

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES - MARCH 5, 2026
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**

ATTENDEES: Ed Abrams, Mayor Barbara C. Smyth, Joseph Andrasko, Kendrick Constant, Troy Jellerette, Anne Yang

OTHERS: Lamond Daniels, Deanna D'Amore, Karla Rodriguez-Alicea, David Walencyk, Sherelle Harris, Keenan McMahon, Jazmin Principe, Vanessa Valadares, Kimberlee Kinsella, Neil Rennie, Glendaly Padilla, Marsha Elbourne, Jared Schmitt, Tom Ellis, Robert Stowers, Ken Hughes.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Abrams called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the March 5th special meeting of the Board of Estimate and Taxation for continued reviews of the Department of Budget. Mr. Abrams noted a housekeeping item for anyone from the general public that there is no public commentary during these budget reviews and that there will be the opportunity for full public commentary during the public hearing on March 25th.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Elbourne called the roll and a quorum was achieved.

III. BOARD OF ESTIMATE & TAXATION – BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

A. Community Services

Mr. Ellis stated that tonight the Board was starting with Community Services. Mr. Daniels provided open remarks, thanking the Chair and noting that he was appearing in his former role in a department that is very dear to him, as he had come to the city as its first Chief of Community Services.

Mr. Daniels introduced the team, including Ms. D'Amore, who is the Health Director, Ms. Harris, and for the first time to the Board, Ms. McMahon, the city's new Director of Human Services, as well as Mr. Walencyk, the Division Director of Youth Services.

Mr. Daniels highlighted the overall changes in the year's budget, which related to personnel costs across the divisions, including contractual adjustments, position adjustments, existing staffing levels, and a few targeted reductions. Ms. McMahon presented the requested FY27 budget highlights for the Human Services Division, excluding wages and salary line items.

Ms. McMahon reported a total three-hundred-dollar increase for the early childhood program category across all non-wages and salary line items, no increases requested at all for the fair rent category across the non-wages and salary line items, a total decrease of one thousand five hundred dollars for the human services category across the non-wages and salary line items due

to more accurate reclassification of expenses in membership and dues, training and education, and IT software, and a total decrease of three thousand seventy-two dollars for the youth services category across the non-wages and salary line items. Mr. Schmitt confirmed there were no headcount changes in any of these departments.

Ms. Yang requested a walk-through of headcount by each group. Ms. McMahon reported a total of eighteen staff members within the Human Services Division, including herself, with one staff member in early childhood and, technically, two staff members in fair rent. Mr. Daniels clarified that in fair rent it is one full-time fair rent coordinator and a part-time ADA coordinator. Ms. McMahon noted that one particular employee, Jasmine Principe, is the executive assistant for the Community Services Department but her salary and wages are within the fair rent category. Mr. Schmitt advised that all headcount detail is contained in the line-by-line detail previously sent to the Board. Ms. Yang confirmed she was referring to the large budget book and inquired whether it was available for pickup. Mr. Schmitt confirmed it was available online. Mr. Abrams requested that the link be sent to the BET. Mr. Ellis explained that the initial document with line-item detail for expenses, revenues, and headcount had been sent and that a final version was being prepared for distribution the following day.

Ms. Yang requested that, for subsequent meetings, each department be sectioned out with its spreadsheet so the Board would receive one consolidated email per department. Mr. Abrams sought clarification on the fair rent line item 218, confirming it reflected funding for the two full-time employees and the part-time ADA coordinator. Ms. Yang asked whether the part-time person is fully loaded with benefits and requested a better multiplier for the actual costs to the city in light of contract negotiations so the true dollar amount of every headcount could be understood. Mr. Schmitt confirmed the request was for overall compensation including benefits and that the figure would be a calculated estimate.

Mr. Jellerette asked Mr. Ellis to scroll to the bottom of the spreadsheet to show the percentage increase for the whole unit. Mr. Ellis confirmed the five-point-two percent increase. Mr. Jellerette asked whether Mr. Daniels saw room for additional relief for the taxpayers. Mr. Daniels stated that the department would look for further reductions, including shared resources with IT and possible delays on certain library activities. Mr. Abrams reminded all BET members and department heads of the outstanding request for each citywide department to provide an alternative showing a ten percent reduction at the total department level, along with associated risks and impacts.

Mr. Walencyk highlighted that the Youth Services Division receives approximately ninety-five thousand dollars annually in state grants through DCF, of which about sixty-two thousand dollars is used to offset and subsidize salaries, thereby reducing the burden on taxpayers. Ms. Yang commended the point and expressed hope that all departments would highlight revenues that offset costs and address projections in the current uncertain federal funding environment. Ms. Yang inquired whether the open position previously held by Margaret Sweeb as Fair Housing Officer remained vacant. Mr. Daniels clarified that the position falls under a separate fair housing department outside the Community Services umbrella but that it had been filled. Mr. Ellis added that the matter is grant-funded and would be covered the following Wednesday.

Mr. Andrasko sought clarification on what was meant by the ten percent reduction, asking whether it applied to the eleven million dollar proposed spend for FY27 or only to the five hundred fifty thousand dollar increase. Mr. Abrams confirmed it referred to the eleven million dollar total and clarified that the reduction need not be applied line by line; Mr. Daniels should review across all departments under his purview and return with a recommendation outlining risks and impacts. Mr. Abrams emphasized that the request was not a mandate but an exploration to understand impacts and risks and to promote consistent fiscal review across departments.

Mr. Ellis then moved to Mr. Daniels' area of Chief of Community Services. Mr. Daniels explained that the grants to outside agencies reflect the city's targeted support for several community partners, including operating expenses for the Norwalk Senior Center, the required local five-hundred-thousand-dollar federal match for the Head Start program administered through the Connecticut Institute, funding for the mayor's summer youth program, the statutory municipal agent for the elderly contract with FCA for case management services to low-income seniors, and the closing two-year contract with Mid-Fairfield to increase mental health services for children in Norwalk. Ms. Yang asked whether the six-hundred-thousand-dollar grant to the Norwalk Transit District was included in the one-point-five-million-dollar line. Mr. Daniels confirmed it was accounted for elsewhere.

Mr. Constant asked whether there were areas where Mr. Daniels felt the funds were essential and could not be cut without breaking services. Mr. Daniels replied that the department would perform the requested exercise and return with clear impacts.

Mr. Abrams reiterated that the ten percent reduction request was not a directive but an exploration to understand risks and drive consistency. Mr. Walencyk responded to Mr. Constant, noting that the Youth Services Division had struggled with hiring and had been understaffed for much of the prior year, which had impacted operations and likely contributed to coming in under budget.

B. Health

Ms. D'Amore reviewed the Health Administration budget. She noted a wage increase as well as several proposed reductions in areas such as membership and dues, advertising, telephone expenses, and mileage.

She explained that the machinery, equipment, and rental line reflects an increase based on projections derived from current fiscal year spending trends. However, she stated that the department would continue reviewing that line item to determine whether savings could be achieved.

Ms. D'Amore also discussed the insurance premium line, which has been used to provide additional support for the WIC program.

She explained that the Norwalk Health Department administers the WIC program locally but operates under a subcontract with Optimus Health Care, a community health center that holds the primary regional contract with the Connecticut Department of Public Health. In previous years,

Norwalk held a direct contract with the state to administer the program but now operates under this subcontracting model.

Ms. D'Amore emphasized that maintaining the WIC program in Norwalk is important because it provides services to approximately 1,400 families in the community. Due to rising personnel costs, including union wage increases and employee health benefits, the City has provided additional financial support to ensure the continued operation of the program despite limited grant funding.

Ms. D'Amore noted that the Health Administration division includes seven full-time staff members and one part-time staff member.

Mr. Abrams asked if there were any questions related to the Health Administration section. There were none.

Building Maintenance

Ms. D'Amore then referenced the Building Maintenance portion of the budget, noting that the request had been prepared by Mr. Neil Rennie and his team. She asked if Mr. Rennie wished to highlight anything related to that portion of the budget.

Mr. Rennie indicated that the building maintenance costs were consistent with other city buildings and would be reviewed when the broader facilities budget was discussed.

Mr. Ellis added that the building maintenance section reflects the standard contractual costs associated with operating the Health Department facility, including utilities such as electric, water, and gas, as well as building maintenance services and Guardian staff allocations. He noted that the costs for the Health Department building actually showed a slight decrease of approximately \$800 year over year, while continuing to provide the same level of services and materials required for building maintenance.

Mr. Abrams acknowledged the explanation and indicated that the Board would move forward with the next section.

Environmental Health and Housing

Ms. D'Amore reviewed the Environmental Health and Housing division, which includes eight full-time staff members and one part-time staff member.

She explained that the proposed budget includes reductions in certain overtime and part-time wage lines due to staffing changes, including the hiring of a newer employee with lower associated wages.

Ms. D'Amore also noted a reduction in the messenger and delivery services line, which is used to transport specimens to laboratories for testing.

She explained that the department had previously planned to implement an on-call system where staff would be paid to be available on weekends. However, the department has decided instead

that the Assistant Director of Health and the Director of Health will cover on-call responsibilities, resulting in savings.

Ms. D'Amore also highlighted that Environmental Health is one of the divisions that generates revenue for the City through various licenses and permits, including those related to food service establishments, septic systems, body care services, body art establishments, and salons. These fees are established in coordination with the Board of Health and the Common Council.

Mr. Andrasko asked about the decrease shown in the other grants and contributions line and whether the change reflected the expiration of a grant.

Ms. D'Amore initially explained that the line item referenced funding for relocation services, which had historically been budgeted at \$50,000 annually. She noted that the current year's revised budget reflected costs associated with the Halstead relocation, which required an approved transfer from the City's contingency account. The proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year returns the allocation to the original \$50,000 level.

Mr. Ellis clarified that Mr. Andrasko may have been referring to a different line item reflecting historical grant contributions.

Ms. D'Amore confirmed that the funding previously shown in that line item had been reallocated to the eviction services line, following a prior request from the Board of Estimate and Taxation to make the line items more reflective of the actual expenditures.

Mr. Andrasko thanked Ms. D'Amore for the clarification.

Weights and Measures

Ms. D'Amore then reviewed the Weights and Measures division, which consists of one full-time staff member.

She explained that the City is required to maintain a Sealer of Weights and Measures to verify that commercial measuring devices such as scales and fuel meters are accurate.

Ms. D'Amore noted that the increase in this section of the budget reflects contractual wage increases and longevity payments.

Mr. Abrams acknowledged the explanation.

Community Health (Medical and Education)

Ms. D'Amore next reviewed the Medical and Education section, which the department refers to as Community Health.

She explained that the increases in this section relate to contractual wage increases for the two full-time staff members assigned to this division, while all other line items remain generally unchanged.

Health Laboratory

Ms. D'Amore reviewed the Health Laboratory section, which includes one part-time staff member. She noted that the slight decrease in wages reflects a newer hire with lower salary costs.

Mr. Abrams asked why the City does not completely outsource laboratory services.

Ms. D'Amore explained that the department previously operated a fully licensed clinical and environmental laboratory with a full-time lab director. However, the City has since transitioned to outsourcing most laboratory testing to the Connecticut Department of Public Health laboratory, which now performs the majority of specimen testing at no cost.

She noted that while the City no longer operates its own independent laboratory, a staff member is still required to collect samples, package and ship specimens, assist with clinical programs, maintain rainfall data, and process tick samples sent to the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station.

Mr. Abrams thanked Ms. D'Amore for the explanation.

Preventable Diseases

Ms. D'Amore then reviewed the Preventable Diseases division. She explained that the increases in this section relate primarily to contractual wage increases for full-time staff, while the department has reduced part-time staffing as part of cost-saving efforts.

She noted that the division includes three full-time staff members and three part-time staff members, including the department's contracted medical director.

Ms. D'Amore also highlighted reductions in mileage expenses and a modest increase in the uniforms and cleaning line, which reflects annual contractual increases associated with the department's uniform service agreement.

Ms. D'Amore concluded by stating that those items covered the Health Department's budget request.

C. Library

Mr. Ellis reviewed Library 1, Library 2, and Library 3, noting the total library ten percent increase for administration and programs, and turned the presentation over to Ms. Harris.

Ms. Harris presented her requests, beginning with account 5140 for part-time payroll. Ms. Harris explained that part-time staff have not had raises since 2012 and librarians even prior to that, while custodians received increases to meet minimum wage. Ms. Harris expressed gratitude for the one hundred thousand dollars added to the budget.

Mr. Abrams asked for the headcount, and Ms. Harris reported nineteen full-time staff with four open positions currently being filled and forty-three part-time staff. Ms. Harris continued to account 5258 for programming, noting a request of twenty thousand dollars across five departments and receipt of seventeen thousand dollars.

Ms. Yang inquired about a previous year when money was given for raises for hourly staff. Ms. Harris confirmed it was denied, and thanked Ms. Yang for her advocacy during the last budget cycle.

Mr. Jellerette followed up on the forty-three part-time positions, asking if the number has been stable or if there are difficulties filling spots. Ms. Harris confirmed there are openings, having lost three staff members, and that part-time librarians and assistants are being advertised for, noting that pay is well under market rate in Connecticut. Mr. Abrams requested data on attrition rates for full-time and part-time staff over the last three years. Ms. Harris moved to account 5392 for the book budget, noting the twenty-five percent increase granted for e-content.

Mr. Constant inquired whether digital books are a one-time or ongoing cost. Ms. Harris explained it depends on the format and platform. Mayor Smyth asked how many online books were purchased last year and anticipated with this request, and whether the library can stay current with new releases. Ms. Harris agreed to provide the statistics.

Mr. Jellerette asked if the library card population is growing. Ms. Harris confirmed it is growing. Mr. Jellerette shared an observation from the new Norwalk High School tour regarding the media room having few books. Ms. Harris noted that younger generations prefer technology but younger children and elderly still favor physical books.

Mr. Abrams asked whether the Library has maximized revenue opportunities across programming and services while remaining a free public library. Ms. Harris acknowledged the question and stated the Library would explore additional revenue sources such as grants while maintaining free access. Mr. Ellis noted that maintenance for the two libraries would be covered under building-related lines with Mr. Rennie.

D. Youth Services

No discussion occurred on this item beyond the coverage already provided under Community Services.

E. Human Relations

No discussion occurred on this item.

F. Department of Public Works

Mr. Ellis moved to the Department of Public Works. Ms. Valadares provided opening remarks covering all Public Works divisions. She introduced the staff present, including Mr. Stowers, Mr. Torre, Mr. Hughes, and Mr. Rennie online. Ms. Valadares acknowledged the city's fiscal challenges while outlining the department's own pressures, including the impact of the new 2405 union contract on wages and benefits, rising service demands from residents, sharply increased utility costs beyond expected levels, and the absence of mid-year transfers that had been relied upon in prior years. She emphasized that the figures presented represent the department's actual needs.

Ms. Valadares presented on Operations, identifying solid waste and recycling collection and disposal as the largest operating cost. She detailed the new collection system implemented in July after a consultant review following expiration of the prior contract, including elimination of commercial service, standardized carts, and removal of the opt-out option to improve efficiency. Ms. Valadares explained broader industry challenges such as the lack of local landfills, closing incinerators, and collapsed recycling markets that have turned recycling from a revenue source

into an expense. She reported seventy-one full-time employees with three vacancies and no new headcount requests. Mr. Constant inquired about line items including wages and salary premiums (which had doubled due to new contractual rates and additional premium-time needs) and the “transferred to other funds” line for sewer charges on City buildings. Mr. Ellis and Ms. Valadares provided clarification. Mr. Jellerette asked about recycling revenue and bottle deposit programs. Ms. Valadares noted ongoing exploration of additional revenue opportunities while maintaining free recycling for residents.

Ms. Valadares briefly addressed Engineering, noting a flat budget except for the request for summer interns at eighteen to nineteen dollars per hour to support capital projects and inspections. She urged funding for this program as cost-effective labor.

G. Recreation and Parks

Ms. Valadares transitioned to Recreation and Parks. She noted major impacts from the new union contract, the temporary loss of North High School fields causing heavier use and increased maintenance on other fields, and the upcoming opening of the new Recreation Center. Ms. Valadares highlighted projected revenue growth from expanded summer camp enrollment, full operations at Gallagher Mansion, expanded Veterans Park docks, and tournament usage at the Broad River Baseball complex. Mr. Stowers reported a headcount of thirty-seven full-time employees (twenty-eight in grounds and facilities maintenance and nine recreation professionals) and over two hundred seasonal part-time staff. He noted two hundred thirty-two line items with thirty-five increases, including eight for the new recreation center, twelve for utilities, and significant wage and recreation center operating costs. The department requested three new full-time positions and additional part-time funding.

Mr. Jellerette questioned maintenance requirements on fields, particularly synthetic turf. Ms. Valadares and Mr. Stowers explained that most fields are natural grass or clay requiring substantial maintenance and lining for different sports, while synthetic fields also need regular grooming. Mr. Abrams expressed concern over the size of the increase and requested revenue projections as an open item. Mr. Abrams asked the department to review the numbers more aggressively for savings in addition to preparing the ten percent reduction scenario. He left Recreation and Parks as an open item pending further review and revenue information. Ms. Valadares provided peer city comparisons showing fewer maintenance staff than similar municipalities. Mayor Smyth commented on the public safety value of recreation programs and asked if the new recreation center could open without the requested positions. Ms. Valadares confirmed it could not due to safety and operational requirements. Ms. Yang emphasized the need for a holistic approach across departments under Mr. Daniels to reach the ten percent target.

H. Building Management

Ms. Valadares began the Public Works presentation with Building Management. She noted that contractual obligations, personnel costs, assumption of full maintenance for the five City fire stations, and major utility increases (particularly at the new recreation center at 98 Main Street) were the primary drivers. Mr. Rennie reported the headcount as three in management, seven in engineering maintenance, and three full-time plus twenty-one part-time in janitorial. Mr. Rennie explained the department is assuming responsibility for seven additional buildings. He stated that without these new buildings the budget increase would have been approximately four percent.

Extensive discussion occurred regarding the transfer of fire station maintenance from the Fire Department, estimated at approximately three hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Jellerette, Mr. Abrams, and Mayor Smyth asked detailed questions about previous maintenance conditions (especially Station 4), manpower impact, and incremental costs. Mr. Abrams left the fire station maintenance transfer as an open item for further detailed review.

I. Water Pollution Control Authority

No discussion occurred on this item.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

****MR. TROY JELLERETTE MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

****THE MOTION PASSED. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED.**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:40 PM.

Respectfully Submitted
Courtney Baldwin
Recording Secretary