

**CITY OF NORWALK  
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - JANUARY 20, 2026  
ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

**ATTENDEES:** Jalin Sead (Chair), Josh Goldstein (Council President), Ann Wennerstrand, Richard Dellinger, Johan Lopez, Jesse Buccolo, Colin Holston.

**STAFF:** Mr. Candela, Jim Travers, Chief James Walsh.

**OTHERS:** Nicole Ayers.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The regular meeting of the Ordinance Committee was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Mr. Sead.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Mr. Sead conducted roll call, and a quorum was confirmed.

**III. PUBLIC HEARING (POSSIBLE ACTION ON)**

There was no public hearing scheduled.

**IV. PUBLIC HEARING DISCUSSION**

There was no public hearing discussion.

**V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COMMENT**

No public participation.

**VI. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

**A. Regular Meeting: November 18, 2025**

**1. Discuss and vote to approve minutes of the regular meeting of the ordinance committee on November 18, 2025**

**\*\* MS. WENNERSTRAND MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF NOVEMBER 18, 2025.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS PRESENTED.**

There were no corrections, deletions, or omissions to the minutes.

## VII. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

## VIII. NEW BUSINESS

### **A. Discuss and vote on Chapter 33A (Complete Streets), Section 33A-8 (Exceptions)**

Mr. Candela presented the proposed amendment to Section 33A-8(G), which specifies a 30-day period for an applicant to appeal a denial of an exception to Superior Court, replacing the general reference to Connecticut state law. The change promotes administrative efficiency, provides certainty to all parties, prevents indefinite uncertainty about municipal decisions, and allows the city to proceed with projects without concern for untimely appeals.

### **\*\*MR. GOLDSTEIN MOVED TO DISCUSS THE AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 33A (COMPLETE STREETS), SECTION 33A-8 (EXCEPTIONS)**

Mr. Travers, Complete Streets Coordinator, supported the amendment as a minor clarification and fine-tuning of the exception period and appeal process. He provided a detailed overview of the Complete Streets Ordinance, explaining that Norwalk adopted the legislation and accompanying Design Manual after nearly two years of extensive public meetings, internal discussions, and consultant guidance, making it the 14th city in Connecticut to do so. The ordinance takes a holistic approach to all modes of transit, including bus service, vehicular traffic, sidewalks, bike lanes, and multi-use paths, while expanding opportunities for road design.

Mr. Travers highlighted key successes in the first year since adoption, including a record 12.3 miles of new sidewalks constructed, additional bike lanes, upgraded traffic signals for improved pedestrian mobility, ongoing discussions about funding for traffic signal optimization, a partnership with the Department of Transportation, and the longest marked bike route on any state route in Connecticut. He noted that the ordinance reflects a broader philosophy change across city departments, including Public Works, Planning and Zoning, and site plan review processes. He also mentioned interest from neighboring municipalities, such as Darien, in replicating Norwalk's successes.

Mr. Travers clarified the distinction between exemptions (technical, regulatory, or maintenance-related situations where Complete Streets improvements are not required, such as routine crack sealing that does not change curb-to-curb width or pavement) and exceptions (situations where improvements are technically feasible but may not be pursued due to factors such as prohibitive cost, lack of right-of-way requiring acquisition, or other considerations). Exceptions are reviewed by the Complete Streets Committee, which has 45 to 90 days to make a decision. Mr. Candela emphasized the importance of the 30-day appeal period for due process and project certainty.

Mr. Lopez inquired whether the original ordinance included provisions ensuring that anecdotal, speculative, fear-based, or unsupported public comments do not outweigh technical analysis during exception evaluations. Mr. Goldstein and Mr. Candela clarified that public comment is considered in the process, but final decisions are made by the Complete Streets Committee,

comprised of the Complete Streets Coordinator, Chief of Staff, Chief of Operations and Public Works, Chief of Economic and Community Development, ADA Coordinator, Chairperson of the Planning and Zoning Commission, and Chairperson of the Bike Walk Commission (or their designees).

Ms. Wennerstrand requested further clarification on the difference between exemptions and exceptions, which Mr. Travers and Mr. Candela provided in detail.

Mr. Goldstein added that the ordinance was modeled on best practices from other municipalities and is an evolving policy that is refined through experience and amendments.

Mr. Hosten asked whether 30 days is a reasonable appeal period, if it aligns with standards in other Connecticut municipalities, and whether projects are held during appeals. Mr. Candela explained that 30 days is the default under Connecticut case law when no specific period is prescribed, balancing due process with reasonableness. Mr. Travers noted that the internal committee review process already provides significant safeguards, and additional layers could delay projects given short construction windows.

**\*\* MR. GOLDSTEIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 33A, SECTION 33A-8 (EXCEPTIONS).  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. THE AMENDMENT WAS APPROVED.**

**B. Discuss and vote on Chapter 29 (Cannabis), Section 29-6 (Enforcement; fines/citation; hearing; report)**

No discussion or motion was made on this item.

**VIII. NEW BUSINESS**

**C. Discuss and vote on Chapter 112A (Vape Shops), Section 112A-13 (Penalties)**

Mr. Candela presented the proposed amendment to Section 112A-13(B), which increases the penalties for violations of the vape shop licensing ordinance. The amendment raises the fine to \$250 per day for each ongoing violation (with each 24-hour period constituting a new violation), allows continued fines for second and third violations, and provides for license suspension on a second violation and revocation on a third violation (for licensed entities). The changes aim to strengthen enforcement against non-compliant shops that are not registering or obtaining licenses, as many violators are ignoring the current penalties.

Mr. Candela explained that the ordinance was originally enacted as part of a multi-layered approach to address the proliferation of unregulated vape and smoke shops in Norwalk. The licensing requirement, including background checks through the Police Department and Mayor's Office, was intended to assist police enforcement. However, feedback from the Police Department indicates that many violating entities are not applying for licenses, rendering license

suspension or revocation ineffective. The increased daily fines are designed to create a stronger deterrent.

Mr. Sead thanked the Police Department for their ongoing enforcement efforts, noting frequent busts at vape shops and the public health risks posed by unregulated products.

Mr. Lopez asked whether the fines could be structured to gradually increase at each violation level. Mr. Candela explained that Connecticut General Statutes limit the maximum fine to \$250 per day, and lower initial fines (\$50 or \$150) are likely to be ignored. The daily fine structure allows immediate application of the maximum penalty for ongoing violations. He noted that additional enforcement mechanisms with greater impact are under discussion with the Police Department and will be brought back to the committee later.

Mr. Buccolo inquired about the timeline for evaluating the effectiveness of the amended penalties, the grace period for compliance, and any available data on the number of shops versus licensed entities. Mr. Candela stated that the initial grace period ended in September, with no further grace periods planned. New businesses must license immediately due to public health and criminal concerns.

Chief James Walsh provided data: there are 44 smoke and vape shops in Norwalk. Since enforcement began in October/November, 16 employees have been arrested for not registering and for illegal sales. Undercover operations have recovered large quantities of illegal cannabis products. He described many shops as organized criminal operations exploiting the legalization of adult-use cannabis by selling unregulated, high-dosage THC products at lower prices and in greater quantities than legal retailers. He noted hidden compartments in some shops and emphasized that misdemeanor arrests often result in limited prosecution.

Mr. Candela added that the city loses sales tax revenue from legal cannabis sales due to these illegal operations.

Mr. Sead highlighted the public health risks of unregulated products, which may contain dangerous substances, and the importance of protecting residents, especially children.

Mr. Candela emphasized that state-regulated legal cannabis retailers are heavily monitored and have strong incentives to comply, making their products the safest option.

Mr. Goldstein noted that the ordinance uses civil enforcement to address public health and legal issues where criminal penalties have not kept pace. He supported the amendment as aligning with the original purpose of the ordinance and reflecting lessons learned from enforcement.

Ms. Ayers sought clarification on whether arrests target employees or owners. Chief Walsh explained that arrests typically involve the person making the sale (often employees aware of hidden inventory), following multi-step investigations.

Ms. Ayers asked about the age of those arrested (noting many are under 25) and whether the public could advocate for stronger state legislation. Mr. Candela suggested social media

campaigns to raise awareness of busts and promote legal retailers, and noted recent state statutory changes (October) that may allow stronger penalties for public health-endangering sales (including tobacco and vape products). He indicated these options are under review.

Ms. Ayers emphasized the need to address both clerks and owners, arguing that owners bear significant responsibility.

Mr. Goldstein and Mr. Candela clarified that the ordinance applies to the retailer/business owner/applicant, not individual employees.

Chief Walsh stressed that enforcement requires a multi-departmental approach involving Planning and Zoning, business licensing, and code enforcement, as many shops are non-compliant with multiple regulations.

Mr. Candela agreed, noting that the ordinance is one layer of a broader strategy including fines, citations, inspections, and potential landlord accountability, limited by state authority.

Mr. Sead reiterated the need for municipal action to protect residents and the importance of advocating for stronger state legislation.

Mr. Buccolo expressed support for aggressive enforcement and appreciation for the efforts of the Police Department and Mr. Candela.

Ms. Wennerstrand asked whether fines collected could be earmarked for specific purposes. Mr. Candela confirmed this had not been previously discussed but could be considered in the future.

**\*\* MR. LOPEZ MOVED TO APPROVE THE AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 112A, SECTION 112A-13 (PENALTIES).**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. THE AMENDMENT WAS APPROVED AND REFERRED TO A PUBLIC HEARING.**

**D. Discuss and vote on Chapter 112A (Vape Shops), Section 112A-7 (Issuance of license)**

Mr. Candela presented the proposed amendment to Section 112A-7, which adds two new grounds for automatic denial of a vape shop license: prior violation of Connecticut General Statutes § 21a-278(b)(1)(D) (illegal manufacture, distribution, sale, etc., of 1 kilogram or more of a cannabis-type substance) and § 21a-246 (unlawful possession and supply of marijuana). These additions, recommended by the Police Department, aim to prevent issuance of licenses to individuals or entities with relevant criminal histories.

Mr. Hosten inquired whether these statutes account for convictions prior to the legalization of recreational cannabis and whether expungements apply. Chief Walsh explained that under Connecticut's Clean Slate Act, marijuana-related convictions that became legal were automatically expunged. Mr. Candela confirmed this and offered to provide detailed copies of the statutes for review.

Mr. Candela noted that the fines amendment (Section 112A-13) is more time-sensitive, as most existing shops have already applied (or chosen not to), while the license issuance changes

primarily affect new applicants. He suggested providing additional information on the statutes before proceeding.

Mr. Hosten moved to table the amendment to allow further review of the statutes and their application.

**\*\* MR. HOSTEN MOVED TO TABLE THE AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 112A, SECTION 112A-7 (ISSUANCE OF LICENSE).  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED (MR. LOPEZ OPPOSED). THE AMENDMENT WAS TABLED FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION AT A FUTURE MEETING.**

## **IX. DISCUSSION**

### **A. Discuss the financial disclosures and impact of ordinances**

Ms. Ayers presented her proposed ordinance requiring a fiscal impact statement for all new ordinances. She explained that the goal is to provide greater transparency and allow elected officials to better understand the financial implications of ordinances, including costs for enforcement, additional staffing, or restructuring. She noted that many state statutes include financial impact sections and that this practice would help the city plan responsibly.

Mr. Goldstein supported the proposal, describing it as a fiscal note summarizing potential impacts on city departments or practices, codifying what has sometimes occurred informally. Ms. Wennerstrand thanked Ms. Ayers for her work and inquired whether the proposal would quantify the administrative burden on city employees, such as additional human resources needed for enforcement or oversight. Ms. Ayers confirmed that it would cover such costs and allow long-term financial forecasting.

Mr. Hosten asked who typically prepares financial impact analyses and to what extent they are expected to be accurate. Mr. Candela explained that in past cases (e.g., tree ordinance, leaf blower ordinance, Complete Streets), departments were consulted multiple times to assess capacity and needs. He noted that some ordinances had no fiscal impact, while others involved detailed discussions with staff.

Mr. Lopez shared his experience with the vape shop ordinance, where multiple departments were consulted on enforcement capacity. He inquired whether such a requirement would typically be established by charter rather than ordinance. Mr. Candela responded that it could be done by either method.

Committee members agreed to continue working on the proposal, with Ms. Ayers noting that the draft would benefit from refinement.

## **X. ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* MR. LOPEZ MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:22 pm.**

**Respectfully Submitted,  
Courtney Baldwin,  
Recording Secretary**