

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - MARCH 25, 2026**

:

ATTENDEES: Nicol Ayers, Anne Wennerstrand, Jan Degenshein, Jesse Buccolo, DeJuan Wiggins, Broderick Sawyer, Keenan McMahon

OTHERS: Theresa Argondezz, Novelette Peterkin, Margaret Watt, David Walencyk, Mary Oster.

DeJuan Wiggins joined the meeting after roll call. Broderick Sawyer joined the meeting at 7:38 PM.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Ayers called the meeting to order at approximately 7:05 PM and welcomed everyone to the March 25th meeting of the Community Service Committee of the City Council for the City of Norwalk.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Ayers conducted roll call and a quorum was established.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting: January 21, 2026

****MR. DEGENSHIEN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 21, 2026, MEETING WITH ONE MINOR CORRECTION THAT IT WAS COUNCILMAN DEGENSHEIN NOT COUNCILMAN DELLINGER WHO ABSTAINED.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED WITH THE CORRECTION.**

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

V. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Ayers stated that the committee did not have any new business that had been stated on the agenda.

VI. ACTION ITEMS

A. Authorize the Mayor, Barbara C. Smyth, to execute any and all agreements and amendments with Education Development Center Inc. to process payment for online trainings, tentatively scheduled in March 2026.

Ms. McMahon introduced the item. Ms. Argondezzi addressed the committee and explained that the request was for grant funding to train some of the Health Department staff as well as several community partners on various mental health topics and suicide prevention topics. Ms. Argondezzi noted that the Health Department had worked with Education Development Center in the past on other wonderful activities and that this was one of those trainings. Ms. Argondezzi stated that the organization's estimate and billing process included rather lengthy terms and conditions, and after speaking with Corporation Counsel it was determined that this would require the Mayor to sign off and therefore needed to come before the committee. Ms. Argondezzi indicated that the action was to accept their estimate for the relatively low cost and to pay for the training for Health Department staff and community partners. Ms. Argondezzi clarified that while the action item listed a tentative schedule of March 2026, the Health Department would actually be looking at more of a summer date for the training but had had wonderful experiences with the organization.

Ms. Wennerstrand asked whether this was a new training program or a continuation of training already in process. Ms. Argondezzi confirmed that Education Development Center had done the training in the past on a regular basis and that it would be a new offering to Norwalk partners but tied in really well with other trainings that had been offered. Ms. Degenshein noted a date discrepancy on the estimate, which showed a start date of March 16, 2026 and an end date of February 16, 2026, and suggested that for legal purposes the dates should be corrected if necessary. Ms. Ayers explained that when the Health Department originally reached out the backup material reflected the earlier dates because the committee meetings had been moved, but the Health Department was in the process of adjusting the dates and was aware they needed to be updated. Ms. Ayers stated that legally this would not hold up the contract because the committee was only approving an estimate and not dispensing money. Seeing no further questions, Ms. Ayers called for a vote. All in favor raised their hands. There were no abstentions.

****MS. AYERS CALLED FOR A VOTE.
THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

B. Authorize the Mayor, Barbara C. Smyth, to execute any and all agreements, documents, instruments, or amendments as may be necessary with Carver Foundation, Inc. to provide financial assistance for the 2026 Summer Enrichment Program in the amount of \$147,000. Account No. 012010-5A0620.

Ms. Ayers introduced the item and recognized Ms. Peterkin. Ms. Peterkin thanked the committee for having her and explained that the funding being sought would support the two affordable enrichment camps, one run at Carver and one run at the South Norwalk school, which had now been combined into one program when Carver took over the South Norwalk camp. Ms. Peterkin stated that these were the most affordable camps in the city and that the funding helped make that possible. Ms. Peterkin reported that each camp supports 150 students and due to construction this year both camps would be run independently at Ruby Shaw Elementary in South Norwalk.

Ms. Peterkin described the program as offering a robust experience with two literacy teachers, a math teacher, and a science teacher, project-based learning, one field trip every week, and swimming, all included. Ms. Peterkin noted that the highest a family would pay for six weeks was \$700 on a sliding scale based on income. Ms. Peterkin stated that Carver had operated the program for 21 years and had been facilitating the South Norwalk camp for close to 10 years.

Mr. Buccolo thanked Ms. Peterkin for joining and for the important work Carver does serving children, youth, and families in Norwalk for over 20 years. Mr. Buccolo asked whether the money would go directly to offsetting the costs of the program for families and what the total cost of the programs was, noting it served 300 students across two sites. Ms. Peterkin confirmed that the Carver camp costs \$193,558 and the South Norwalk camp costs \$192,933, with the \$147,000 divided as \$80,000 to one and the remainder to the other, all going to offset costs. Ms. Peterkin explained that when Carver took over the South Norwalk program it had previously received \$90,000 and Carver used that as leverage to expand and mirror the Carver program. Ms. Peterkin noted that last year the city cut funding by 25 percent and there was a possibility of another cut next year, which would force reconsideration of offering the camps because Carver already raises \$239,000 for both camps through fees and private funding. Ms. Peterkin stated that if the city wants to continue providing an affordable option the city must help with that.

Ms. Ayers echoed Mr. Buccolo's support and shared that she had previously run the camps under NEON before Carver took them over and that Ms. Peterkin had expanded the offerings. Ms. Ayers compared costs to a camp she now runs in Stamford that charges \$15.50 per week, noting it is the cheapest there, and emphasized the documented value Carver provides in preventing summer slide. Ms. Peterkin confirmed that Carver documents how students grow faster as a result of participation, with dedicated literacy and math teachers and project-based science and arts programming. Ms. Peterkin invited committee members to visit and see the programs in action. Ms. Wennerstrand asked how costs had gone up and where extra needs were arising. Ms. Peterkin cited increases in transportation (which follows district rates), insurance for the camps, and programming costs such as bringing in maritime educators. Ms. Peterkin noted that the programs participate in the free and reduced lunch program so there is no food cost. Ms. Degenshein asked about the source of the prior grant money that was no longer available and whether the committee could press for its reinstatement. Ms. Peterkin explained that the funding had come from ARPA COVID relief money passed through the state as a two-year grant of \$50,000 per site but was now gone, and that the city had already reduced funding by 25 percent last year. Ms. Peterkin reiterated that the city supports two camps while the school district supports a third. Mr. Buccolo asked whether the school sites were being used and if Carver paid a fee for the buildings. Ms. Peterkin confirmed that Carver partners with the district and receives use of the facilities at no cost as part of the partnership, providing enrichment for summer school, transition programs, and more, serving over 1,500 kids in total summer programs.

Seeing no further questions, Ms. Ayers called for a vote. All in favor raised their hands. There was no opposition.

****MS. AYERS CALLED FOR A VOTE.
THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

C. Authorize the Mayor, Barbara C. Smyth, to execute any and all agreements, documents, instruments, or amendments as may be necessary with the Local Prevention Council in the amount of \$20,000.00 - Account No. 012010-5A0620 to the fiduciary Positive Directions, 90 Post Rd W, Westport, CT 06880 c/o The Norwalk Partnership.

Ms. Ayers introduced the item and recognized Ms. Watt. Ms. Watt introduced herself as the Prevention Director at Positive Directions, the Center for Prevention and Counseling, and the fiduciary for the Local Prevention Coalition known as the Norwalk Partnership. Ms. Watt described the Norwalk Partnership as a citywide coalition of 132 volunteers and 66 organizations across 12 required sectors working to prevent substance misuse and promote mental wellness in Norwalk youth and young adults using an evidence-based, multi-sectoral, data-driven national public health model. Ms. Watt highlighted the biannual Norwalk Youth Survey of approximately 4,000 students in grades 7 through 12 that gathers data on lifestyles, protective and risk factors, mental health, substance use, and technology use, which schools and nonprofits use to develop programs and secure grants. Ms. Watt outlined the coalition's work across informational, educational, and environmental strategies including skills development, supports for youth and families, high school clubs, teen nights out, policy work on equitable and restorative practices such as vaping responses, legislative efforts on smoke shops and illicit cannabis, suicide prevention training for all middle and high school faculty, and cannabis professional development for health, gym, and social work staff. Ms. Watt noted that the \$20,000 city contribution is part of \$159,000 total braided funding, with \$125,000 coming from a federal Drug-Free Communities Grant now in year 7 that will end after year 10, and \$14,000 from the state. Ms. Watt explained that the city funds support extra data analysis from the survey, bus shelter ads on marijuana awareness, a summer program, food for teen clubs, the Norwalk for Mental Health event, communications, social media, ad buys, and training curriculum. Ms. Watt emphasized that the city contribution is flexible and fills gaps, unlike restricted state funds, and urged the committee to begin planning for the eventual loss of the federal grant.

Mr. Buccolo thanked Ms. Watt and expressed appreciation for the Norwalk Partnership's incredible collaborative work addressing high mental health challenges for youth, particularly highlighting the Norwalk Youth Survey as a key data asset. Seeing no further questions, Ms. Ayers called for a vote. All in favor raised their hands. There was no opposition.

****MS. AYERS CALLED FOR A VOTE.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

VII. DISCUSSION

A. Update from Human Services Director, Keenan McMahon on the Norwalk Opioid Settlement Mini-Grant Program; informational only, no Council action required.

Ms. McMahon provided an update from the Human Services Director on the Norwalk Opioid Settlement Mini-Grant Program. The update was informational only and required no Council action.

B. Introduction to Community Services panel on services for Norwalk children and youth by Human Services Director, Keenan McMahon. Panel includes David Walenczyk, Youth Services Director; Mary Oster, Early Childhood Coordinator; and Theresa Argondezzi, Assistant Director of Health/Community Health.

Ms. McMahon introduced the panel on services for Norwalk children and youth. Mr. Walenczyk provided an overview of the Youth Services Department, which functions as the City's Youth Service Bureau established by state statute in 1972. Mr. Walenczyk described care coordination for behavioral health referrals from the community, schools, police, and youth diversion team; behavioral health assessments by master's level clinicians; connections to service providers and ancillary services such as sports camps or mentoring; and tracking families over a six-month period. Mr. Walenczyk explained the Youth Diversion Team (formerly Juvenile Review Board) using a restorative justice model for youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system, including hearings, individualized rehabilitative plans, specialty mentoring through the Daniels Youth Leadership Program, and victim assistance services such as restitution. Mr. Walenczyk also described the Peer Connection Program, an activity-based youth development program for middle school students held in the evenings at City Hall or in the community, and the department's support for the Summer Youth Employment Program. Mr. Walenczyk noted that the department receives approximately \$125,000 in state grant funding annually and participates in numerous community collaboratives.

Ms. Oster discussed early childhood services, noting that her position as Early Childhood Coordinator began as a grant-funded role in 2011 and that she serves as a resource for families prenatally through kindergarten transition. Ms. Oster described the Local Governance Partnership (formerly the Norwalk Early Childhood Council), support for licensed center-based and family child care programs, resource and referral services, professional development and quality monitoring for early care providers, developmental screenings through the ASQ project, home visiting programs, playgroups, parent cafes, early literacy initiatives including Read to Grow and Reach Out and Read, little libraries, volunteer readers in preschool classrooms, and the fourth annual Celebrate Early Childhood event held earlier that month at the Sono Collection with over 500 adults and children in attendance.

Ms. Argondezzi outlined the Health Department's child-serving services in three categories. For clinical services she described the WIC program providing nutrition education, breastfeeding support, nutritious food, and connections to other services for approximately 1,300 appointments per month; lead poisoning prevention and investigations; the childhood immunization clinic offering routine vaccinations, flu shots, pertussis cocooning, and the grant-funded Immunization Action Plan program; and the sexual health clinic for teens and adolescents. For health promotion and education she highlighted the Growing Gardens Growing Health summer program, Fit Kids nutrition and physical activity lessons for preschool and early elementary students, the Flu and You outreach using glow-germ handwashing education, the Gizmo mental health story time program, and the Norwalker walking initiative with maps and walk-to-school events. Ms. Argondezzi also noted the department's leadership and participation in coalitions including the Norwalk Food Alliance, the Norwalk Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Coalition, the Norwalk Partnership for substance use prevention, and the Lower Fairfield County LGBTQIA+ Community Health Coalition.

Ms. Wennerstrand thanked all the panelists for their detailed presentations and noted that the budgets are not large yet the volume of services is impressive. Ms. Wennerstrand suggested that a future conversation could focus on pressure points, gaps in services, how the Council can better partner, and what the panelists would like to see happen in the next one to three years given tightening budgets and potential changes in federal funding. Mr. Buccolo thanked the panelists and suggested that a future discussion include updated data on the number of individuals and families served by each program and any trends in those numbers. Ms. Ayers thanked the panelists and noted that future conversations should also include the library and the youth department of the library. Ms. Ayers expressed appreciation for the beginning of ongoing discussions about supporting Norwalk's young people and families and stated that the committee is sensitive to the needs of youth and families in the community.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

****MR. DEGENSHIEN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,
Courtney Baldwin
Recording Secretary