expensive and difficult, he said, and he plans to put it on his agenda for consideration “in the next year or two.” He also will look at the need for a new city police station. A 2012 referendum soundly defeated a plan to relocate the station on several downtown properties.

Salomone said he will have to set priorities for his growing list of issues to tackle in the coming years. First on that agenda is the proposed 2016-17 city budget. By city charter, Salomone must present a proposed budget to the City Council April 4.

Republicans swept nearly unprecedented majorities on the City Council and Board of Education in November with promises to cut the city's high property taxes.

“My goal is to make decisions clear for the City Council,” Salomone said of the budget. “What they're voting on, what it means, what level of service that would bring. ... It's my first budget. We'll learn together.”