

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE & TAXATION
PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 26, 2025**

ATTENDANCE: Ed Abrams, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling; Atty. E. Camacho
Kendrick Constant, Troy Jellerette, Artie Kassimis, Anne Yang

OTHERS: Esther Murillo, Jared Schmitt, CFO

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Abrams called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. He then reviewed the meeting rules.

ROLL CALL.

Ms. Murillo called the roll. A quorum was present. Mr. Abrams explained that there were 33 people present in the Chambers and 3 individuals who were calling in. Each speaker will have 3 minutes. Time alerts will be given at the 2 minute and 2 ½ minute marks.

PUBLIC HEARING ON THE FY 2025-2026 OPERATING BUDGET

Ms. Barbara Smyth, of Brook Hill Lane, came forward and greeted the Board members. She thanked them for all their hard work on the budget, including the resources for the vulnerable Norwalk residents. Previously, this program had been funded by the Ritter Family Foundation along with another foundation, which the foundations would fund the program for the first three years and then the program would shift over to the City side. Last year, due to budget concerns, the foundations agree to fund one more year.

Ms. Smyth said that the positions that the City was including into the budge were the Family Navigators, who are multi-language individuals who assist resident on a one to one basis and help them obtain the services that they need. Ms. Smyth said that this was a very valuable program and she hoped that the BET would fully fund this community resource hub.

Ms. Alexis McCarthy of Fox Run Road, greeted the Board and explained that she and her husband, David, were calling in. They wished to support the Board of Education budget and thanked the Board for their support of the global community. Both Ms. and Mr. McCarthy have seen other teacher and administrator jump in to help with situation that come up on a daily basis. She urged the Board to pass the 4% increase at a minimum to allow as many of these caring professional as possible to continue. Our children will lose truly great educators and experiences if the staff cuts are made.

Mr. McCarthy then said that the Norwalk program have drawn new residents to Norwalk and increased the property values because buyers compete to live in the District. This was not always

the case. Mr. McCarthy said that he grew up in Norwalk and has lived here all his life. Now as parents, they are sick over the budget cuts in the schools. As business owners, they understand the impact that the increase in taxes may have on local businesses but believe that the benefits of fully funding the schools and continuing their new trajectory of excellence. Mr. and Mr. McCarthy don't want to risk the positive reputation and accompanying boost our schools currently bring to Norwalk.

Mr. Michael Paris was the next speaker. Mr. Paris greeted the Board and explained that he was present in support of the Public Libraries. He requested that the Board reinstate \$50,000 that was removed from the budget request this year. When he moved to Norwalk 30 years ago, the library was a welcome home to him and his children with the many wonderful programs. Those children are now adults and he has a grandchild who he takes to the Library for a Little Legos program. Once the library was about books, but now it is about the Internet and movies and the library has adapted and changed. Recently there was a program about Mount Rushmore given by the sculpturer's son, so it's not just about books anymore. The staff is polite and helpful. They need to be paid so the Library can keep good people. He closed his comments by reiterating his earlier request that they reinstate \$50,000 that was removed from the budget request this year and thanked the Board for their time.

Mr. David Cahill of Broadview Terrace was the next speaker who had called in. He said that he was the proud parent of two NPS students and also explained he had spoken to the BOE and the Common Council about the urgent need to fund the schools. Many people are profoundly displeased with the current board of Ed and the Superintendent for the repeated failure to negotiate effectively. Negotiation means offering options that lead. A one and done budget submission is not negotiation. The parents and taxpayers shouldn't have to scrutinize their budgets. The parents and taxpayers should trust our elected officials to fulfill their responsibilities. Serving on the Board of Ed is serious business, not a social club. During this crisis, central office should be actively communicating progress and posting a revised budget to the public. Not goofy, unnecessary promo videos on Instagram. The lack of seriousness won't be forgotten, and Mr. Cahill plans to vote his frustrations at the ballot box.

Now, sadly, it feels the opportunity for negotiation has passed. 4% is now the best everyone can hope for, knowing the Superintendent plans to take it out directly on schools by cutting staff and programs that benefit our children. The parents and taxpayers now look to you the BET to do the right thing and approve the 4% budget cap. Any further reduction would be devastating.

Now, if the calculations don't support 4%, please don't punish our children. Find the money elsewhere using the rainy day fund for 4% isn't kicking the can down the road. Don't use the fear of a credit rating downgrade as an excuse. This is exactly what rainy day funds are for. Spend less on expensive murals and frivolous land purchases. Without well-funded schools, these beautification efforts paint the dishonest picture of what we have to offer.

Mr. Cahill moved here from New York City 14 years ago because he saw great potential in Norwalk. He chose this beautifully diverse community as the place where he wanted to start my

family. The city's current apartment building blitz aims to attract young professionals and their tax dollars, hoping they'll fall in love with Norwalk and stay to raise a family just as he did.

But a community's worth is ultimately measured by the quality of its schools. Those tax dollars will quickly move to neighboring towns if you continue to slash school budgets, undermining Norwalk's future and possibility. So do the right thing. Please pass the proposed 4% budget cap and if we can found more, find more. Please consider raising it. Thank you for your time.

Ms. Lisa Brinton, of Shorefront Park, greeted the Board members and thank them for all their service. But as the saying goes, the buck stops with you. Ms. Brinton said she had some great points to make tonight. NPS administration costs; ECS revenue and tax abatements. Still, the administration cost is drowning the city and every taxpayer.

Since 2020, administration has doubled by 168 employees, while teacher and para classroom support is flat to slightly down. Student enrollment is flat, ECS funding compared to Danbury, is \$38 million less. We have forfeited millions in property tax abatements, as the Council did last night and two weeks ago.

In the 27 years I've lived here, there has been a school budget gap, but today it's much worse since education makes up 54% of the budget. Ms. Brinton stated that she had provided comparison numbers from 18 and 19 and the 2324 school years. As reported to the state, she also included a city map of the neighborhoods and areas qualifying for tax abatements. The city and taxpayers are struggling with school administrative costs while reading and math scores and teacher morale have hit an all time low.

Student demographics have changed. We have 295 fewer black students and 593 less white students, with ESL students making up the difference. With such drastic change in six years, one would think resources would go to teachers in the classroom. Instead, they've been too many vanity projects and increased administration. It's not just what you spend. About how you spend.

Her second point was that Norwalk is the 8th largest contributor to income taxes in Hartford. The city sends \$180 million to Hartford with roughly 444,444 thousand tax returns and millions in sales tax each year. We get back just \$15 million for our schools despite 70% of the students being high need. The ELL enrollment is double the state average. She provided ECS revenue for what the state considers Norwalk's peer districts as well as the cities getting 10 times more revenue per student than Norwalk does. Danbury, our closest comparison gets \$50 million, a difference of \$38 million or 16% of what we would be our school budget this year.

We have unsustainable development a decade of tax abated development and large scale apartments has meant more money for developers and private equity, but less income for the city and more expense for taxpayers. We don't have a corporate base. Merit 7 is practically empty and our largest employer of the city with over 3700 employees, are 85% reliant on property taxes. 70% coming from residents. The map highlighting the enterprise and opportunity zones from

MLK to Route 1 is grey. That's our bank account. Do we know have any properties receive abatements and how many are in the future pipeline?

In closing you're the financial board. Are we on a sustainable path as a city? Please review the date I've shared with you reduce the budget, stop the tax abatements and get more ECS for our students. Thank you very much.

Mr. Josh Goldstein greeted the Board members and said that he would be speaking about the Community Resource Hub. He thanked the BET for their work during this process. He noted that the Common Council appreciates the work that the BET does.

The Community Resource Hub is a vital program that Mr. Goldstein wanted to address along with my colleague, Council President Barbara Smith. They both support of the Community Resource Hub. Given the national climate, in addition to the vital services of the Community Resource Hub has already provided, it is vital that the City continue to have these programs and have these navigators who serve as a beacon and a source for many community members who fall well under the threshold and whose need for these services really couldn't be more important. Mr. Goldstein feels very strongly that this program has been a vital program for this city, and implored the BET to fund it in the upcoming budget. He thanked them again, for their work and look forward to continue working with them as a member of the Council.

Mr. Wilmer Joseph of Monroe Street was the next speaker to address the Board. He said he was present to express his deep concerns about the City's Operating Budget and Commissioner Yang's comment about the Fair Housing Officer.

His first concern was the Norwalk Public Library, which is more than just books. It's a vital resource for working families, students, job seekers. It's been ten years and its staff, including part time workers, have gone 10 years without raises and are not receiving competitive pay compared in neighboring parents. Part time employees don't even receive benefits. The staff are underpaid, undervalued and underpaid. The library is a cornerstone of education and opportunity, particularly for black and working class residents who rely on its free resources, job assistance and community programming. It's time Norwalk gives the Library the funding it deserves.

Regarding housing, this budget does not do enough to address affordable and displacement rents keep rising and too many families, especially black and working class families, are struggling to stay in Norwalk. If Norwalk not invest in affordable housing and rental assistance, the city will continue to see families push out of the city. This should not come at the cost of housing stability. Yet year after year, the city underfund critical programs while adding the general fund.

Mr. Joseph said he wished to address Commissioner Yang's comments regarding the Fair Housing Officer. Commissioner Yang suggested that Norwalk is no longer needs the Fair Housing Officer because everyone has moved on. But racism and discrimination have not magically disappeared. Mr. Joseph said he had personally witnessed and experienced the barriers that black residents. Based in housing and unemployment and public services to suggest that

protection are no longer necessary ignores the reality of this city. The Fair Housing officer exists because discrimination in rail and removing it would be a step backwards. Norwalk must do better. He urged the BET to prioritize the funding for the Library, and to make the investments in housing along with maintaining the protection for the residents facing discrimination.

Ms. Sarah Alexander, a resident of Friendly Road was the next call in speaker. She explained that she had moved her family to Norwalk from Brooklyn and has a second grader at Wolfpit Elementary along with a four year old that will be going to NPS. She urged the Board to consider approving the 4% BOE increase.

Ms. Alexander spoke about her disappointment in the lack of transparency from the BET. She said that she hoped that the Board of Education Common Council, Mayor Rilling and Superintendent Estrella all felt a deep level and noted that this entire community holds them responsible for this budget crisis. She has heard from the families that have lived in Norwalk for upwards of 10 years or more, they all say the same thing. They knew this was coming. She asked the Mayor, if this the legacy he wanted for the city which he claims to hold so dear? She said that the Board members with all of their qualified years of budget, experience and support from the Mayor himself, who appointed each of you, whether they would be a tax paying citizen who will be directly affected along with thousands of other families and children because of this budget crisis. She said she was not ashamed of the educators who work day in and day out to support the children, regardless of the reckless actions taken by this Board, which has forced everyone to take time to hold this Board accountable. All of those people work very hard. She challenged the Board members to visit each and every one of the NPS locations and look the children in the eyes. If the Board does not help, the people will vote with their feelings.

Ms. Jody Sattler of Highland Avenue came forward and state that she was the Co-chair of the School Governance Council of Brian McMahon High School. Ms. Sattler was present to support the 4% BOE increase.

She asked the BET to prioritize any Board of Ed spending focused on classroom teachers. The BET has gone line by line for every other City Department. The principals are being asked to cut 121 teaching positions, which would be detrimental to our students. All funds allocated to our students are important, but Norwalk is in a financial environment where some tough decisions must be made.

Ms. Sattler had 7 suggestions on expenses that can be cut to save classroom teachers.

1. We cannot afford School Choice with guaranteed busing transportation. costs are expected to increase by 1.15 million, and busing should not be a priority over classroom. The City currently restrict busing for kids who live too close to schools, for example, it is required that you live more than two miles from school to qualify for a bus to Brian McMahon High School. And there's only parking available for seniors, parents. Students currently have to figure out their own transportation to their district school and out of district. Students can do the same
2. There's a review called the School Quality Review. It is a heavy burden on teachers time and takes them away from their students. The SQL Administrator makes over \$200,000 a

year, plus benefits. That is just one example of a high cost employee who doesn't work directly with students. The school budget shows an increase in education administrators from 22 positions to 28 positions.

3. Catered food, training trips, gift cards, logo, swag, publications and other nice to have items must go. These items may be relatively small, but they add up and this spending sends a terrible message in the face of layoffs. There's over \$300,000 requested for travel alone.

4. The wage increase per employee contract is 2.5%. The COLA is also 2.5% for 2025. No one else should get a raise higher than 2.5%

5. We can't afford satellite learning locations. We have space in schools that should be utilized before we pay rent along with a security guard and other staff at off campus locations. Two examples are the Family Center and the Future Ready program. As property services costs are going up over \$1,000,000 this year, we have to cut out these extra locations. The Future Ready program costs over \$750,000 in grant money that could be reallocated. We also have a new elementary school that only has four grades. We should be utilizing that space instead of paying rent in other buildings. 3

6. We need to put a freeze on all outside consultants that cost the district \$5,000,000.

7. There was an efficiency study done and there were good recommendations like combining functions such as Purchasing and the Human Resources departments. We have two communication directors and two IT departments now.

Ms. Sattler requested the BET is to not only set the budget to 4%, but please give direction on spending that favors classroom teachers who directly impact student access. She thanked the Board for their time.

Ms. Diane Lauricella of Little Fox Lane was the next speaker on the phone. She said that she has been speaking about this operating budget for years wanted to consolidate some of what I've said for years.

She wanted to thank the BET for the virtual abilities and their work. She very disappointed because she's been trying to get the public to appreciate more what government is about. There was no link on the web page for the Operating Budget agenda. There could have been a link that should link people right to seeing the line by line operating budget. There was nothing on the homepage of the website and she urges the Board to do this.

There are two elements that make up the budget, because there's usually the educational group and then there are people like me that actually read the other parts of the budget.

Ms. Lauricella said she would limit her comments to expenses. She could see a 4% increase for the Board of Ed. but if and when and only if the following defenses are cut and the following revenues are added.

First for revenues, Norwalk needs a full time grant coordinator. She noted that Mr. Schmitt had been considering this but Norwalk has left millions of dollars on the table and other towns eat Norwalk's lunch. We need a full time grant coordinator and let our people in the departments just assist in the lingo instead of doing the grants, following the grants and finding the grants.

Norwalk also needs to increase enforcement for blight zoning. Health and the money that they could rake in under expenses.

Ms. Lauricella said there should be across the board cuts for electricity and gas, which has just gone up and that is because Norwalk is not taking renewable energy seriously in our public buildings. In fact, Norwalk switched from oil tanks, which she was in favor of, but the District immediately went to gas instead of looking to see whether that particular building could look at renewables, where we are creating electrons, meaning we have reduced electricity and gas, those are very expensive items.

She asked that ECD and the Business Development consider what happens when some of the staff does not feel it is their duty to save money. I saw this with the wasteful West Avenue mural and the money given to the Arts Commission. She thought they were given very bad advice by the staff.

Lastly, under Board of Ed, Ms. Lauricella thought it's too top heavy and agreed with previous speaker, the money should go to the teachers and the paraprofessionals. They said they're going to move the Welcome Center, which Ms. Lauricella has spoken about for ever since it started. It is important to make sure it happens because we have plenty of room in our buildings. Why should we be renting?

She thanked the Board for their time. Please take this seriously and please make sure that you let people know where the budget can be found in any homepage and documents like agendas. Thank you.

Ms. Amanda Trimboli of Cider Lane was the next speaker. She asked the Board to approve or increase the 4% recommended BOE budget that the Mayor and Common Council proposed.

Last year, the recommended 4% budget was capped at 3%, but this year is not the same as last. Even 4% will devastate our schools. The budget cuts the district is facing are way more dire this year than in the last few years. There are 120 teachers jobs on the line and our kids cannot afford to be the victims of these cuts. Ms. Trimboli said \$242 million is not a shoestring budget and not an insignificant amount of money to invest in our schools. But with the way that everything is inflated these days, the District needs as much money as they can get to support our student population in more ways than one.

She suggested last week to the BOE that it would be a great idea for all of them to sit in our schools and observe what goes on in a day. It would be great for all of the BET to do the same, so everyone can really understand how many staff members it takes for a school day to function well. In her opinion there aren't enough staff members in the buildings, but unfortunately there will be fewer staff in all the schools next year. COVID was a time that she hoped that no one has to live through again. It was also an incredibly challenging time for our kids, especially in

school. She gave the district a lot of credit for the fact that they had school in person because we were one of the few Districts in the State that did this.

She pointed out that in about 7 to 8 years, the COVID kids will have graduated high school? They are still very much in this and feeling the effects from this and it's not going away anytime soon. The district was forced to create jobs with COVID dollars a few years ago because the city flat funded them, and now all those COVID funds are gone. This created a huge problem that has had a lasting snowball effect. Going forward, she implored the Board all to find a way to work cohesively with the Common Council, the mayor, the BOE and the public. There needs to be more discourse throughout the year to come to better solutions on how to deal with these challenges. It seems that this discourse just happens around budget season. Norwalk is her home and it's also home to her two children who are in elementary school and have many more years ahead of them in this lovely city. She has realized how generational Norwalk truly is. If the cap is lowered, they will be failing our kids who are the future generation of Norwalk. Please don't fail them. Thank you.

Ms. Nicol Ayers of Ohio Avenue greeted the Board and said she was the Chairperson of the Community Service Committee for the Common Council. She thanked all the members of the BET for their service, service and willingness to hear the public. She was present to speak to the Community Service Hub and address some comments that were made by Commissioners.

She reminded everyone that almost a decade ago Norwalk had NEON, which was our access agency. A lot of residents received a lot of different services from them, from childcare to Head Start to Energy Assistance, food security so on. NEON disappeared over 10 years ago and Norwalk residents had nothing. Norwalk residents were forced to go to Bridgeport and Stamford to get services that they needed to help them live in Norwalk. Then the community service hub and the Navigators program opened and people were able to partner with them. The nonprofit sector helped Norwalk start this all over again, but the administration made an agreement that that would not be forever. Now it is now time for the City to take on that cost of continuing the services that are provided by the Community Service Hub.

It was suggested or asked or by one of the Commissioners about a consult. Ms. Ayers said that she works in the nonprofit industry and to pay a consultant would cost around \$120,000. These are valued resources and if have the Navigators were not available, Norwalk residents would then be forced to go out of Norwalk. Many Norwalk residents do not own car and rely on public transportation. The Navigators are providing a service to those people who need it and who have no other way, so I would ask all you good people who are volunteers who are giving of your time and your talent here, please reconsider and understand that we must keep the community service hub and those Navigators. Thank you.

Elyse Williams of Midrocks Road addressed the Board next. She stated she has two children, one of which is in the NEC Special Education program and the other attends Wolfpit. She was present to support the BOE budget as a parent of a special needs student. She claimed that the 4% increase was actually a decrease in the overall BOE budget while regular prices continue to

climb. Food services are up 10.6% busing by 10%, special education 13.6% and fringe benefits. Such as health insurance premiums by 18.2%. These are all significant portions of the budget and rising much faster than the proposed 4% increase. Cutting Wolfpit's budget will affect the students. Teachers already managing diverse classrooms with rising numbers of MLL currently 23% and SPED learners 19 % will have to deal with even larger class sizes and fewer staff. These challenges will not only be seen in the classroom, but also in the courtroom as parents request costly out of district placements, often \$100,000 or more per student per year. She urged the Board to please get creative and find funding beyond the additional 4% CAP to ensure that we can continue to support all of these children. Ms. Williams thanked the Board for their time.

The next speaker was Mr. Paul Fox of Hanford Place in South Norwalk. He pointed out that neither up-to-date line item budget recommendations nor minutes of the March 20th meeting were published prior to this hearing, making it difficult for concerned residents to get a clear picture of what conclusions the board has reached so that we may make relevant comments.

He was focused primarily on the proposed cuts to the operating budget for the transit district. As someone who depends on the bus and rides nearly every day, he appreciates the important role that NTD plays in providing accessible, affordable public transit to many Norwalk residents. At the first budget hearing in September, he was among over a dozen people who spoke in favor of prioritizing funding to transportation alternatives, including NTD. Proposing a 33% cut to the operating grant for the transit district. Many Norwalk residents rely on bus service, including him. In fact, approximately 4200 people use NTD services daily and as Norwalk grows, he expects that number will increase over the past year. Norwalk Transit District has completed a long overdue comprehensive operational analysis and route redesign and are committed to implementing it this year as required. To make way for the Wall Street St. streetscape improvements planned by TMP. Because entity has few sources for operating funding, it relies on grants like this to maintain its operations. This is the worst time to be recommending a sudden cut to entities operating funding the particular year when they will have to face their grading latest operating challenges in decades. He urged the Board to recommend that the grant be fully funded and not put the reliable operation of our bus service in jeopardy. Thanks for thank you for your attention.

Ms. Allison Cahill of Broadview Terrace and the parents of two elementary school students spoke next. Ms. Cahill is also a teacher in the NPS district. She stated that setting the school budget cap below 4% would have a devastating impact on our kids and even 4% is barely enough. Year after year, the District finds itself here fighting for funding that should be a given. Why our student needs growing? Think back five years, a global pandemic disrupted education in ways we are still grappling with today. Our youngest learners lost months of in person instruction, months that are crucial for mastering foundational skills. Many students continued remote learning beyond that, widening the gap at the same time, Norwalk has seen an influx of new families, some relocating from New York, during COVID others coming from across the world to start a better life these students. The effects of COVID learning loss are real, and they are not going away. The support staff put in place, parents, coaches, interventionist special educators and mental health professionals are critical. And yet their jobs are now at risk.

As a Norwalk parent and teacher, I implore you, do not let our schools and students down. The kids are. Resilient, but they won't recover from these losses. There's too much at stake. We need full funding, nothing less. Thank you.

Ms. Allman of Merwin Street addressed the Board next. Ms. Allman rides the Norwalk buses and trains every day along with a variety of service workers, engineers, engineers and health employees. The planned improvements laid out in the NTD I had planned were heartening. It was surprising to hear of the proposed 1/3 funding reduction. For our transit system, the planned rework of Burnell Blvd. will reduce the Wheels hub capacity and without following through on the associated bus network improvements, it's difficult to see how our transit system will continue to serve our city. I ask you to honor your transit plans rather than cut them this year. Thank you.

Mr. Nick Zerzan of Jean Avenue came forward to speak to the Board. He thanked the Board and the Mayor for their hard work. His three children attend NPS and he is not in a position to send them to private schools. They have received a wonderful education and the last five years have been incredibly challenging. He appreciates all that the Board does because he has to deal with the rising prices for food and heating oil. Most of the school costs are fixed costs and the teachers don't receive large salaries. The District is not in a position to lose 120 staff members. Inflation is the major concern and the costs of operating the District are not going to decrease. He said that the 4% increase is not unreasonable and he was willing to work together to see what can be done for the schools.

Mr. Tanner Thompson of Hillside Place said that he would like to echo the concerns of Mr. Fox and others about the Norwalk Transit District. He served on the Steering committee for the Comprehensive Operational Analysis, also known as NTD. This is a project that has been really years overdue and nothing of its kind has occurred in Norwalk in I think 30 or 40 years. This is the first time that the NTD has completely re-engineered the bus network in multiple decades. The NTD hired one of the best transit consultants, transit planning consultants in the nation to completely re-engineer the route network. That route network will go into effect in August and as Mr. Fox alluded to, this is perhaps the most important operational change to North Transit in a long, long time. It is important that people understand how the network is changing, how they're going to get to school, get to work, get to the doctor, get to the grocery store when all the bus routes are now different. The new network is a huge improvement over the old one. It's more efficient, it offers more frequent service on lines that have the most riders and will serve Norwalk well, but if we don't stick to landing of moving to this new network, and if we don't get the word out effectively to the normal riders who rely on the bus network it will slow down the pace of Norwalk Transit and its impact in Norwalk for years to come. Thank you very much.

Ms. Mona Noor of Pequot Drive was the next speaker. She greeted the Board and stated that she was the chairperson of the Norwalk Public Library Board. She was present to ask for the reinstatement of \$50,000 for the library's part time staff budget. This money will provide raises for 45 part time workers who haven't seen a pay increase in 10 years. These are the custodians who keep the library clean, shelveers who organize the varied materials for the over 28,000

monthly visitors and the library assistants and part time librarians. As you may have seen in Nancy and Norwalk, over the last 10 years, our libraries operating budget has been cut by over \$1,000,000. Much of that has come in the form of full time positions and last year the part time budget was cut \$100,000, making this reinstatement even more critical. She urged the Board to reinstate the funding.

Ms. Becca Stall of Emerson Street was present to request that the NTD budget request not be cut. The NTD is headed for an enormous overhaul of NTD that is going to make it more efficient, faster, more like a service that someone like her would want to use and to cut that off at the legs seems very seems like a really odd choice, but bus is not just for people who are low income. It absolutely does help service industry people get to their jobs, such as part time workers at the library, teachers, paraprofessionals, perhaps students going to Brian McMahon High School who aren't able to have school busing or can't park because they're seniors. If you don't give them a bus to take, they can't take the bus. Ms. Stall would like to be less and less car dependent and as Norwalk builds more transit oriented development both around South Norwalk and East Norwalk, it will be important to show that car free living in Norwalk is an option and NTD is going to be a huge part of that. But it has to have service. It has to have staff, it has to be easy to use and understand. It must be an attractive alternative to driving and that will be made very difficult by a 33% cut to the budget at such a crucial time of the year. Thank you.

Ms. Romney Donald of Stuart Avenue came forward as a concerned parent, resident and community member to speak about the operating budget and challenge the suggestion that the Fair Housing officer position should be removed. Commissioner Yang suggested that Norwalk no longer needs the Fair Housing Officer because Norwalk's moved on, but racism and discrimination have not disappeared. Ms. Donald said he had personally experienced racism and discrimination in workforce housing and there is a serious problem with discrimination on Section 8 and families with children. Ms. Donald utilized services at Fair Housing and removing this position with strict protections from residents who still need them. These services are mandated by a consent decree settlement.

According to Page 7, the City Operating Budget, your intention is to raise revenues by only 1.26 to 1.4% and lowering the mill rate. Inflation currently stands at just over 3% and the labor contracts fall for contractual raises of two to 3%. So your proposed budget does not keep pace with inflation or the labor costs and will require residents to sacrifice services at a time when Norwalk is prospering. Why is the administration making cuts to services and then bank millions of unspent revenues to the General Fund?

The schools are already stretched thin and further constraints will make it harder to retain teachers and provide the resources students need larger class sizes and fewer academic and mental health supports will disproportionately harm black and low income students. Ms. Donald said she supports the state delegation's efforts to adjust the ECS formula to secure more state funding for Norwalk. Housing stability is also at Risk, rising costs and lack of affordable options already displaced families and budget cuts could mean fewer housing programs and delayed assistance.

The Norwalk Public Library also needs fair funding staff, including the part time workers who haven't had raises in over 10 years and don't receive competitive pay or benefits. The library is more than just books, it's a hub for education, career support and community services particularly for black and working class families. They're open seven days a week. It is unacceptable to underfund it while other towns invest in their libraries. Without proper operating funds, these services will be diminished and the residents who rely on them the most, particularly black and working class families, will suffer the most.

She urged the BET to be transparent about the real impact of this budget. Norwalk cannot continue underfunding critical services while hoarding funds in the General Fund. Norwalk must prioritize equity, education and housing, not cuts that hurt the most vulnerable. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Ms. Margaret Watt of Grant Street addressed the Board next. She is the Director of Prevention at Positive Directions, where her work includes serving as project director for the Norwalk Partnership, which is a Community wide coalition to prevent substance misuse and promote mental health wellness in Norwalk youth. In that capacity, she is the one who funds and manages the biannual Norwalk Youth survey conducted in collaboration with Norwalk Public schools. She is also a member of the Norwalk Act Social Emotional Health Leadership team for the city and a parent of two young adults who recently graduated from P Tech and MCC.

Ms. Watt was present to talk about the funding for NPS. The proposed 4% increase is not sufficient to sustain the essential and in fact, life-saving behavioral health services that have been necessary to respond to our youth mental health crisis. She spoke about how the levels of depression had decrease from 2020 to the present. An important reason why we've had the success we've had so far in cutting these rates down is that there has been increased and barrier free access to counseling rate at school. NPS has added school counselors at all levels in response to our response to our data. NPS has also partnered with community agencies to host and provide services in the schools where the kids are spending. Another essential position is the social worker at large. This position goes above and beyond past roles they she supports and manages services to high risk students. She supports school counselors, and she's an absolutely critical liaison between. The community agency is working at a strategic level on all the citywide groups so that we can ensure our kids are supported in their families, classrooms and community. Her role is at risk, and so are the counselors in our middle schools. Norwalk is one of the few towns that hasn't had a teen suicide in recent years.

Ms. Watt urged the Board to please make sure that we keep and sustain the services that are keeping our kids. Moving in the right direction. Thank you.

Ms. Nia Calhoun of Stuart Avenue spoke next. Ms. Calhoun is eighth grader in Norwalk. She said that the City's budgets doesn't just affect adults, they affect the students, too. She spoke about an article that said the budget was limiting the funding for the schools, the libraries and other important services. When budgets are cut, students lose teachers, counselors and even

programs like music, art and sports. These aren't just extras, they help the students learn, express themselves and feel supported.

Ms. Calhoun said Art is her favorite subject and she plans to become an interior designer. Art has helped her to express myself at school. I feel supported by my counselors.

The library is also really important. It's a place where students can go to study, have access to books and technology who might not have it if funding is cut. It would mean fewer resources, fewer programs and less support for students who need it the most. This is especially important for black students and other kids of color who might already face challenges in school if we lose teachers, counselors, art programs and library resources, where do we turn for support and inspiration? We are the future of Norwalk and we deserve to have the resources we need to succeed. Thank you.

Mr. Ben Hanpeter of Haviland Street spoke next and echoed the points mentioned by the previous speakers about the NTD proposed cuts. The NTD is entering a really critical period this year by launching the Comprehensive operational program. It would really be slap in the face to all bus riders and city residents to be cutting their funding right at this time. The federal government is openly hostile to any sort of public transit and funding coming from the feds will probably be harder and harder to come by over the next few years at least, so it's really more incumbent than before for municipalities to support transit districts. Please continue to fund the NTD as proposed. Thank you.

Ms. Marline DeBellis of Gilbert Street was the next speaker. She thanked the Board for their time and dedication to the City of Norwalk, which is an amazing, wonderful place. She was present to support maximum funding for the Norwalk Public Schools and the Public Library. Her daughter is a junior at Norwalk High School and receiving an amazing education. She would not only like to see the 4% increase to NPS, but also would like to see the 9% original request.

Ms. DeBellis also spoke about the Norwalk Public Library and how it strengthens every aspect of Norwalk. It is a hub and a partnership with the public schools with families, with residents of all ages and virtually all organizations. She implored the Board to support maximum funding for Norwalk Public Schools and Norwalk Public Library. Thank you so much for this opportunity to speak. Thank you.

The next speaker asked where the firm accounting was located and noted that he was a teacher. He wished to know where all the revenue was for this thriving city and pointed out that they immediately moved to cut funding to the BOE. They are cutting the arts which may be the only exposure that the babies in Norwalk have to music and the arts.

As a Marine, the speaker often told his squad that they do with less but they adapt. They overcome because they get creative and are flexible. He asked the Board to be creative and flexible. Thank you.

Mr. Ron Sharp of Gilles Lane was the next speaker. He is a taxpayer and 20 year resident of the City. He opposes the proposed cuts to an already modest school budget. Norwalk is a town surrounded by affluent communities that invest significantly in their schools. Their leaders understand that strong schools attract families, drive up property values, and create a thriving local economy. Yet instead of strengthening our schools to compete, we're considering effective cuts that will weaken them further. At his daughter's school, they are already been operating with minimum resources and now, they are looking at even more reductions that will directly affect the classrooms.

Unlike some of our neighboring towns, Norwalk's community is made-up of a diverse range of demographics and income levels. This is one of the greatest strengths in all, but it comes with unique challenges that require proper funding to ensure all students, regardless of background, have access to high quality education, cutting funding effectively really widens the gap and makes it harder for our schools to provide the support, resources and opportunities that every child deserves.

Mr. Sharp pointed out that they Board should note who showed up for this Public Hearing. The students would be present if they could be, but students shouldn't need to come and ask for funding for their schools. Thank you very much.

Ms. Jamie Norbitz of Key Lane, came forward and explained that she has 5 year old in kindergarten at Norwalk Public School and a little one who will be attending Nora public schools in just a few years. It is critical that students get as much money toward their education as possible. It seems crazy that those with power don't seem to understand and naturally approve what is necessary to support children's education the most for parents to have to speak out. And every year the problem seems extreme. 4% was all that was proposed last year and then NPS got only 3% and 4% is again a proposed this year. It's really not enough, but if that's the best the City can do for them, then let the kids get that much. Ms. Norbitz was a teach before becoming a parent and she sees how tight the budgets are in schools and how beneficial having coaches, paras art, education and music and more are for the kids. Learning as little as needs to be cut, the better for teachers to be able to teach effectively and for children to learn. Thank you for your time.

Ms. Becky Wardell of Greenfield Street was the next speaker. She and her husband are both educators in the District and their son attends Nathan Hale for 7th grade. She said that this was the fourth or fifth time she has attended one of these meetings since they moved here 9 years ago. She and her husband are involved in the Nathan Hale PTA and community.

Education is not a business transaction. It's about people, children, teachers and families. It's about what happens when a child walks into a school building each morning and whether that child is happy in the place that they are. They have a chance to feel safe, supported and thrive a lot. Many of the students also come to school knowing that they have two meals a day. What she see every morning when she's in my school is adults who love children and are happy to greet these children every day, and we need more of that in every single one of these buildings. And

she's proud to say that she work in one of these buildings. She and her husband also have children in the school system and she thanked everyone who came out tonight. Thank you.

Ms. Marissa Mangone of Ludlow Manor came forward and greeted the Board. She is a graduate of NPS and a lifelong resident. She works as community provider at the Mid Fairfield Community Care Center, which is in close partnership with both Norwalk Public Schools and the City of Norwalk. Ms. Mangone recognized the incredibly difficult position the BET is in with balancing the needs of our schools and programs with the responsibility of protecting residents from further tax burden. She thanked them for their thoughtful leadership in this regard.

Ms. Mangone strongly urged the BET to increase the 4% funding allocation for the Board of Ed. This is not just a financial decision, it is a lifeline for the thousands of students and families who depend on our schools for academic support, social, emotional learning and increasingly critical mental health services. In recent years, Norwalk has made substantial, measurable progress in the area of youth mental health. The school district and city have become a model for other communities by demonstrating the power of a strong public and private partnership. Together, Norwalk built programs, trained staff, and created an infrastructure that is beginning to show real results. At a time when the demand for mental health services is only growing, increasing the Board of Education funding allocation is not just good policy, it's a necessary investment in the well-being of our children and the long term health of our community.

Ms. Mangone recently had the opportunity to present to a local foundation that not only supports our organization, but deeply values the ongoing collaboration with the City. She spoke about the powerful stories and testimonials they've received from NPS educators, students, and families. She shared just a brief excerpt from one of these testimonials through one-on-one and small group counseling Mid Fairfield has provided the essential emotional regulation supports to students facing a range of challenges. Their expertise in trauma informed care has been instrumental in helping students navigate their emotions, build resilience and develop coping strategies. Additionally, they're professional learning sessions for educators have strengthened our ability to create trauma sensitive learning environments by equipping teachers with strategies to support students affected by trauma. There is no higher priority than the mental health and well-being of our children. She strongly urge and respectfully asked that the BET continue to prioritize both their social and emotional well-being mental health and academic success as they make this critical decision. Thank you.

Mr. Medard Thomas came forward and said that he had been thinking about how he would approach the opportunity to speak since he is the principal of the Concord Magnet School. While his job can provide him with enough material to laugh for days on end, the recent few months have been challenging. Having to cut \$540,000 from his budget has been distressful and saddening. When he became the principal for Columbus Magnet, he had hope and a strong sense of purpose. They just celebrated a 40th anniversary but there have been low points such as being promised a new school and also the death of one of their students, an event that totally devastated the school. He also spoke about his recent health challenges and explained that he didn't have to worry about the school since it was adequately staffed while he was ill. Next year, he wonders if

it will be able to run as well if he suffers another medical episode, since they will be reducing the staff. He promised the students that the staff will find a way to provide the education they deserve. Thank you.

Mr. David Dorris of Byrd Road in Norwalk, greeted the Commissioners. He said the City was at an intersection with the Education and the resident's wallets. There is an possibility of a 30% increase in property taxes or even more in some cases over the next four years. He asked how much would be going to increase the quality of the students education. He said there was not enough discipline and they need to compare Norwalk's budgets to other districts. It is important to work with what the District already has. While it is nice to have all these programs for so many different groups of people that need help in so many ways, the residents also have a duty to their own children. He spoke of creating a track record where they can further their goals and then have an increase in funding. Thank you.

Ms. Robin Gredinger of Foxboro Drive was the next speaker. She said that she was a social worker for the past 18 years in NPS. Her position is at risk, but she cares about her students and the services that are provided every day. She works closely with local mental health agencies to ensure that anyone facing serious safety concerns, whether that be a threat to themselves or others in the community, receives the appropriate and fast interventions that they need beyond the crisis. Her work includes providing wellness support to both staff and students, and with so many educators experiencing burnout in this incredibly demanding profession, this kind of care has never been more important. These proposed cuts remove more than just positions. They remove stability, connection and care from the classrooms.

Without adequate funding, the City is risking overcrowded classrooms, under resourced staff and students whose needs will go unmet. While temporary federal funds helped NPS get through some of those years, they're no longer available to help. She urged the BET to not only meet the recommended 4% increase, but to fully fund the 5.6 requested by the BOE. Let's continue to invest in the well-being of our children and the educators who serve them every day. Thank you for your time and thank you for your care to this important work.

Mr. Mike Sanger was the next speaker. He said he is the parent Co-chair of the SGC at elementary school where his daughter is a kindergartener. He said that there was a lack of true transparency in the budgeting process. This is not just posting number on the webpage. During the Board of Education meeting at Brien McMahon it was clear that the decisions had already been made. It was performative and Mr. Sanger said that there needed to be more community and parental involvement in the early stages. By doing this, the residents would benefit personally. The property taxes will be increasing over the next four years. It's no secret that a lot of funding has been derived from COVID grants these past several years, which seems like everyone should have known was not going to last forever. More planning should have been put in place to address that.

The Rainy day fund has been mentioned and NPS is facing a downpour at this point in terms of. What's being asked of the principles, who sort of unwittingly assumed the task of being ultimate

decision makers here. Both he and his wife graduated from BMHS and Norwalk has always made education a high priority. He and his wife received the benefit of adequately funded education through the CGS exposure to the arts, athletics, and a lot of other programs that are in question right now. They very well may not be in place in the immediate future for his kids, and to him, that's deeply concerning and disappointing. So with that, thank you very much.

There was a speaker calling in whose name was Steve and he stated that he was just present to understand what was being discussed.

There were no additional members of the public who wished to address the Board at this time. Mr. Abrams thanked all those who were present and all the speakers. He closed the public hearing portion of the meeting.

**** MR. JELLERETTE MOVED TO OPEN A DISCUSSION REGARDING THE ISSUE OF RECREATION AND PARKS.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Stowers greeted the Board and gave an overview for a budget neutral request. He was asking for a position to be made full time and requesting that funds be transferred from the General Fund to the Parks budget.

This particular position is a position that's very critical to the department as they strive to be more businesslike and to generate more revenue and to actually account for our revenue. This position is a Systems Analyst that is responsible for the reservation scheduling and accounting platform. This particular position was responsible for the conversion of an older rec recreation system that was used previously to a newer system.

This staff member t acts as our master program reservationist scheduler. She's also our account manager overseeing our facility rentals, recreation program, sports fields staff and managing reservations and programs to schedule them indoor and outdoor sports. She also this position is a liaison to Active Net, which is our IT platform that is a public interface, an internal tool for registrations and all of our programs. He went on to give the details.

There's an extensive back end of this platform which is financial and this position is responsible for the accuracy of working with the Comptroller's Office to make sure that funds are transferred into the appropriate accounts. This position will become more and more important as we recently the BOE has approved a joint use agreement. The joint use agreement is really documenting the policies and procedures of using school facilities for our rec programs. Unlike some cities where Parks and Rec have their own facilities, this city and the BOE both use city facilities for programs.

There was a question of whether or not this was included on the agenda for the Public Hearing. A brief discussion followed.

Mr. Stowers then continued to explain that this position would become more important as Parks cooperates with our schools to have a central calendar through our reservation system. This will prevent double bookings and confusion about which facilities are being used. This person will work hand in hand with the school districts on reservations. In 2026, the Department will also be bringing on a community recreation when the community center opens. This staff person will be handling the reservations for the Community Center and troubleshooting the scheduling.

A question was asked about where the \$84,000 salary figure was derived from. Mr. Stowers said that they did some comparable checks across the country to see what a systems analyst would make. He explained that the position would be cost neutral going forward as the department generates revenue. Discussion followed.

Mr. Stowers was asked if his department was just maneuvering their budget so that they are setting up this general fund to work within the system to do what the department want to do as far as the programs and money is going to go in and out of that account. And the Department thinks that that account is going to generate revenue.

Mr. Stower agreed and said that the department has continue to grow and they need someone who can handle the scheduling and collect the revenue as the new programs are introduced properly in the IT platform. There should be an increase in sales and more participation.

He was asked if this setup would provide more flexibility in order to drive revenues in his department. Mr. Stower confirmed that this was so. A lengthy discussion followed about the accounting details and transfers involved along with expected future revenue. It was agreed that this rearrangement of funds would not affect the cap since it is internal.

It was pointed out that a policy needs to be developed for a threshold for the amount of revenue that the Recreation and Parks would be holding in their account.

The discussion then moved to the fact that there was a staff member in the position that was being funded by ARPA funds, which would stop on June 30th. It was pointed out that the BET would be having a meeting in May and the item could be tabled to that meeting in order to develop a policy regarding the details discussed.

**** MR. JELLERETTE MOVED TO TABLE THE REQUEST FROM THE RECREATION AND PARKS DEPARTMENT REGARDING BUDGET NEUTRAL REQUEST FOR CONVERTING A NECESSARY PART TIME POSITION TO A FULL TIME SYSTEMS ANALYST POSITION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADOPT FY 2025-2026 TENTATIVE OPERATING BUDGET

Mayor Rilling said that he felt that the budget was fair for both the BOE and the taxpayers. He noted that the taxes are going up significantly because of the shift from residential taxes and a

good percentage of the burden shifted from residential to commercial. However no one knows what will be happening on the Federal Grant horizon. The City has to be cautious. He recommended that the budget stay the same as it was crafted -- 2 1/2 percent for the City and 4% for the Board of Education.

Mr. Kassimis asked to confirm that this was a tentative budget. Mr. Schmitt said that his was so.

Ms. Yang said that there were a tremendous number of very worthy, very interesting comments and the Board should contemplate, think about what we have seen and then think about how we might still adjust the budget rather than just setting aside all the comments they have heard. The mill rate doesn't have to be set until May, so there is still time to hear input. Discussion followed.

Mayor Rilling reminded everyone that they were required to send this tentative budget to the Common Council by April 1st. Mr. Schmitt pointed out that the BET could go back and make adjustments as long as they stay within the cap. He noted that there would be a Capital Budget meeting scheduled for March 31st with the Economic Development department.

Mr. Schmitt said that if the BET came in above the cap, they would have to ask the Council for approval. However, as long as they stay at or below the cap, the Council can't touch the operating budget.

Mayor Rilling noted that they had reviewed each department line by line as did the BOE and answered all of the questions people had. He felt they should just go ahead and vote on it. They have done their due diligence.

Ms. Yang agreed and said that they had listened carefully. She said that they had not voted on the open items and would like to take time to consider the open items. She said that she was not ready to vote on the tentative operation budget.

Mr. Jellerette agreed. He also commented that not one person had spoken about the brand new school buildings that the City has invested in. The second to largest line item that the City has next to the BOE is the debt service, which is a result of what the City is doing for the schools. He said that there are guard rails and while he would love to give everyone 30%, keeping the City at AAA bond rating saves the City a great deal of money. Norwalk is one of 10 cities in CT that has this and it keeps the City moving forward.

Mr. Jellerette said that he would be open to tabling the vote subject to finishing up on open items and any other things that the members might want to discuss regarding reducing the budget.

Mr. Abrams pointed out that they were up against a legal requirement. Discussion followed.

Mayor Rilling said there will be adjustments to the mill rate and to assessments that will happen on May 5th as a result of finalizing grant lists and those kinds of things. Ms. Yang had concerns about the 3.3%. Additional discussion followed about various line items.

**** MR. ABRAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE BOTTOM LINE. OPERATING BUDGET AT 3.3% INCREASE YEAR TO YEAR OR \$450,481,977 THOUSAND DOLLARS.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH SIX (6) IN FAVOR (ABRAMS CAMACHO, CONSTANT, JELLERETTE, KASSIMIS AND RILLING) AND ONE (1) OPPOSED (RILLING).**

Ms. Yang stated for the record, her opposition was not to the number, it's to this process by which they have not been able to discuss the overall number in the overall context of the fiscal health and future of the City of Norwalk.

ADJOURNMENT

**** ATTY. CAMACHO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

City of Norwalk -- BET Public Hearing for the FY 2025-2026
Operating and Budget -- March 26, 2025
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SIGN UP SHEET

Start	Name	Address
6:33	1 Barbara Smyth	4 Brookhill Lane
6:37	2 Michael Paris	3 Hadik Parkway
6:42	3 Lisa Brink	19 Shattuck Park
6:47	4 Wilner Joseph	10 Monroe Street
6:53	5 Jody Sattler	17 Highland Ave
7:00	6 Amanda Trimboli	12 Cider Lane
7:06	7 Elyse Williams	24 Midrocks Dr
7:11	8 Aly Cahill	14 Broadview Terrace
7:14	9 Nick Zerzan	1 Jean Ave.
N/A	10 Ludwig Pierre Bonfant	2 Penny Lane.
7:20	11 Moira Noor	15 Pequot Dr.
7:24	12 Romney Donald	43 Stuart Ave
7:31	13 Nia Calhoun	45 Stuart Ave
7:34	14 Maureen DeBellis	2 Hilbert St.
7:38	15 Ron Sharp	11 Gillies Ln
7:44	16 Becky Riddle	4 Greenfield Road
7:46	17 Mariessa Mangone	15 Ludlow Manor
7:49	18 Medard Thomas	27 Heron Rd.
8:00	19 Mike Sanger	3 Crossland Place
	20	

City of Norwalk -- BET Public Hearing for the FY 2025-2026
Operating and Budget -- March 26, 2025
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SIGN UP SHEET

	Name	Address
1	Medard Thomas	27 Heron Rd.
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		

City of Norwalk -- BET Public Hearing for the FY 2025-2026
Operating and Budget -- March 26, 2025
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SIGN UP SHEET

	Name	Address
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		



Outlook

Public Comment

From A V <amarizyv@gmail.com>

Date Tue 03/25/2025 2:18 PM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from amarizyv@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

To whom it may concern,

I will not over-flourish this comment with words. The idea is simple: 4% is not enough. Norwalk is a community that understands our children must come first so that we can all thrive in the future. I implore you to raise the 4% increase to better fill the \$13.26 million gap.

Thank you,
Amariz Videz



Public comment

From Margaret Oconnell <oconnellmarg@aol.com>

Date Tue 03/25/2025 9:25 PM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from oconnellmarg@aol.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Hello,

Appreciate the complex demands of financing the urgent needs of Norwalk in this current context. I am a Parent of soon to be two students at CGS. I am also a former Teacher - current Social Worker.

CGS has deepened my daughter's love of learning - rejecting the ease of submitting an AI generated piece of material . Why? I believe she loves her relationship with her Teachers.

Please do not cut staff at these schools. I have another daughter involved in Band and Color Guard - guided by powerful unsung hero Leaders that help teen mental health. As a SW , I fear for what lies ahead for many children and families in our district. We need adult support for the kids in our community.

Please consider the power of relationships in buffering stress. Fund our schools at more than the 4% currently proposed.

Thank you,
Margaret O'Connell

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)

Public Comment - BET meeting March 26, 2025

From Betsy Mettler <betsyuva@hotmail.com>
Date Tue 03/25/2025 9:41 PM
To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>; David Mettler <dmettler7@hotmail.com>

You don't often get email from betsyuva@hotmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Dear Tom,

Thank you for including our comments in the public record. We are unable to attend the meeting tomorrow night and appreciate our concerns being known.

Dear Board of Estimate and Taxation,

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Norwalk Operating Budget as taxpayers of Norwalk.

We are also parents of a current 8th grader and of a graduate from BMHS Class of 2024.

We are asking for your review and guidance on the Norwalk Public School Budget to ensure that the allocation of funds is first and foremost going to frontline teachers who directly instruct our students. Please use your ability to review the NPS budget and advocate for the NPS spending that benefits our student population most.

As parents, we know the best way our children learn is through dynamic and engaging curriculum presented by our NPS teachers. We are grateful for their hard work, dedication, and encouragement of our students. We are concerned that the BOE and Superintendent are calling for the firing of over 100 teachers to balance their budget, while maintaining non-teaching roles and programs outside the classroom. We believe this is a big mistake and one that we would appreciate your oversight on.

Specifically, we are very concerned at the rapid and continued increase in administrators, consultants, and other non-teaching roles within NPS. Additionally, we know of two examples of non-teaching spending that will remain in the budget. First, we understand that NPS Family Center is a dedicated building with onsite staff to provide family on-boarding and believe it could be staffed better inside schools instead of maintaining another building. Second, we understand that NPS will offer increased busing in support of the school choice initiative that will add costs. We are asking for your support to advocate for students and teachers by confirming these costs and identifying other similar costs we may not be aware of, that if reduced, would allow for the retention of teachers.

Please investigate how the budget line items are allocated by the BOE and Superintendent to ensure that our concerns as taxpayers and parents of students are being addressed, and teachers are prioritized

over non-essential expenditures.

Sincerely,

Betsy and David Mettler

104 Highland Ave, Norwalk



Outlook

Public Comment: Tonight's BET Meeting

From Chapin Bryce <mail@chapinb.com>

Date Wed 03/26/2025 8:52 AM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from mail@chapinb.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Good morning Mr. Ellis and Members of the Board of Estimate & Taxation,

I noticed that tonight's agenda includes public hearing and vote for adoption of the tentative operating budget. However, I am unsure where the tentative budget document is posted for review ahead of tonight's meeting and I am concerned for my and the public's ability to comment on the plan.

I have looked for it in the following locations:

- The agenda: <https://norwalkct.portal.civicclerk.com/event/67/files/agenda/890>
- The BET webpage: <https://www.norwalkct.gov/1012/Board-of-Estimate-and-Taxation>
- The operating budget webpage: <https://www.norwalkct.gov/941/Budgets>

I request that ahead of a vote the city updates the website and agenda to indicate where the document is available for review so that myself and other residents have an opportunity to evaluate the proposal and provide meaningful comments based on the proposed plan.

Thank you for all of your efforts navigating this challenging process.

Chapin Bryce

16 East Ave, Norwalk, CT

 Outlook

Re: PUBLIC COMMENT - 3/26/25

From Kathleen Boland <kdick33@yahoo.com>

Date Wed 03/26/2025 12:59 PM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from kdick33@yahoo.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Thanks Tom! Just realized I referenced "Capital Budget", when I meant "Operating Budget", obviously.

I appreciate you adding these to the record.

Best,
Kathleen

On Wednesday, March 26, 2025 at 12:01:52 PM EDT, Ellis, Tom <tellis@norwalkct.gov> wrote:

Thanks Kathleen!

Received. This will go into the public record with the minutes from the meeting.

Tom Ellis
203.854.7708



From: Kathleen Boland <kdick33@yahoo.com>

Sent: Wednesday, March 26, 2025 10:11 AM

To: Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - 3/26/25

You don't often get email from kdick33@yahoo.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Hi Tom,

I'm writing to submit Public Comment for tonight's BET meeting, with regards to the Capital Budget.

I have a daughter who is a sophomore at NHS and a son who is in 8th grade at NHMS. I am also PTA President at NHMS, and have served on PTA's throughout my kids' years in the school system.

The BET has a challenging job, I do not envy what they're up against. But our kids' futures are at stake here. I beg you to continue to put in the work, going line item by line item, and avoid cutting student-facing positions. It breaks my heart to think essential staff inside the schools (para educators, nurses, Deans, etc) are on the chopping block. These people are the lifelines of our schools! The ramifications of a special needs student losing their para will be devastating. Having only part-time nurses on-site is a risk I don't want my children to have to take. Eliminating leadership roles, in the forms of Deans and Assistant Principals, puts an undo onus on an already overwhelmed leadership team.

Larger classroom sizes are a giant move backward. And the threat to our Music Departments is terrible! For some kids, Music is their motivation, their joy, it is an essential part of who they are as people. It is a large part of their school experience.

Again, I implore you to take long, hard looks at the ramifications of the budget shortfall. Your tireless work here, although may seem thankless at times, is greatly appreciated. But we need you to make the right decisions, our kids are depending on it.

Thank you for your time,
Kathleen Boland



Outlook

Public Comment

From Schwartz, Benjamin B <benjamin.b.schwartz@Vanderbilt.Edu>

Date Wed 03/26/2025 10:31 AM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from benjamin.b.schwartz@vanderbilt.edu. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Mr. Ellis:

As a Norwalk resident, I am writing to express my concern about the BOE's stated plan to cut the Norwalk Transit District's budget by 33%. These cuts will be, simply put, punishing for me and for many others in our city. At a time when Norwalk has the opportunity to continue to grow, attracting new and diverse residents, I urge the BOE to invest in transportation, not cut it.

Yours sincerely,
Benjamin Schwartz, PhD
Norwalk, CT 06850



Outlook

Urgent Concerns Regarding Upcoming Budget Changes

From Yasmina Smith-Tyson <ysmith511@gmail.com>

Date Wed 03/26/2025 10:37 AM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>; Harry Tyson <harrydtyson@gmail.com>

You don't often get email from ysmith511@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

My family has serious concerns regarding any potential budget changes and their impact on students.

This school year, we were forced to hire an advocate to get the administration to acknowledge that our son's IEP was not being met. Due to existing budget restrictions and a lack of teachers, he did not receive math services provided under his IEP for over 118 school days. If this is happening under the current budget, what will occur when funding is further reduced?

Additionally, despite our four-year-old daughter demonstrating academic abilities in line with a five-year-old, the administration is refusing to allow her to start kindergarten. They claim she is "not socially ready"—a subjective assessment that cannot be objectively measured. This decision appears to be influenced by concerns over future performance metrics and funding rather than her best interests. As a result, she will remain in a Pre-K program where she risks regression, lack of stimulation, and disengagement.

We deeply value our school and our children's teachers. However, being misled and having to hire an advocate—an expense we cannot afford—to fight for our children's education is unacceptable and has placed a significant strain on our family. If these challenges exist with current funding constraints, we are extremely concerned about what will happen with further budget cuts.

We urge you to consider the long-term consequences of these decisions on students and families. We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to discussing possible solutions.

Sincerely,

Yasmina Smith Tyson and Harry Tyson

YST
Makeup Department
IATSE 798 Makeup Artist
<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm5452855/>
ysmith511@gmail.com
434.466.2910

City of Norwalk
Board of Estimate & Taxation
Public Hearing
March 26, 2025

 Outlook

Public Comment - BET Meeting - March 26 - Submitting for Public Record

From Ron Sharp <ron.sharp@oracle.com>

Date **Wed 03/26/2025 10:37 AM**

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from ron.sharp@oracle.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Mr. Ellis,

Per the public notice regarding tonight's BET meeting, I am submitting this as a public comment I would like entered into the record for tonight's meeting. Schedule permitting I also plan on attending and speaking tonight in any open comment parts of the meeting.

Thank you in advance,
Ron Sharp

===== Public Comment =====

My name is Ron Sharp and I am a parent and tax payer here in Norwalk and I've been a resident for over 20 years. I strongly oppose the proposed cuts to our already modest school budget.

We live in a town surrounded by affluent communities that invest significantly in their schools. Their leaders understand that strong schools attract families, drive up property values, and create a thriving local economy. Yet, instead of strengthening our schools to compete, we are considering cuts that will weaken them further. This is a backwards approach that will only make our town less desirable, discouraging new families from moving in and ultimately harming our local economy.

One of the schools most impacted by these cuts is Concord Magnet School, our town's ONLY K-8 school, which has already been operating with minimal resources. And now, on top of that, we are looking at a \$500,000 reduction in funding—cuts that will directly affect classrooms, staff, and supplies. This school is a tremendous success, providing a stable, inclusive, and supportive environment for our children, but it is already stretched thin. Taking away even more resources from a school that is doing so much with, so little is not just impractical—it's truly irresponsible.

Unlike some of our neighboring towns, our community is made up of a diverse range of demographics and income levels. This is one of our greatest strengths in Norwalk, but it also comes with unique challenges that require proper funding to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have access to a high-quality education. Cutting funding only widens the gap and makes it harder for our schools to provide the support, resources, and opportunities that every child deserves.

Instead of stripping resources from our children, we should be making strategic investments in our schools to strengthen our community. A well-funded school system attracts families, raises property values, and improves the overall financial health of the town. Cutting funding does the opposite—it drives families away, leading to a weaker tax base and further economic decline.

I ask you to think not just about numbers on a budget sheet, but about the real impact on our children, our families, and our town's future. CMS is an essential part of this community and weakening it will have long-term consequences. All of our schools—especially CMS—deserve better. Let's invest in success, not failure. Thank you.

Public Comment for BET Public Hearing 3/26

From Amanda Trimboli <amanda.trimboli@gmail.com>

Date **Wed 03/26/2025 10:38 AM**

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from amanda.trimboli@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Hello members of the Board,

My name is Amanda Trimboli and I live at 12 Cider Lane. I am writing to you to ask you to approve or increase the 4% recommended budget that the Mayor and Common Council proposed. Last year the recommended 4% budget was capped at 3%, but this year is not the same as last. Even 4% will devastate our schools.

The budget cuts the district is facing are way more dire this year than in the last few years. There are 120 teachers' jobs on the line, and our kids cannot afford to be the victims of these cuts. I realize that \$242 million is not a "shoestring" budget and not an insignificant amount of money to invest in our schools, but with the way that everything is inflated these days, the district needs as much money as they can get to support our student population, in more ways than one.

I suggested last week to the BOE that it would be a great idea for all of them to sit in our schools and observe what goes on in a day. I think it would be great for all of you to do the same, so you can really understand how many staff members it takes for a school day to function well. In my opinion, there aren't *enough* staff members in the buildings, but unfortunately, we all know that we are going to have to face having fewer staff in all the schools next year. Who suffers?? Our kids.

Covid was a time that I hope that none of us have to live through again. It was also an incredibly challenging time for our kids, especially in school. I give the district a lot of credit for the fact that they had school in person, because we were one of the few districts in the state that did this. Do you realize that in about 7-8 years our Covid kids will have

graduated high school? We are still very much in this and feeling the effects from this, and it's not going away any time soon. The district was forced to create jobs with Covid dollars a few years ago because the city flat-funded them, and now all those Covid funds are gone. This created a huge problem that has had a lasting snowball effect. Going forward, I implore you all to find a way to work cohesively with the common council, the Mayor, the BOE and the public. We need more discourse throughout the year to come to better solutions on how to deal with these challenges. It seems that this discourse just happens around budget season.

I didn't grow up in Norwalk, but I consider Norwalk my home. It's also home to my two children who are in elementary school and have many more years ahead of them in this lovely City. I have realized how generational Norwalk truly is. Many people have grown up here and then raised their own families, and so on and so forth. Not many people really move because they love it here, and I hope to have that for my own kids. If you lower the cap, you will be failing our kids, the future generation of Norwalk. Please don't fail them. Thank you.



Proposed Budget for Norwalk Public Schools

From Kelly Bloom <kellybbloom@gmail.com>
Date **Wed 03/26/2025 11:20 AM**
To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

1 attachment (101 KB)
Ltr to Ellis 3.26.2025.pdf;

[You don't often get email from kellybbloom@gmail.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Dear Mr. Ellis:

Please see the attached letter.

Regards,

Kelly Bloom

City of Norwalk
Board of Estimate & Taxation
Public Hearing
March 26, 2025

Kelly Bloom
51 Cove Ave
Norwalk, CT 06855

March 26, 2025

VIA EMAIL

Tom Ellis
Norwalk Board of Estimate and Taxation
125 East Avenue
Norwalk, CT 06851

Re: Proposed Budget for Norwalk Public Schools

Dear Mr. Ellis:

I write to specifically urge the Board of Estimate and Taxation to adopt, at a minimum, a budget for the Norwalk Public Schools of 4% as proposed by the Common Council.

As the parent of two elementary aged children in the district, it is my hope that any proposed budget will ensure a high-quality education with appropriate support systems for every child in this district. I urge the Board to propose appropriate funding to maintain, at minimum, the current levels of school staffing and the level of education being offered to public school children in Norwalk. To not do so fails to demonstrate a commitment to the public school system in Norwalk and does the children in this city a major injustice. Inadequate funding deeply affects their academic futures, their social and emotional growth and ultimately, their opportunities in life.

Moreover, any failure to properly fund the schools in our district will result, in addition to the disservice to the children of Norwalk, in many residents leaving the district in search of adequate educational opportunities, whether to private educational institutions or a geographical move to different towns to provide them with the best academic chance. An adequate proposal made by this Board will do much to offset this ever-increasing reality.

The children of this district deserve a city that provides and elevates the need for adequate funding for their futures. It is incumbent upon this Board to propose a budget that can realistically provide for an adequate educational experience for the children in this district.

Very truly yours,



Kelly Bloom
Parent & Rowayton PTA Co-President



Public Comment

From bcldiva@mac.com <bcldiva@mac.com>

Date Wed 03/26/2025 11:22 AM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from bcldiva@mac.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Good evening-

I am a homeowner in Norwalk and an Elementary Band Director at Naramake and Wolfpit Integrated Arts. Over the past six years, I have been encouraging young musicians to foster musical excellence, teambuilding skills and cooperation to help create students who will become successful graduates ready for college and beyond.

We are just starting to see the benefits of what band music at the elementary level can do. We are the only city in the state that can say we have not only one, but two Connecticut State Marching Band Champions in our two high schools. This would not be possible without a strong foundation in all of our elementary schools.

If that doesn't factor into our district's vision for the Portrait of a Graduate, I don't know what does.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth M Lockhart
Director of Bands
Norwalk Public Schools



Outlook

Comments/questions about BOE budget for meeting 3/26/25

From Christina Taccone <cmt1012@sbcglobal.net>

Date **Wed 03/26/2025 11:23 AM**

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from cmt1012@sbcglobal.net. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

To whom it may concern,

There is a budget meeting tonight about increasing taxes for school budgets. I think this should not be done until we see where all the money goes and allocated to line by line for each school. This would not be hard since we do this for our homes and companies and districts have to do this as well. NPS has yet to post this or give information to this. This is very concerning. How much is going to each school and what is it used for? How much did the school budget get last time? Also it seems like CT HAS DOUBLE FUNDED SCHOOL YET SAY THEY HAVE NO MONEY. If we pay double for each student, why are we out of money and you asking for more? Until these issues are addressed and traced with accuracy for past 10 years our taxes should not go up since it sounds like the district and state should have the money to do so. Next step would be to stop double funding students especially since we don't see the return and everyone keeps saying we have no money. I have a feeling the money isn't going where it's supposed to. This is a problem. Our taxes should not go up and should be lowered. Thank you.

From,
Christina

Advocacy for Raising Part-Time Library Wages in Norwalk

From Javier White <white.javier@gmail.com>
Date **Wed 03/26/2025 11:55 AM**
To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from white.javier@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Dear Members of the Norwalk Board of Estimate & Taxation,

My name is Javier White. As a current resident and constant visitor, I would like to express my strong support for increasing the wages of part-time library staff in Norwalk. Our two public libraries serve as vital community hubs, providing essential resources such as educational programs, technology access, and research assistance. However, the dedicated part-time employees who make these services possible are not compensated adequately for their invaluable contributions.

My family and I have enjoyed both locations' programs and vast literary resources. My 2nd-grade daughter harasses the staff for the latest Babysitter Club books, and they have always offered more than satisfactory service while creating a more than positive experience for her. Naturally, to continue such an atmosphere with such a high level of customer service, it is important to have employees who feel appreciated.

Currently, the wages for part-time library workers do not reflect the cost of living in Norwalk or the level of expertise required for their roles. Some of these employees hold advanced degrees, possess specialized knowledge, and perform work that extends far beyond shelving books, offering digital literacy support, assisting job seekers, and engaging in community outreach. Without fair compensation, acquiring and retaining skilled, passionate library staff becomes increasingly difficult, ultimately impacting the quality of service available to Norwalk residents.

A wage increase would recognize these employees' dedication and align with Norwalk's commitment to fostering an equitable and thriving community. I urge you to prioritize this issue in the upcoming budget discussions and ensure that part-time library workers receive fair pay for their invaluable work.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your support in strengthening Norwalk's library system.

Sincerely,
The White Family

Public Comment

From Natasha Weglarz <weglarznatasha@gmail.com>

Date **Wed 03/26/2025 11:57 AM**

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from weglarznatasha@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Natasha Weglarz
2 Deerwood Manor
Norwalk, CT 06851

March 26, 2025

Dear Members of the Board of Estimate and Taxation,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed funding for the Norwalk Public Schools 2025-26 budget. As a parent of three children currently attending Norwalk Public Schools, including two with special needs, I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact that adequate funding has on our students, staff, and schools.

I understand that the Board faces difficult decisions in balancing the needs of the city and its residents during the budget process. I appreciate the efforts being made to achieve this balance. However, I strongly believe that maintaining the proposed 4% increase for the Norwalk Public Schools is crucial. It will help prevent deeper cuts that would directly and negatively impact our students, staff, and the overall quality of our schools.

My children, like many students in our district, require specific resources and support in order to thrive academically and personally. Maintaining these vital programs requires consistent funding. This funding ensures that these essential resources and support systems remain available, allowing my children and other students in the district to continue making progress and reach their full potential.

Further cuts to the school budget would only exacerbate the existing challenges that our schools and students are already facing. We could see increased class sizes, the elimination of valuable programs and extracurricular activities, as well as a reduction in the support available to students with special needs. These consequences would have a detrimental effect on the overall learning environment in Norwalk.

I urge the board to consider the long-term impact that deeper cuts to the school budget would have on our community. A well-funded education system is essential to the success and well-being of our children. I believe that maintaining the proposed 4% increase for the Norwalk Public Schools is a critical investment that may ensure that our schools have the necessary resources to provide a good education to all students.

City of Norwalk
Board of Estimate & Taxation
Public Hearing
March 26, 2025

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective and sincerely hope that you will make a decision that is in the best interest of our students, staff, and schools.

Sincerely,

Natasha Weglarz

Natasha Weglarz (weg.larz)

May your day be filled with good thoughts, kind people and joyful moments.



Public Comment

From Kathleen Hagerty <kathleenhagerty9@gmail.com>

Date **Wed 03/26/2025 3:00 PM**

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

[You don't often get email from kathleenhagerty9@gmail.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

>>> My name is Kathleen Hagerty and I have been a Rowayton (Norwalk) resident for over 30 years. I pay a lot of money in taxes. My 15 year old son has been in the public school system since kindergarten. He is currently a freshman at Center for Global Studies (CGS) a magnet school with Brien McMahon High School. It is rated the number 1 magnet school in Connecticut. He has a 4.0 average and loves his school and teachers. Please reconsider cutting the budget for our public schools. If you cut the budget it will cause the loss of at least 3 full time teachers at CGS and at least 18 full time teachers at BMHS. CGS students need the high school for the core classes. Please don't take this money away from our children and schools! They are the future of Norwalk,Ct and they will all suffer. The schools need the money desperately and to cut the already low budget would be cruel and destructive. I am writing to you pleading for the children of Norwalk to get a proper education. I appreciate all the work and time you have spent in your position and I hope you will be able to figure out an alternative to cutting the budget of our precious schools.

>>> Thank you for your support.

>>> Best Regards,

>>> Kathleen Hagerty

^^^

City of Norwalk
Board of Estimate & Taxation
Public Hearing
March 26, 2025

Raises for part-time staff

From Shanita Gadsden <shanita.gadsden@gmail.com>
Date **Wed 03/26/2025 3:10 PM**
To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from shanita.gadsden@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Dear Members of the Norwalk Board of Estimate & Taxation,

My name is Shanita Crafter. As a current author, speaker, certified life coach, and visitor of the Norwalk Public Library. I would like to express my strong support for increasing the wages of part-time staff in Norwalk. These two libraries have not only served as a pillar within the community, providing essential resources, such as research assistance, and technology access, but it provides a safe and friendly environment for individuals to pursue and achieve their dreams. It is very disheartening to know that the part-time employees who make these services possible are not compensated adequately for their invaluable contributions.

I remember the feeling I had as a little girl when obtaining my first library card. I would never forget the day I saw a copious amount of books all in one place. The memories of story time and fun events are ones that remain in my thoughts forever. Having to check out books and returning them by a certain date, taught me the importance of not only submitting important documents and tasks on time, but also learning the value of borrowing other people's belongings and taking care of them as if it were my own. Yes these are skills that were not only taught by my parents, however supported through amazing library designs such as Norwalk Public Library.

Although I may not be a resident of Norwalk, I acknowledge that these skills are universal. My husband was born and raised in Norwalk, CT. The skills that he has learned from the Norwalk Public Library has contributed to his ultimate success. My interaction with the Norwalk library has been so amazing. Their staff always greets me with a warm smile and you can feel their sense of love for the community. I appreciate every timely email, cheerful phone call, and willingness to serve to the best of their ability.

As a business owner that serves families, it is very discouraging to know that the part-time employees have not been receiving fair compensation for their work. This can cause financial strains on households, especially while the cost of living has increased over the years. It is my hope that employers would want their staff to feel supported and appreciated for the work that they have done while being reflected within their compensation plan.

A wage increase would recognize these employees and without fair compensation, it can become extremely difficult to retain skilled and passionate staff. I strongly encourage you to prioritize this issue in

the upcoming budget discussions and ensure that part-time library workers receive the pay increase that they deserve for all the outstanding work that they do.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your support to uplift and support the Norwalk Public Library.

Sincerely,

Shanita Gadsden

Request to give Norwalk Public Library Part Time Staff Raises

From Robert Burgess <burry1937@gmail.com>

Date **Wed 03/26/2025 5:27 PM**

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from burry1937@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

March 26, 2025

Dear Board of Estimate and Taxation and Norwalk Finance Department,

I was disappointed that Anne Lang was the lone member of your board to speak up on behalf of the Norwalk Public Library. As I listened to the meeting recording the thing that struck me most is that the library is open 7 days a week for up to 10 hours continually working with the public and that the part-time staff has not been supported with pay increases for over 10 years.

I am writing to ask that you consider the Norwalk Public Library staff valuable enough to compensate them equitably. I request that these valuable staff members receive raises.

I have lived in and contributed to Norwalk for over 50 years. The library has been a lifeline for me and many Norwalk residents. We have gone to the library for research for Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now (NEON) when I ran it. The staff are very helpful and knowledgeable, going out of the way with due diligence to find local and state information requested. My late wife and I also used the library for personal use. My wife was an avid reader and I am a movie buff. It is great to use our local library for business and personal reasons. It is the hub of our community.

The cost of living, food in particular, continues to rise. If these dedicated staff members will work for over 10 years with no pay increase, as their bills increase, we should reward that dedication to our citizens. I find it outrageous that surrounding towns pay their part-time staff who don't have degrees more than we pay our part-time staff who have degrees. Why can't we show the same appreciation to our staff members who do not receive any benefits, which some surrounding towns give their part-time employees, and do not receive any cost of living increases.

I have worked with our most vulnerable populations. They rely on the library for computers, WIFI and basic things that they cannot afford on their own. The library not only supplies computes and laptops, the staff help residents learn how to use them. The library also provides tax help, meeting areas and such.

Other communities have invested in their libraries and their library staff members. I request that Norwalk do the same. The Norwalk Library should be supported equitably as other Norwalk departments, not taken for granted. The chart on Nancy on Norwalk with the funding decline since 2019-2020 is deplorable. Do not make us ashamed. The library staff does not do fluff

work. Show our library staff that we value them and the invaluable work they do. Give them raises.

Robert Burgess
Norwalk Sheriff
Retired Executive Director Norwalk Economic Development Now (NEON)
Former Board Member, South Norwalk Electric and Water Company
Former District B Chair

Public Comment

From Mike Berg <miketberg@gmail.com>
Date Wed 03/26/2025 6:05 PM
To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from miketberg@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Hi Tom, I understand public comments were due by noon today but, unfortunately, won't be able to attend this evening's Board meeting.

I've emailed the following to Board members. Please feel free to use as you see fit.

Thanks,
Mike Berg

Hello, I'm a proud Norwalk resident, parent, and advocate for our public schools.

My wife and I moved here in 2011 and have built our family in this community. We have a middle schooler, an elementary schooler, and a future student. Over the years, I've coached my kids' soccer and hockey teams, mentored middle and high schoolers, and stayed as involved as possible in my kids' education.

And I want to be incredibly clear: the quality of education in Norwalk is the single biggest factor in whether we remain here long-term.

To date, we've had an amazing experience in Norwalk Public Schools, from Cranbury Elementary to Concord Magnet School. The teachers care deeply, the administrators advocate for the children, and my kids have grown into incredible people because of their influence.

But every year, we hear about budget tightening—staff reductions, program cuts, fewer resources. These are not just numbers. They are real impacts on students, families, and the future of our city.

I can't tell you how many times people have asked if my kids go to private school just because we live in Norwalk. And every time, I proudly tell them about the teacher who walked to our house during COVID to help ease the transition to remote learning. About the Gifted & Talented teacher who found ways to keep my kids engaged. About the music teacher who inspired my daughter to audition for this spring's play (after years of her rallying up the courage). These experiences are what make our schools special—but they are only possible if we invest in our schools.

These three kids are the most important part of my life, and like any parent, I'll put them in places where they have access to the best opportunities.

You have the power to make Norwalk a place where families want to stay, where students thrive, and where the next generation chooses to build their future. I'd strongly encourage you to invest in our schools and invest in Norwalk's future.

Sincerely,
Mike Berg

Support for increasing the wages of part-time library staff in Norwalk.

From Lu Jin <jaffee521@gmail.com>
Date Wed 03/26/2025 6:30 PM
To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

You don't often get email from jaffee521@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Lu Jin, and I am the owner of Norwalk Dollar & Gift in the South Norwalk area. As a proud member of this community, I am writing to express my strong support for increasing the wages of part-time library staff in Norwalk.

Our public libraries are vital community hubs, providing essential resources such as educational programs, technology access, and research assistance. However, the part-time employees who make these services possible are currently not adequately compensated for their dedication, expertise, and hard work.

My family has personally benefited from the library's programs and resources. My mother, who has been participating in the Greater Norwalk Literacy Volunteers (GNLV) programs for about a year, started learning English from the beginner's level. Today, she can independently read level M books. The staff at the library have been incredibly helpful and supportive throughout her educational journey. My children also love visiting the library, where the staff go above and beyond to create a welcoming and engaging learning environment. Their enthusiasm and professionalism make a lasting impact on families like mine.

Currently, part-time library workers' wages do not reflect the cost of living in Norwalk, nor do they recognize the specialized skills these employees bring to their roles. Many of them hold advanced degrees and provide crucial services, ranging from digital literacy support to job assistance and community outreach. Fair compensation is necessary to attract and retain skilled library staff, ensuring that the high quality of service our residents rely on will continue.

A wage increase for part-time library staff would demonstrate Norwalk's commitment to supporting its workers and fostering a strong, equitable community. I urge you to prioritize this issue in the upcoming budget discussions to ensure that part-time library workers are fairly compensated for their invaluable contributions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your support in strengthening Norwalk's library system.

Sincerely,
Lu Jin
Owner, Norwalk Dollar & Gift

City of Norwalk
Board of Estimate & Taxation
Public Hearing
March 26, 2025

 Outlook

BET Operating Budget Written Comments

From D Lauricella <dlauricella24@gmail.com>

Date **Thu 03/27/2025 4:01 PM**

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

 1 attachment (15 KB)

BET Operating Budget Written Comments 32625.docx;

CAUTION: EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Tom, please add the attached written comments to the Public Hearing comments as I was mistakenly told that written comments would be accepted until today.

Thank you.

Diane Lauricella
2023 Aquarion Water Company Environmental Champion Award
2024 Climate Reality Project Ambassador Graduate
dlauricella24@gmail.com
203-858-1537

BET Operating Budget Written Comments 3/26/25

Chairman Abrams and the Esteemed Members of the Board of Estimate and Taxation

Thank you for your hard work as a volunteer on the BET.

First, some constructive criticism: Please make a better effort to show the public the Operating and Capital Budget details by placing links to these documents on the actual Agendas for every meeting as well as prominently displayed on the City's Website Home Page during your deliberation period. Not everyone knows, like I do, to find the Finance Department Home Page and scroll down to the teeny tiny reference link at the bottom marked "budgets". I have been a big proponent of educating the public about how their government works and by making the availability of the actual budget details much more accessible, our residents may get more involved and help. Both the Planning and Zoning Commission and others display a link to backup documents at the bottom of their agendas.

Expenses:

- 1. Electricity, Gas and Oil utilities:** I propose that the City must cut electricity, gas, oil, heating and cooling expenses by 15-20% across the board in every public building as a start. The City has seen a continuous rise in electric, gas and oil costs. This is in part due to a myopic energy planning and implementation strategy. City energy policy needs to be reformed to more fully and creatively embrace renewable energy, where after the initial design and installation investments, we could reduce our costs significantly each year by using several solar, geothermal, heat pump, and battery measures either create our own electrons through solar power or heat and cool our buildings.
- 2. Waste Management:** I propose that the DPW takes over the administration waste management and recycling, including diversion of reusable materials such as food, electronics and metal cans. There is still a lack of effective, creative and incentivized education about how our residents, businesses, schools and public buildings all should do their part

to reduce, reuse and recycle. Current BOE Policy places the responsibility of recycling with the Principal. We want the Principals to help our children learn how to read and write. Why have redundancies here?

3. **Enforcement:** Please fund a Fulltime Lead Paint Inspector with the Health Department, the Fair Housing Officer, and more P & Z inspection and enforcement staff. When enforcement, that should include some modicum of compliance education, occurs, our quality of life increases and our economy flourishes.
4. **Library:** Please add some additional funding. As noted during the public hearing, our libraries still serve as an important part of our Norwalk Community.
5. **Norwalk Transit District:** Please add more funding for the implementation of the new routing system.
6. **Corporation Counsel and Chief of Staff Office:** Please cut their budgets down to only the same 2.5% that the other departments were held to . Their appears to be a need to reevaluate whether these two line items are deserved of such a large increase.
7. **BOE/NPS:** Please add a recommendation to your final amount strongly requesting that they move the Welcome Center out of a private building and into a City-owned building. In addition, the Administration is still too TOP HEAVY. Since our Superintendant is making so much money, she should not be allowed to retain the number of Senior Administrators that the BOE backstopped. Any additional money after savings should go to the teachers and paraprofessionals.
8. **ECD Bureau and Business Development Division:** This Bureau utilizes too many consultants to do its work, given the many high-salaried senior officials. In addition, please audit the business Development Division and

reform their policy of rebuffing the set-up of ethical business donations to fund things like community parties, murals and events.

9. Salaries: Please consider an across-the-board cut of salaries for senior officials by at least 10%. I was amazed to see the jump in salaries for the Health Dept, PZ, DPW, well above inflation.

Revenues:

1. Fund a Fulltime Grant Professional and have them operate out of the Finance Department, NOT the Mayor's Office. The current method that the City uses to find, apply and track grants has left us short of millions of dollars due to the insistence about using fulltime engineers and other employees who have other duties to be pulled away to handle the bulk of the grant development process. They should only be used to incorporate language and other details, not the entire process. Please do not delay this management decision. Accountability has been lacking for years and other towns and cities have captured grants that we would have won had we had a more comprehensive approach.
2. Enforcement fine collection of parking, health, P&Z, and Blight violations will both bring in money AND create better quality of life.

Thank you.

Diane Lauricella

21 Little Fox Lane