

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION
February 3, 2021**

PRESENT: Fran DiMeglio, Chair; Brian Baxendale; Tamara Shockley; Mary Peniston; Tammy Langalis; Steve Ferguson; Mike Mushak; John Lesko

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Diane Lauricella; Nick Roberts; Jessica Vonashek; Chief Thomas Kulhawik; Assistant Chief Ed McCabe; Thomas Hamilton; Erica DePalma; Audrey Cozzarin; Diane Keefe; Robert ____; Farrah Marin; Joseph Giandurco; Daisy Sebastian; Iliana Zuniga; John Cross; Zina King; Sasha Carr; Terry Atkin; Jennifer Fritz Romano; Sarah Amato; Mandy Singh; Laura Garcia; Jody Sattler; Nalin Jones; April ____; Karina Malek; Mike ____; Andres ____; Marie Vergara; Neil Putterman; Diana Carpio; Rosario Rojas; Heidi Alterman; Sharon Baanante; Barbara Meyer-Mitchell; Sherelle Harris

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Baker called the roll. It should be noted that this meeting was held on Zoom.com with all participants calling in, separately. He then called the roll of all the Department heads that were on the Zoom call. Mr. Baker explained how the public could speak at this meeting. Ms. DiMeglio explained to the members of the public how the meeting would be run. She said that it would end at 9 pm and be extended as necessary. Each speaker would be allowed to address department heads during their turn. The hearing would be open for letters and emails until February 4, 2021 at 5 pm. She had already received many for the record. She noted that she would not cut anyone off and would allow 3 - 5 minutes per speaker.

III. PUBLIC HEARING

A. Capital Budget – 2021-22 to 2025-26

The department heads for the following departments were on the Zoom call. The public would be allowed to address the Capital Budget requests from these departments.

- 1. Police Department & Combined Dispatch**
- 2. Fire Department**
- 3. Community Services**
 - a) Human Relations & Fair Rent**
 - b) Library**
- 4. Finance Department**
 - a) Information Technology**
- 5. Economic & Community Development**
 - a) Art Commission**

- b) Economic & Community Development**
- c) Code Enforcement**
- d) Planning & Zoning**
- e) Transportation, Mobility and Parking**
- f) Business Development & Tourism**
- g) Historical Commission**
- h) Redevelopment**
- i) Parking Authority**
- 6. Operations and Public Works**
 - a) Engineering**
 - b) Transfer Station**
 - c) Recreation & Parks**
 - d) Building Maintenance**
 - e) WPCA**
- 7. Board of Education**

Diane Lauricella, 21 Blue Mountain ridge Road, thanked the Planning Commission and staff. She asked for the 5 year plan with explanations. She could not find it online. She asked for more details so that they could understand the requests. She asked for an extension to Friday, February 5. To the Police Department and Fire Department, she asked why those departments were only going to replace their vehicles with hybrid vehicles and not electric vehicles. She also asked both departments why they were not adding solar panels to their roofs. She also asked the library to renovate. Under IT, why they could not get hurricane warnings similar to other towns. She also asked for a vision zero for parking. She thought that green infrastructure should be implemented. She asked for rain gardens and pervious surfaces. She discussed the Department of Public Works (DPW) and had concerns about artificial turf. She asked for a moratorium on these artificial turfs until a study could be done about the implications of them on kids' health and injuries. She also had a question about Calf Pasture Beach and green infrastructure. For the Board of Education, she addressed whether the Welcome Center was necessary. She asked the Board of Education to consider solar panels on their buildings.

Nick Roberts addressed Ms. Lauricella's concerns. He said that there were numerous studies on the artificial turfs and it was found that there was a low risk to students. His department had also reached out to the state's Department of Health which said that the risk assessment was not high. He would send these reports to anyone that requested them, including Ms. Lauricella. If it changes in the future, they would follow the updated guidelines. He also spoke about Calf Pasture Beach and the paving of those parking lots. They would look to implement green infrastructure to ensure water quality.

Jessica Vonashek noted that the library would be remodeled in the near future. She would also be looking into vision zero policy and complete streets. For parking, she understood the importance of a green infrastructure and that it would help especially since the city is located off of the Long Island Sound.

Thomas Kulhawik explained that the Police Department would purchase hybrid vehicles now that other municipalities had experience with them. He did not want the department to be the first if there were problems with the functionality of them. As of now, there is limited experience with full electric vehicles by other municipalities. Since the purchase of these types of vehicles is expensive, he would prefer to wait to see how they worked for other towns before making a large purchase. He was open to purchasing them in the future.

Assistant Chief Ed McCabe said that the Fire Department was doing research on hybrid vehicles. However, they are finding it difficult to find fire engines in hybrid models. Some vehicles are not offered in electric in the US. at this time.

Thomas Hamilton noted that he had sent a memo about the Welcome Center to the commissioners as to why this project was important. He also addressed Ms. Lauricella's comments about solar projects. He explained that they are moving forward with them. Some are in construction as well in design. They are not in the Capital Budget because they are being financed through agreements with other entities.

Erica DePalma, 110 Perry Avenue, who is representing Silvermine parents, advocated for driveway reconstruction for Silvermine. The current driveway was not designed to handle the amount of vehicles that use it now. She explained the situation and asked them to restore the driveway to the Capital Budget, which had been removed from last year's funding.

Audrey Cozzarin, 19 Kendall Court, said she had forwarded her remarks. She said she agreed with comments from the previous speakers. She asked that the city should not remove healthy trees. She asked the city to rely on environmentalists that live in the city. She wanted the city to reject the artificial turfs and did not think it was good for the planet. She thought the fields were coming at a cost to the planet. Pervious paving was preferred. She liked the active transportation to be put in place, with walkability and bike riding.

Diane Keefe, 249 Chestnut Hill Road, thought it was important to fix potholes and footpaths. She asked about the \$250,000 for Cranbury Park. The neighbors did not know. She asked for more trees there and not more development there. She asked about the \$700,00 for Veteran's Park. She had questions about the Capital Budget for tree planting and it should be doubled.

Robert ____, 1 Compass Street, asked about a study for a sidewalk in Rowayton. He said that he had sent comments to Mr. Kleppin earlier in the week. He knew that the road was a state road so that the city did not have complete control over the area. It was a dangerous area and there have been several accidents. He would like the item to be fully funded. Jessica Vonashek said that there was not a specific line item for this project and would call Mr. ____ the next day for more information. mature trees being cut down. She asked that several arts programs be funded but that the Welcome Center not be funded. She thought more curriculum would be necessary instead. The conditions of the bathrooms should be fully funded. Affordable housing should be funded but was cut. She had concerns about solar projects. She suggested buying it and not leasing it. She would like the departments to fund hybrid or electric vehicles.

Farrah Marin, 63 Bayview Avenue, said that she was disappointed with the funding for the artificial turf softball. She would prefer the funding should be given to the library instead, which had not been funded. She also wanted the city to purchase hybrid or electric vehicles.

Joseph Giandurco, 163 Chestnut Hill Road, Vice President of Norwalk Federation of Teachers, had concerns about teacher staffing. He asked that teachers be supported and not be asked to do more with less. He was not in support of the Welcome Center but would like to know more about it. He suggested that the district reconfigure central office space. The money saved could be spent on other projects around the district. He noted that there were delays on other projects around the city. He also noted that Cranbury renovation had been delayed for years and should not be again.

Daisy Sebastian, 127 Perry Avenue, addressed the bathroom renovations in West Rocks Middle School. She thought it was imperative they fixed. She also supported the Silvermine driveway because she thought that someone would eventually get hurt. She asked the commissioners to go to drop off or dismissal to see the problems.

Iliana Zuniga, 8 Running Brook Lane, asked for the commissioners to support the bathroom renovations as well as the air conditioning in classrooms. She also asked for supporting curriculum and technology as well as solar panels on the schools. She asked for the funding for the Silvermine driveway. She spoke about free and reduced lunch for students.

John Cross, the Athletic Director of Brien McMahon High School, spoke in support of the artificial turf softball field at that school. He noted that the fields are used daily as well as walking on the track. It is a welcome investment. He also explained that there was a gross inequity between the baseball fields for the boys and the softball fields for the girls.

There was an explanation of how the Capital Budget process worked. The Planning Commission would first review the requests, which would go to the Mayor and the Common Council. At this public hearing, the commissioners were listening to input from the public.

Zina King, 7 Nursery Court, spoke in support of the renovation of the Silvermine driveway. Chief Kulhawik said that his officers have seen issues at the driveway but are not aware of what can be done. He had not seen the plans as put forth by the Board of Education.

Sasha Carr, 114 Perry Avenue, spoke in support of the renovation of the Silvermine School driveway. She is concerned about the layout of the driveway.

Terry Atkin, 184 Rowayton Avenue, spoke in support of the Rowayton sidewalk because it is a dangerous area. She asked that it be fully funded for the safety of the residents as well as the employees of Rowayton Market who are walking to the train station.

Jennifer Fritz Romano, 41 Wolfpit Avenue, spoke about the Board of Education Capital Budget which had been recommended by the city's CFO. She was concerned about the cuts to technology and curriculum. She also had concerns about the bathrooms in Nathan Hale. She also noted that some of them have no running water. She was also concerned about the cuts to asbestos abatement. She asked about central air conditioning. She noted that the Welcome Center was a want, not a need. Tom Hamilton gave a brief synopsis about the central air conditioning at all the schools which are undergoing a major renovation or new construction. He also noted that modular and window air conditioning would be installed as well. He noted that it should be finished in a few years since the issue was funding.

Sarah Amato, ____ Ridge Street, spoke about the funding for bathrooms. She said that she had attended these schools and they were the same as they were when she was there. She was also concerned about the asbestos in the schools. She also asked about air conditioning for the schools. She was in support of the Welcome Center and helped to process these registrations. She asked them to support the technology Capital Budget request. She also asked them to support the Arts budget. There was a discussion about fundraising for air conditioning. She knew there was a problem with upgrading the electricity in these rooms.

Mandy Singh, 73 North Seir Hill Road, spoke in support of a new Cranbury building. She noted that the building does not have a separate cafeteria. They have been waiting for 25 years.

Laura Garcia, 247 Flax Hill Road, spoke about the importance of the Welcome Center. Her son had been a new student 2 years ago and it had been difficult. She also spoke in support of the Silvermine School driveway.

Jody Sattler, 17 Roton Avenue, spoke in support of the new artificial turf field at Brien McMahon.

Nalin Jones, ____ Cricketwood Lane, spoke in support of the bathroom renovations, especially at Roton School where her children attended.

April _____, spoke in support of the new Cranbury school. She noted that the city had promised this in previous years. She said that they needed this investment.

Karina Malek, 30 Broad Street, spoke in support of the Silvermine School driveway.

Mike _____, 10 Timberline Road, of the Norwalk Little League, spoke in support of the artificial turf fields. He explained the opportunities that they could give to the city. They are limited by their resources because of weather, etc.

Andres _____, President of Cal Ripken Baseball, spoke in support of the artificial turf fields at Brien McMahon.

Marie Vergara spoke in support of the new Cranbury school.

Neil Putterman, 3 Valley view road, spoke in support of the artificial turf fields at Brien McMahon.

Diana Carpio, 8 Forth Street, a member of the Board of Education, thanked the commissioners for listening to the residents. She spoke in support of the Welcome Center as well as the full Board of Education budget. She noted that the Superintendent and her team had done their best with this budget.

Rosario Rojas, 10 Tower Street, did not speak English. Her comments were translated by Mary Peniston. She said she had brought her daughter from Spain 2 years ago. She is hoping for better bus service and more services for those that don't speak English, like her family. She thought that the parks were inadequate. Ms. Rojas was supporting the Welcome Center. Ms. Peniston was not sure she understood that she should be commenting on the Capital Budget requests.

There was a discussion about addressing the need for a translator in the future at public hearings. Ms. DiMeglio said they would add it to a future Planning Commission agenda.

Heidi Alterman, 29 Sherwood Street, noted that there should be support of the Welcome Center, especially in light of Ms. Rojas needing help to participate in this public hearing. It would help make families' transitions to the city easier. She also spoke in support of the new Cranbury school.

Sharon Baanante, 64 Comstock Hill Avenue, noted that the city should tap into grants and corporate sponsorships for the fields. She also supported bathroom renovations. She was concerned about the environment. She also supported the Welcome Center.

Barbara Meyer-Mitchell, was concerned about the CFOs recommendations and some had been zeroed out. The entire budget was \$1.7 million. The emergency funding had been zeroed out, as one concern. She was concerned about the curriculum and technology funding recommendations. She also discussed the building of two new schools and how this affected repairs/renovations. She explained what the minimums that each new school should have. She thanked the commissioners for listening.

At this point, no other members of the public spoke. Ms. DiMeglio reminded the public that they could still send written comments to the Planning and Zoning office by Thursday, February 4 at 5 pm.

Sherelle Harris, 2 West Avenue, spoke about supporting the curriculum by including more diversity in the books they read. She explained her time as a Norwalk public librarian which helped to bridge the gap between students and their grandparents. She noted that this inclusiveness was helping children to feel welcome by seeing their own cultures, etc.

The department heads were told that they could log off of the meeting.

There was then a discussion about the next Planning Commission meeting which would be the Capital Budget review. Mr. Kleppin said he was trying to have the CFO at the meeting but there were scheduling conflicts. Ms. DiMeglio noted that the CFO had always been at the meeting in the past. However, Mr. Kleppin reminded them that it was the Planning Commission's recommended budget. Ms. DiMeglio said she would like to ask questions of the CFO. She thought that February 25 was too late for the Planning Commission.

There was then a discussion about adding additional money to the Capital Budget and how this would affect the city's bonding issues.

There was also a discussion about the process of this evening's meeting and how it went. There was a discussion about the comments in the Zoom chat and whether it was part of the public record.

Mr. Ferguson thanked Ms. Peniston for translating a resident's comments during this public hearing.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Langalis made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Ferguson seconded.

Fran DiMeglio; Brian Baxendale; Tamara Shockley; Mary Peniston; Tammy Langalis; Steve Ferguson; Mike Mushak; John Lesko approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero