

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION
January 27, 2021s

PRESENT: Fran DiMeglio, Chair; Brian Baxendale; Tamara Shockley; Mary Peniston; Tammy Langalis; Steve Ferguson and Mike Mushak (arrived shortly after roll call)

STAFF: Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Karen DelVecchio; Anthony Carr; Neil Rennie; Chris Torre; Ralph Kolb; Vanessa Valadares; Paul Sotnik; Drew Berndmaier; Nick Roberts;

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 5:30 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.

III. DEPARTMENT REVIEWS

A. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Karen DelVecchio, recently retired Director of Information Technology, explained to the commissioners that she has been consulting for the department since the fall and would be handling the presentation of the Capital Budget requests from their department for this cycle. She noted that this is a combined Capital Budget request for all city departments. She explained that there would be some cyber security projects for the city as well. The Capital Budget requests were listed in priority. They have met with all the departments to help prioritize them.

Cybersecurity projects have been prioritized. There had been an assessment in October 2019 which had been mostly positive but there was room for improvement. Ms. DelVecchio noted that the department will also work with the Chief Information Security Officer once that position is filled. She also explained that a follow up assessment in 2021 would be necessary to gauge how well the measures are working. She said that she would prefer not to go into great detail about cybersecurity measures in a public forum as this. The Capital Budget request was for implementation of these measures.

The next Capital Budget request was for e-government projects. Ms. DelVecchio noted that these projects did correspond to the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) which stated that the city should have new technologies for the city's website. This technology would help with streamlining the work of the City's Clerk's Office. There had been an increase of traffic to the city's website during the pandemic. The department had not been able to make changes at the time. However, it is time to refresh the city's website since the last update was 5 years ago. There would be new citizen engagement tools available. Some would be done by the information technology department while others would be done by outside vendors. They would also work with city departments to find out what they could use on the website to help them.

The next Capital Budget request was the desktops, laptops and iPads refresh project. They use some for spare parts and otherwise dispose of items in an environmentally friendly way. Because of the pandemic, they have moved away from desktops to laptops so that staff can easily work at home. All employees have access to their voicemail from home. This had been set up before staff left for the quarantine last year. Along with this refresh was the request for servers to be refreshed every 5 years. This is an ongoing project for which the department requests funding annually.

Another Capital Budget request was the Council Chamber AV upgrade since equipment is now more environmentally friendly. The next request was for the city's network switch in City Hall which had been installed in 2008. The current one was not as quick and efficient. Newer ones will utilize less electricity. The next Capital Budget request was to upgrade AV equipment in conference rooms. During the pandemic, many of these conference rooms were used for webinars. They would like to do 2 conference rooms per year. There was also a smart board at the Public Works garage which should be replaced. Another smart board would be mobile so that it could be used throughout City Hall. It would have microphones and cameras.

There was a discussion about the desktop refresh which was an item in the Capital Budget every year. Ms. DeVecchio noted how many were upgraded every year.

Aerial photography had been done in 2019 for the city's geographic information system (GIS) which had been funded by the state. However, since the state may not fund it in 2022, they projected the cost for that year and added it to a future Capital Budget request.

The next Capital Budget request was to refresh the mobile laptops in police vehicles. They were refreshed every 3 years. There would also be a refresh of the servers at Police Headquarters.

The next request was for new software for the Fire Department. Assistant Chief Bassett explained this item further and what it would be used for. The software currently being used would be retired as of January 2022 so it was necessary to find a new software for the Fire Department. There was a discussion about a tornado warning in 2020 which Westport had text capability but Norwalk did not. Assistant Bassett said he would follow up with Emergency Management to find out how Norwalk could have those texts as well. There was also a discussion about replacing a smart board for some of the fire houses, including the headquarters.

The next Capital Budget request was for improved wireless access points at both libraries. At the main library, since the walls are thick, they need more data points. They would also like to replace the public computers at the library which help citizens look for and apply for employment, etc.

There was a discussion about the increase in the cybersecurity Capital Budget request. Ms. DeVecchio explained that since there has been an increase in cyber attacks against the federal government, it was better to have the city's infrastructure protected against attacks. There was also a discussion about the change in software for the Fire Department and what information from that software the public would have access to.

B. DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS & RECREATION AND PARKS

Anthony Carr introduced the staff at the beginning of his presentation.

Neil Rennie explained that the first Capital Budget request was for City Hall repairs and improvements. These include the replacement of the air handler, which would be the last one. The next improvement would be for the cupola upgrade and the first floor restrooms. These have not been upgraded since City Hall had opened in the 1980s.

The next Capital Budget request was for repairs at various other City owned buildings that they had not foreseen. The next item was the replacement of heating and cooling equipment on the roof of Police Headquarters as well as new locker rooms. The next request was for the Public Works Center for the roof membrane which is done every 10 years. The next was for improvements at Nathaniel Ely to upgrade HVAC equipment. The next was for energy conservation at various City buildings. The city could receive savings from the local utility companies. Another request was for the improvements to the branch library.

There was a discussion about the cupola which seemed expensive to maintain. Scaffolding alone was expensive to have in place to make repairs. There was a discussion about historical grants for the cupola since it is a landmark. There was also a discussion about having solar panels on the Public Works building. Mr. Rennie said the roof was not rated for it but he would look into it.

There was a discussion about the Nathaniel Ely improvements and the funding for the windows and air conditioning. The windows would be done first. The heating project would take 2 years. There would be a cost savings for heat if they replace the steam heating system that is currently in the building.

Chris Torre continued the presentation by noting that the truck scale at the transfer station had to be replaced. It is the 3rd year that it has been requested. The next item was for the tipping floor at the transfer station which had to be replaced. There was a discussion about how the floor would be replaced since it is in use. Mr. Torre said that it would have to be closed for 2-3 weeks but would be done in stages. There was then a discussion about fleet replacement. The ones that are being replaced end up being used as scrap metal. There was a discussion about fleet maintenance for all other departments. The fleets have been maintained by the Public Works Department for many years. The only department that has their own mechanics is the Fire Department. There was also a discussion about purchasing 10 hybrid vehicles. Mr. Torre noted that some will be either hybrid or electric vehicles.

Ralph Kolb, of the Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA), explained its relation to the city and that they still had to go through the Capital Budget process. He noted that the same amount of funding is requested each year to rehabilitate the city's sewer system. There would be a study done in 2021 to monitor where there are capacity issues. There was a discussion about how many miles would be studied. There was also a discussion about using a company in Connecticut rather than Vermont. Mr. Kolb explained that this company had the lowest price and best qualifications. There was a discussion about the separation of storm water and sewer. Mr. Kolb explained that these were long term projects.

Mr. Kolb noted that the next item was for construction of the various pump stations around the city. The bids would go out in February 2021. The second pump station at Keeler Brook would be completed. Because of COVID, costs had gone up so that this request was for additional money to pay those costs. They evaluated the pump stations to determine the top 5 that had to be replaced.

There was a discussion about additional apartments being constructed throughout the city and how the WPCA would handle the additional units. Mr. Kolb said that they do have capacity but noted that

it is going down. This is because of new and refurbishment projects that helped to reduce the capacity. They would work with Planning and Zoning to project numbers. High efficiency fixtures in residences also help to reduce the capacity to the city's sewer systems. There was also a discussion about the Glover Avenue project which had 1300 units.

There was then a discussion about how Norwalk takes waste water for the treatment plant from neighboring towns such as Westport and Wilton. They pay the same rates as Norwalk customers. There are a few Norwalk customers who use the water treatment services of bordering towns.

Vanessa Valadares began the presentation with requests for bridge repairs. She explained that they had hired a consultant last year to prioritize bridge repairs. Since this is a construction year, they are requesting funding for them. She said that she had attached a list of all bridges to the Capital Budget request. They are mostly over streams and brooks. Paul Sotnik also noted that the bridges were listed in order of priority from the worst to the best. Design had been done in the prior year. There was a discussion about projected years. They would send a backup document to the commissioners.

The next Capital Budget request was for structural inspectors and repairs since they don't have anyone on staff to do this. The next item was for West Cedar Street repair. The state would pay a share and Norwalk would pay the remaining 20%. There was a discussion about how to show this funding. Ms. Valadares explained why the whole amount was reflected in the Capital Budget request. There was a discussion about how these amounts would be reflected in the spreadsheet that the commissioners would use to deliberate on the Capital Budget in a month. There was a discussion as to whether the Planning Commission could change the requested Capital Budget funding for a bridge. Since the West Cedar Street bridge was structurally deficient, it did not seem wise to not grant the request.

Ms. Valadares noted that the next 4 Capital Budget requests should be looked at together. The first item was for the pavement management program. Their department had completed a lot of roads last year. Ms. Valadares reminded them that the more money they received, the more roads they could pave. The next Capital Budget request was for sidewalks and curbs. This funding was for sidewalks on the roads that they were repaving. She gave them an example of this. They had prioritized the sidewalks to be repaved.

Ms. DiMeglio had some questions about a recent work done by Eversource in her neighborhood. There was then a lengthy discussion about concrete vs. asphalt for sidewalks and these requirements from Planning and Zoning. Ms. DiMeglio asked that these requirements be reviewed after the Capital Budget process was over with the Planning Commission and Operations and Public Works. Drew Berndlmaier noted that it would be difficult to make residents happy as to which type of material to use. It was noted that asphalt was usually less expensive and for long term use, concrete was best. There was another material, flexipave, that was basically permeable sidewalk. It has been used around trees. However, it was expensive and hard to repair.

The third Capital Budget request was for footpath replacement. It is an amount that they usually ask for. The last Capital Budget request was for general drainage to change catch basins, videotape pipes, materials, etc. and was part of the general paving program discussed earlier.

The next Capital Budget request was for watercourse maintenance to mitigate flooding in the city. The next item was the stormwater management plan which the commissioners had seen over the last few years. Since they have to be compliant with the federal government, they have asked for funding in order

to save the money for this project over the next several years. The next Capital Budget request was for the Norwalk River flood control which had to be done so that it does not flood and affect Perry Avenue residents. The next Capital Budget request was for coastal resiliency, a new project. It had not been funded last year so it is new this year. The next Capital Budget Request was for tree planting. They usually spend all of the money for trees that had been damaged in storms. The next item was for the East Avenue roadway and bridge reconstruction which had been partly funded last year. This request would allow the city to have the grant matching funds. The construction of the Walk Bridge would begin this year but the city had to pay for part of it before it started. There was a discussion about the state's bid process.

The next Capital Budget request was for grant local matching funds and noted which projects these grants would be necessary for. The next request was for a right-of-way use policy study which had not been funded in the previous year. The next request was for state projects non-participating city standard amenities which Ms. Valadares explained what the funding would be used for.

There was a discussion as to whether nearby towns had a right-of-way use policy study but Ms. Valadares did not think so.

Nick Roberts began the presentation by noting that Recreation and Park's Capital Budget request was less than previous years due the loss of revenue in 2020 from lack of programming. The first item was for school and park playgrounds. Mr. Roberts noted which playgrounds would be renovated. He explained that some other projects had been closed out and funds could be used. However, cost estimates on these projects were high since they were over 10 years old. There was a discussion about the drainage and lighting at Devon's Place.

The next Capital Budget request was for milling, repaving and restriping of the parking lots at Calf Pasture Beach and Shady Beach which had not been for decades. Some areas of the parking lot would be resident only. There was a discussion about the drainage in these lots. There was also a discussion about an easement on the Gardella side. The reconfiguration would allow for different entrances and egress. Mr. Roberts thought the layout would be better and safer. There was a discussion about pervious surfaces especially since pollutants come from vehicles in the Calf Pasture Beach and Shady Beach parking lots.

The next Capital Budget request was for the turf softball field at Brien McMahon High School and the following request was for the Broad River baseball complex. These grass fields would be turned into turf fields. There would be lighting to increase their use. However, since the estimated cost of both projects exceed the current funding, the department is requesting additional funding. For the turf softball field at Brien McMahon, Mr. Roberts explained that there were neighbor complaints. They will be changing the orientation of the fields. There was also a suggestion about adding bathrooms to the complex. It would be used for girls hockey and lacrosse as well.

There was then a discussion about the sports that were played during COVID. Mr. Roberts said that most summer sports were played during that time. The Department of Health made recommendations which the sports programs had to follow.

There was a discussion of what these projects would encompass. There was a discussion about the parking issues which Mr. Roberts noted would be expanded. It was hoped that a major league player may come out of these sports complexes. Mr. Roberts said that state tournaments can be played on these fields. There was a discussion about the fees that the Recreation and Parks Department charges

the programs to use the fields. It was suggested to have a corporate sponsor for these fields to raise additional funding.

The next Capital Budget request was for Cranbury Park. Mr. Roberts noted that the department would be requesting less money since a bid had come in lower than expected. The request would decrease to \$250,000. These funds would be used to seal the envelope of the building and replace the roof on the caretaker house.

The next Capital Budget request was for the tennis courts at Mathews Park. Mr. Roberts explained that the courts are cracking and have to be replaced. Since these courts have their lights on until 10 pm, they do get a lot of use.

The next Capital Budget request was for Veterans Park for the replacement of the docks. It had been requested in the previous year. The docks are sinking and the pilings are rotted. Mr. Roberts said he would send pictures of these conditions. Risk Management said that the docks would have to be insured. He was concerned that those rates would be high and they would not be able to be utilized. There was a discussion about seasonal user fees for the docks. There was a discussion about the use of the docks by residents and non-residents. He noted that the department will be increasing their fees this year.

The next Capital Budget request was for vehicle replacements of 2 pickup trucks. Since they are constantly used, they have become rusted. They also need a Bobcat and a backhoe and Mr. Roberts discussed the department's priorities.

The next Capital Budget request was for Casagrande Field which was a new request. The next request was for the Testa Field. Mr. Roberts noted that these 2 projects could be pushed out a year but both have to be replaced. It was discussed not doing them at all since Norwalk High School could be constructed in the next few years and those fields would be used as staging areas. These projects would not be done at the same time. Sports could be impacted as well.

The next Capital Budget request was for Ben Franklin gymnasium for air conditioning. Currently it does not have central air conditioning so it is only in winter. With the addition of air conditioning, it could be used year round. There was a discussion as to why this was in the Recreation and Parks budget and not the Board of Education. They had requested this item last year but it had not been funded.

The next Capital Budget request was for Irving Freese Park for the phase 2 of the Master Plan for seating around the park. Mr. Roberts noted that it could be pushed out another year.

The next Capital Budget request was for backstops and fencing which could be pushed out to next year. The next Capital Budget request was for paving sidewalks projects which had not been funded in the previous year. Mr. Roberts said this was a priority since it had not been done last year. The next Capital Budget request was for tree planting to continue the city's Tree City designation. It is an annual requirement. The next item was for the open space fund. The funds are then transferred to the Conservation Commission to purchase open space areas. The line item may go under the Conservation budget and not be on the Recreation and Parks budget.

There were two items that would be pushed out for a year since there may be leftover funds from previous projects.

There was a discussion about having a finance committee on their Recreation and Parks committee in order to understand the revenue generating from some of the projects. Mr. Roberts said that they would definitely do that especially once they had a Recreation and Parks Master Plan.

There was a discussion about purchasing hybrid vehicles for their replacement vehicles. There was a discussion about the number of bids for procurements. There was also a discussion about tree planting which would happen in the West Rocks area. Any trees removed by the Recreation and Parks department for a project would be replaced.

There was a discussion about the Capital Budget public hearing on February 2 which would be on Zoom. All department heads would be on the Zoom call. Every resident would ask questions to all of them at the same time. There was a discussion about limiting the amount of time residents could speak.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Langalis made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Baxendale seconded.

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

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero