

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE & CLAIMS COMMITTEE
SPECIAL JOINT FINANCE AND CLAIMS AND BOARD OF EDUCATION
FINANCE COMMITTEES MEETING
JANUARY 8, 2026
BY COMMON COUNCIL CHAMBERS CITY HALL 3RD FLOOR AND ZOOM
VIRTUAL MEETING**

To allow public access, anyone may access a meeting by telephone and/or Zoom, or a recording in the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. Specific instructions and links can be found at norwalkct.gov/meetings.



Members of the public may call in to participate. Callers will not be able to see the meeting participants. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, dial *9 on the phone and you will be called on by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.



Members of the public who wish to provide "live comments" may also use the Zoom meeting platform. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, click the "raise your hand indicator" and you will be called by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.



Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be included into the record, they must be submitted by 12:00 p.m. the day of the meeting. Please email Chitsamay Lam at clam@norwalkct.gov with the subject line "Public Comment" to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Frayer called the meeting to order at 6:00p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Chair Frayer and Chair Pritchett called the Roll for their respective committees. James Frayer, Anne Wennerstrand, Johan Lopez, Josh Goldstein, Jared Schmitt, Lunda Asmani, Sheri M. Pritchett, Diana Carpio, Marcus Jaime, Garrett Oliver

ATTENDANCE: (CITY) James Frayer, Chair; Anne Wennerstrand; Johan Lopez; Josh Goldstein

ATTENDANCE: (BOE) Sheri McCready Pritchett, Chair Finance Committee; Diana Carpio; Marcus Jaime; Garrett Oliver; Howard White, Chair BOE

STAFF: (CITY) Mayor Barbara Smyth; Jared Schmitt, CFO; Chitsamay Lam, Comptroller

STAFF: (BOE) Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent; Lunda Asmani, CFO

OTHERS: Jalin Sead and Nicole Eady, City Council Members

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

REMARKS

Mayor Barbara Smyth thanked everyone for participating in the City and Board of Education budget process. She took a moment to acknowledge her dear friend, Greg Burnett. She stated this type of joint meeting is a result of Greg's efforts. He began this about six (6) or seven (7) years ago to create an opportunity for more opportunities for the public to speak and for the Board of Education and Norwalk Public Schools to present their needs to the city as they work on the budget, so those needs can be considered. It is important to work together and make decisions that are in the best interests of the students, families and all the residents of Norwalk. Mayor Smyth thanked the former Mayor Harry Rilling for investing in education, and said she will continue his efforts with the 25-year school building plan and to ensure proper funding to support students, teachers and staff. She has been part of the budget process as a council member, but this would be her first as Mayor. She said that the past budget seasons have been tight, and it may even be tighter. As a city, they have a responsibility to provide proper funding for their schools and to keep the residents safe and to provide important services that affect public health and the quality of life every day. She said their police and fire departments, public works, community services, enforcement, recreation and parks and all the hardworking people who keep the City of Norwalk running. She looks forward to increased stakeholder engagement and improved communication, working together with everyone for their families as they navigate this year's budget cycle.

Superintendent Alexandra Estrella thanked everyone for joining them as they continue the important conversation around the budget for the Board of Education with collaboration with the city. She said last year was a complex year for everyone as they had to navigate grant reductions and limitations and resources that placed them in a predicament of making tough decisions. She is hoping this year they will continue to have a collaborative and respectful process and early engagements around the budget process. That would ensure the BOE and the city are both clear around levers and pressures for the city as well as the district. She hopes that they can continue to have

City of Norwalk

Finance & Claims Committee

Special Joint Finance and Claims and Board of Education Finance Committees Meeting

January 8, 2026

By Common Council Chambers City Hall 3rd Floor and Zoom Virtual Meeting

Page 2

collaborative conversations around the needs of the district. She said they are operating at a minimum, and to effectively provide the services that have yielded the outcomes they have thus far, they need at a minimum to sustain what they have. She hopes that this meeting continues with the dialogue amongst them but also provides the public, particularly the parents and community members, an opportunity to have an understanding of what they hope to accomplish for the betterment of their schools that would yield better outcomes for their students.

Sheri M. Prichett said on behalf of the Norwalk Board of Education and the Finance Committee, she thanked the residents, city officials and colleagues for joining them. She said they appreciate their time, interest and continued engagement in the important work they share. The joint public meetings reflect their commitment to collaboration and open dialogue as they work together to support Norwalk students and community. She said they look forward to a respectful and productive discussion.

Chair Frayer stated this joint meeting is a continuation of some of the efforts that they began last year with both finance committees. Sharing information and continuing a dialogue, so the citizens of Norwalk can gain a better understanding of the operating budget, its goals, objectives, key drivers and challenges for the upcoming 26/27 year. They will get an update from the BOE and the City on their budget requests. He said, as committee members, they have to comprehend the priorities and support those funding requests. They also must balance those needs against the overall economic impact on the city and tax burden on its people. This should not be a budget battle between the City and the BOE, it should be a collaborative process, a creative, problem-innovative, problem-solving exercise between the two (2) groups. They should also engage the state legislature delegation. He went over the schedule.

Public participation comments are not verbatim and represent a summarization of statements unless otherwise noted. Speakers are Norwalk residents unless otherwise noted.

Maria Myslinski (in person), 27 Park Hill Avenue. She acknowledged that since she spoke last, the city stepped up and found additional funding, saved many positions, and preserved the important music and arts programs. She strongly emphasized that schools must receive the funding necessary to provide high quality education for their students and the resources the educators need to succeed. The programs in Norwalk schools need to be expanded, supported and given extra love. She hopes to see improvements in transparency, communication and a working relationship between the BOE and the city. Families should not be left guessing, worrying or finding out after the fact. Clear, consistent communication builds trust.

Jon Richichi (in person), 5 Redwood Road, father of two (2) children at Wolfpit Elementary School. He welcomed newly elected Mayor Barbara Smyth as well as the new members of the BOE. He shared a concern about last year's budget crisis and the

loss of teachers and increased class sizes. Due to that, they have noticed a difference in their son's day-to-day experiences. Larger class sizes place a strain on teachers and school administrations, spending more time on behavioral issues than instruction. It is a disruption to learning. He asked that the committee keeps the real outcomes in mind as decisions are made.

Nick Z. (in person), 1 Jean Avenue, father of three (3) children in the Norwalk Public Schools. Congratulated Mayor Smyth and stated he liked how she gave recognition to her predecessor, Mayor Rilling. He said he appreciated all of his service to the city. He thanked Ms. Carpio and all of the BOE members. He advocates for fully funding the budget for the schools. He thanked the teachers and the schools. Stated teachers deserve all the increases in the budget. He thanked Dr. Estrella and others for funding the school lunches. He said they should continue the upward trajectory by increasing some of the services and be realistic and not wait till the last minute.

Amanda Frazier (online) She is a parent and PTA President at the Kendall College and Career Academy. She said the KCCA staff and students have built a culture of respect, collaboration and fun that can be felt the moment you step through the doors of the school. She asked for their help to build better and stronger relationships, plans and road maps to ensure that their schools receive the funding they need to truly foster and educate their children. She urged the committee to find a way to fully fund the BOE budget and work towards a path to improve the process and funding going forward.

Diane Lauricella (online) 21 Little Fox Lane. She congratulated Mayor Barbara Smyth, the Council and BOE Members. She reviewed the budget line by line and made some comments. She offered to meet with any one of the members to discuss her thoughts. She began by saying the city and the BOE need to look at ways to combine additional services, for example, recycling. Look to regional approaches for purchases and services, for example, fuel oil. Put the BOE meetings on the city website homepage because they are part of their city. Hire a full-time professional grant czar with proper support and lastly, develop an energy policy.

Angela Giraldo (online) 158 Perry Avenue. She asked the committee to allocate the funds necessary to fully staff Silvermine Dual Language School as it was approved, represented to families and submitted to the state. She stated she had no choice but to remove her daughter from Silvermine School because the program was not being implemented as approved. She said Silvermine has a resource allocation problem. She would like the committee to hire the appropriate number of Spanish teachers for all the grades. Families should not have to accept scaled-down service reductions in the dual language program.

Chair Frayer closed public participation at 6:33p.m.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. CITY-CFO PRESENTATION ON THE 2026-2027 OPERATING BUDGET

Mr. Schmitt presented the City 2026-2027 Operating Budget. He said that he would cover a three (3) year period, looking back one-year, current year and the FY27 budget and its challenges and how they can meet those challenges. He shared his screen with the committee. He discussed the FYE 2025 highlights and OPEB. He stated they submitted the Annual Report on time. He thanked Chitsamay Lam and her staff for the months of hard work and great team effort. He also thanked Lunda Asmani and his staff for their months of hard work and great team effort. He gave an update on the FYE 2026 budget and discussed the FYE 2027 challenges. He talked about efforts to minimize tax increases and possibly being able to pause OPEB funding for an approximate year. He showed the committee the upcoming budget dates as well.

B. BOE-CFO PRESENTATION ON THE 2026-2027 OPERATING BUDGET

Mr. Asmani presented the BOE 2026-2027 Operating Budget. He congratulated Mayor Smyth and the members of both finance committee's. He shared his screen with the committee. He shared with the public that they could access the BOE budget book on the BOE website. He talked about student demographics, enrollment and state comparisons. He also went over staffing distribution. Mr. Asmani discussed the items in the budget book and the budget engagement dates. He reviewed the FY26 budget reconciliation. He explained each slide to the committee. He also explained the inclusion of additional funding in past and current fiscal years.

C. DISCUSSION

The Committee began a discussion on both reports for questions and comments. The presentations will be posted to the city's website.

Dr. Estrella asked Mr. Schmitt to explain what the \$600,000 entails.

Mr. Schmitt answered that the funds are for the police that are assigned to security checks around the schools throughout the day, every day. In addition to the SRO's. In the past, the funds were not budgeted, they would use a carry forward to fund it and now the funds will be included in the budget as a recurring cost.

Dr. Estrella stated that there were conversations about new developments, tax deferment and eventually new tax revenue coming into the city, particularly with the mall elevating some taxpayer tension and she wanted to know the status.

Mr. Schmitt answered that they have a list that they can track. He said in most cases the amount owed is phased into a seven (7) year period. He said the mall was structured differently and explained the terms. Mr. Schmitt explained the process of budget funding and how and why funds become available after the budget process has taken place.

A discussion ensued about the budget. Mayor Smyth spoke about working together and advocating for Special Education funding and going up to Hartford to advocate. They spoke about ECS and it not being fully funded.

Mr. Lopez asked if there was a way to work together on waste and recycle to possibly get better pricing instead of working separately.

Mr. Asmani said they work together with the city on the utilities and, yes, they can do that also.

Dr. Estrella commented that everywhere they see a potential to collaborate they will do it.

The committee discussed the efficiency study being three (3) years old and perhaps needs to be updated.

A question about funding the music program and special education not seeing the same increase was asked. Mr. Asmani explained how it was determined and where the funding came from.

Mayor Smyth commented about the taxes and helping families. She briefly spoke about city challenges. She said she really wants to work together, open the dialogue, improve communications, get the stakeholders at the table and work together because those are their kids.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Lopez moved to adjourn.
Motion passed unanimously.
The meeting was adjourned at 8:03p.m.