CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE & TAXATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES - MARCH 4, 2026
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

ATTENDEES: Artie Kassimis, Mayor Smyth, Kendrick Constant, Troy Jellerette, Anne Yang, Joseph Andrasko.

OTHERS: Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Lunda Asmani, Lamond Daniels, Ralph Valenzisi, Sandra Faioes, Jay Habansky, James Travers, Garrett Bolella, Steven Kleppin, Alexis Cherichetti, William Ireland, Sabrina Godeski, David Westmoreland, Jared Schmitt, Kimberlee Kinsella, Ed Abrams, and Tom Ellis.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kassimis called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM and noted that he was filling in for Chairman Ed Abrams who could not attend that evening. Mr. Kassimis asked that everyone be nice to him in his role as acting chair.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Elbourne conducted the roll call and a quorum was established. Mr. Kassimis stated that Mr. Andrasko would log in at 6:45 PM from his email. Mayor Smyth made brief opening remarks noting that this was night two of budget review with the departments, that the season was difficult, and that the Board of Estimate & Taxation was focused on hearing from departments and asking questions.

III. BOARD OF ESTIMATE & TAXATION - BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

A. Board of Education

Mr. Ellis introduced the presentation for the Board of Education and stated that only two areas would be covered that night, starting with the Board of Education. Mr. Ellis noted that Dr. Estrella, Mr. Asmani, and others were present. Ms. Estrella began by thanking the Board of Estimate & Taxation, Mayor Smyth, and the community at large for joining the presentation of the FY26-27 tentatively approved operating budget. Ms. Estrella stated that this is a maintenance budget whose focus has been to preserve the systems and structures that have proven to yield the progress seen thus far in student achievement and the great things happening across the organization. Ms. Estrella explained that the budget is designed to sustain the momentum and continue improving the outcomes of the students. Ms. Estrella reminded the board that over the past five years, with the strategic plan and the efficiency study conducted in collaboration with the city, the district has seen sustained and continuous progress across all academic areas for the scholars. Ms. Estrella highlighted a near 93 percent graduation rate, increases for multilingual learners and students receiving special education services with close to 10 percent gains in the number of those students graduating, progress in reducing chronic absenteeism, and establishing social-emotional learning practices in the organization. Ms. Estrella noted that the state had invited the district multiple times this year to present at the state level on how these positive outcomes were attained. Ms. Estrella stated that in order to continue operationalizing and systematizing these practices, continued funding is required to enable the district to do that.

Ms. Estrella described the process used to establish the budget, including collaboration with the mayor's team alongside the Board of Education's team to look at needs within the organization and overarching needs for the system at large. Ms. Estrella noted community opportunities to solicit feedback from families through surveys, town halls, workshops, budget presentations, and listening conversations that occurred alongside board members and other constituents. Ms. Estrella stated that this enabled the district to gather information to align with things already known to be working and to keep in mind what parents felt was essential to continue. Ms. Estrella identified elements beyond the district's control, including special education costs, healthcare costs, and limitations around grant acquisition, with the number of grants obtained over several years having been diminished or sunsetting in some cases, and the ability to attain additional grants becoming more difficult because of the strings attached to many federal grants. Ms. Estrella emphasized that a community's success is driven by the success of its schools, particularly because the district is responsible for ensuring that students thrive and their success will ensure that the city and the city's future thrive as they become the leaders of tomorrow. Ms. Estrella asked the board to keep in mind the importance of sustaining a strong educational system so that Norwalk remains strong. Ms. Estrella then turned the presentation over to Mr. Asmani to provide more in-depth insight on the budget and the drivers that have led to the request of around a 6.5 percent increase for the overarching budget.

Mr. Asmani thanked Ms. Estrella and confirmed that the board members had received a copy of the budget book distributed in December or January after the Board of Education approved the tentatively approved budget. Mr. Asmani noted that the book is also available online via a QR code and contains an introduction similar to Ms. Estrella's remarks, an organizational section on public school funding, a financial section with line-item detail, five years of general fund line-item history including three years of actuals, the current budget, and the proposed budget, five years of line-item detail for the grant fund and the food services fund, an informational section on service of children, public school academic achievements, enrollment projections, and a four-year summary of staffing changes broken down by position titles, department, and funding source (locally funded versus grant funded). Mr. Asmani stated that the district remains available to answer any follow-up questions that may arise while reviewing the book. Mr. Asmani provided a snapshot that student enrollment is just over 11,000 students as of October 1, highlighted recent openings such as the South Norwalk school, and noted ongoing success across the district. Mr. Asmani described the budget development cycle, which mirrors the city's cycle and begins in September by reviewing the prior year-end close once books are finalized and auditors have completed their work. Mr. Asmani explained that in November central departments submit requests for transportation, curriculum, education, operations, and support services; enrollment is reviewed; the superintendent makes adjustments in December and January; the tentatively approved budget is presented to the Board of Education in January; and the budget is then submitted to the city. Mr. Asmani noted that the district is already beginning the student-based budgeting process with principals using enrollment projections and the mayor's or council's recommended funding level. Mr. Asmani reviewed efficiencies implemented since the

2022 efficiency study in human resources, operations, technology, curriculum and instruction, student support systems, and workforce pathways development.

Mr. Asmani presented slides on academic achievements, including the district performance index for English language arts, math, and science, benchmarking Norwalk against cities with populations over 70,000 that share similar demographics. Mr. Asmani pointed out that Norwalk ranks ahead of all other districts in this cohort on the district performance index and on percent of target achieved for English language arts and math. Mr. Asmani also highlighted the five-year cohort graduation rate, which increased from 85.6 percent in 2020 to 92.6 percent in the most recent data, outperforming the state average. Mr. Asmani noted that while the district is not yet at 100 percent, the progress is significant.

Ms. Faioes addressed the grants landscape, stating that after COVID and the cessation of ARPA funds, and under the current administration, fewer grant opportunities are available. Ms. Faioes explained that grants previously represented 35 percent of overall funding and now represent approximately 12 percent. Ms. Faioes noted hesitation around available grants due to fine print requiring collaboration with entities such as Homeland Security and confirmed that many prior grants have sunsetting while entitlement grants from the state continue. Ms. Faioes stated that philanthropic partners face similar challenges.

Mr. Asmani displayed the grants summary showing funding decreasing from $43 million in 2023 to $35 million in the current budget. Mr. Asmani explained that reductions eliminate some programs while others must be absorbed into the local budget, creating additional pressure on tax-supported resources. Mr. Kassimis asked whether grant-funded programs are eliminated or moved to a different status and whether outside staff were hired specifically for grants. Ms. Faioes responded that it depends on the grant: some staff return to prior school positions when grants sunset, while others are absorbed if the grant terms require continuation of the program. Ms. Faioes gave examples of the behavior health grant leading to program elimination and the marine biology grant requiring absorption. Mr. Asmani added that the Magnet School Assistance Program is an example where existing employees were reassigned and positions will be eliminated upon sunset, with seniority-based bumping occurring. Ms. Estrella noted that many grants are designed for initial launch with the expectation that successful practices will be sustained locally.

Mr. Jellerette asked about the large ESSER grants and other federal funding shown on the chart, specifically why amounts such as the $11 million in federal grants are no longer available and whether this is tied to the current administration. Mr. Asmani explained that ESSER grants were one-time COVID-related funds phased out prior to the current administration. Ms. Faioes confirmed no direct cuts yet to Title grants but noted flat funding or slight declines in IDEA and Title I, along with a lack of new competitive grant opportunities. Mr. Jellerette requested the specific dollar amount of federal funding being lost for next year’s budget due to administration policies. Ms. Faioes referenced the overall drop from 35 percent to 12 percent of the budget offset by grants. Mr. Asmani offered to calculate a precise forecast, noting that some grants such as the $15 million Magnet School Assistance Program are multi-year reimbursement grants drawn down based on actual spending and cannot be accelerated. Ms. Estrella clarified that the $15 million Magnet grant was awarded prior to the current administration. Mr. Jellerette asked whether the remaining balance of the $15 million Magnet School Assistance Program could be drawn down at the Board of Education's discretion. Mr. Asmani and Ms. Faioes explained that these are reimbursement grants: money is spent first, quarterly filings are submitted for eligible expenses, and reimbursement is received; drawdowns cannot be accelerated and must align with the five-year grant term.

Mr. Jellerette followed up by asking if the Board of Education is seeing any issues with the current administration regarding federal money coming in or not. Ms. Faioes and Ms. Estrella both confirmed yes. Mr. Jellerette asked where the federal grants were listed in past years and whether any decline would appear for the next calendar year. Ms. Faioes and Mr. Asmani explained that the chart shows current year only and that some grants carry over multiple years, with the Magnet grant as an example of drawdown based on spending. Mr. Jellerette pressed again for the exact dollar amount being lost from the federal government for next year's budget due to administration policies. Mr. Asmani stated that he would get that number. Ms. Yang asked whether the unpredictable nature of grants could be addressed by projecting them over the next five years to identify potential shortfalls such as a $6 million or $10 million hole, showing a waterfall of expiring grants along with hopes for replacement grants. Ms. Estrella and Mr. Asmani acknowledged the request and indicated that the district would follow up with a five-year projection.

Mr. Jellerette returned to the topic and asked if the Board of Education had to come up with a number off the top of their head for how much money they are losing from the federal government for next year's budget due to the administration. Ms. Faioes referenced the offset between the previous 35 percent and current 12 percent. Mr. Asmani reiterated that they could calculate a forecast because some grants carry over into next year. Mr. Jellerette asked again whether the Board of Education is seeing any decline for the next calendar year from the federal government and their policies. Ms. Faioes and Mr. Asmani confirmed they would provide the specific numbers. Ms. Yang reiterated the need for the five-year projection to understand risks of large holes in future budgets. Mr. Asmani confirmed that the district would provide the requested grant projections and calculations as follow-up. The discussion on the Board of Education concluded with Mr. Asmani confirming that the district would provide the requested grant projections and calculations as follow-up.

B. Economic and Community Development

Mr. Ellis introduced the Economic and Community Development section, noting that Mr. Habansky was presenting for the first time. Mr. Ellis explained that he and Mr. Schmitt had met with Mr. Habansky earlier that afternoon to review the budget and presentation process. Mr. Ellis stated that the recommended budget for Economic and Community Development for FY 2027 totals just under $6.4 million. This represents an increase of approximately $400,000, or 6.7 percent, over the previous year's revised budget. He noted that some line items were down while others were up for various reasons. Mr. Ellis highlighted that the salaries line showed a significant percentage increase, primarily due to two years of contractual raises and steps. He further explained that a 1 percent salary challenge totaling $439,000 for the entire division had been placed in the Chief's section rather than allocated across departments, resulting in a net increase of $44,000 for that area. Mr. Ellis added that the city was again applying a salary lapse this year as a citywide lump sum rather than distributing it to individual divisions.

Mr. Habansky requested that the agenda order be adjusted slightly so that Code Enforcement could present immediately after him to accommodate directors' schedules. Both Mr. Kassimis and Mr. Ellis approved the change.

Mr. Habansky introduced himself as the Chief of Economic and Community Development. He shared that he has 20 years of experience in long-range municipal planning in Connecticut and has served as a graduate-level adjunct lecturer in real estate development for the past six years. Mr. Habansky stated that the departments reporting to him include Business Development and Tourism, Transportation, Mobility and Parking, Planning and Zoning, and Code Enforcement. He expressed that he has been highly impressed by the dedication and talent of the directors leading these departments and stated that he is proud of the work they do every day.

Regarding his own budget, Mr. Habansky noted there were very few changes from the prior year. He explained that several adjustments were made to better reflect how his office plans to utilize the funds. Specifically, the Training and Education line was reduced from $2,500 to $500. The Business Expenses line was increased from $1,250 to $1,750, and the Seminars and Conference Fees line was increased from $500 to $1,000. Mr. Habansky also stated that the Salary Premium line of $1,700 and the Retro Wage Adjustments line of $3,300 were eliminated because they were not anticipated to be needed in FY 2027. He emphasized that his office operates very lean, does not intentionally draw down unused funds at year-end, and returns savings to the city when possible.

Mr. Habansky acknowledged the challenging budget cycle and expressed appreciation for the difficult work facing the Board of Estimate & Taxation. He offered to answer any questions and stated he would provide follow-up information promptly if needed. Mr. Kassimis thanked Mr. Habansky for his presentation.

C. Transportation, Mobility and Parking

Mr. Ellis summarized the recommended budget for Transportation, Mobility and Parking, noting a total of just over $2 million. This represents an increase of $182,000, or just under 10 percent year over year. He explained that the salary line appears inflated at 18.3 percent due to a clerical oversight in the prior year: a mid-year approved hire (approximately $125,000–$130,000) had not been built into last year's revised budget. Mr. Ellis clarified that the true increase is closer to 9–10 percent and that the error was not Mr. Travers' fault. He then turned the presentation over to Mr. Travers, with Mr. Bolella also present.

Mr. Travers thanked the board and acknowledged the difficult budget year. He highlighted two key points: the Parking Authority will contribute $480,000 next year to cover portions of city salaries (including his own, the Assistant Parking Director's, and engineers supporting the team), and the department has reinvested $6 million of parking revenue over the past five years to repair city assets that had previously been neglected. Mr. Travers noted that the department is responsible for safety across 279 miles of roadway (259 city miles and 20 state miles) and plays a major role in the experience of drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users.

Mr. Travers then reviewed the department's strategic reductions across multiple line items while maintaining essential services. Postage was reduced 61 percent to $500 by shifting to hand delivery of project notifications. Printing and duplication were cut 33 percent by using fewer and lower-quality images at public events. Typing services were moved into the Bike Walk Commission event category. Memberships and dues were reduced 16.7 percent to only required items such as CDL licenses and the International Municipal Signal Association. Advertising was reduced 49.5 percent while still meeting grant requirements. Other professional services were reduced 13 percent. Traffic lights were reduced 25 percent. Other repair and maintenance were reduced 12.7 percent after negotiating contracts with Econolite and Myovision and expanding the city's fiber network ring (originally for traffic signals) to support the fire department, police department, and library branches, generating additional IT savings. Training and education were reduced 13.3 percent. Business expense was reduced 20 percent. Travel was reduced 33 percent. Machinery and rental were reduced 7.4 percent. Conference fees were reduced 6.7 percent. Office supplies were reduced 10 percent. Electrical supplies for streetlight illumination were reduced 20 percent. Traffic-related expenses were reduced 25 percent. Consumable tools for the traffic signal division were reduced 20 percent. Traffic signal supplies were reduced 25 percent. Security systems (primarily police overtime at work sites) remained unchanged. Special events for the Bike Walk Commission (safety and education) were reduced 20 percent.

Mr. Travers noted that tariffs on steel and aluminum have dramatically increased the cost of new traffic signals (now approaching $1 million per intersection), leading the department to shift toward roundabouts instead. He cited three upcoming roundabout projects: in front of the Sono School, at Richards and West Cedar, and at Gregory and 5th. He also reported strong safety results: a 27.93 percent reduction in overall crashes and a 14.6 percent reduction in pedestrian-involved crashes from 2024 to 2025. In addition, the department secured just over $13 million in grants during calendar year 2025.

Mr. Jellerette asked about the feasibility of a roundabout at the five-point intersection on East Avenue near St. Paul's Church and the green. Mr. Travers replied that the intersection is challenging due to its multiple approaches but is not off the table; funding for a corridor study from Eversley to Cannon was secured last year, and a consultant will be engaged this year for community meetings and design in coordination with the DOT Exit 16 project. Mr. Jellerette then asked whether additional savings could be identified in the budget. Mr. Travers committed to reviewing it again but stated that he and Mr. Bolella had already conducted a thorough review and that the budget is essentially bare bones.

Ms. Yang asked about anticipated grant totals for 2026 and 2027 and whether the Parking Authority could contribute more than the current $480,000 to the operating budget. Mr. Travers explained that grants are multi-year and project-specific and that exact future amounts cannot be projected because they depend on available opportunities, but the department pursues every grant possible. He noted that the department is extremely lean, with only one project manager supporting all grants, and that losing that position would halt progress. Mr. Travers agreed to provide year-to-date grant figures and to explore additional contribution from the Parking Authority. Mr. Schmitt confirmed that discussions are already underway for an additional $50,000 from the Parking Authority for special events staffing. Ms. Yang asked whether another $100,000 could be requested. Mr. Travers agreed to ask. Ms. Yang reiterated her request for the grant numbers through the current period. Mr. Travers confirmed he would provide them.

Mr. Kassimis thanked Mr. Travers and Mr. Bolella for their presentation. Mr. Travers thanked the board.

D. Planning and Zoning
Mr. Ellis introduced the Planning and Zoning section and stated that the recommended budget totals $1.8 million. This represents an increase of $143,000, or approximately 9 percent year over year, with salaries rising just under 10 percent or $36,000. He noted a handful of other variances and turned the presentation over to Mr. Kleppin and Ms. Cherichetti.

Mr. Kleppin began by stating that most increases are items the department is bound to and that no significant new spending had been proposed. He reported that the department is likely to eliminate or significantly reduce the outside consulting line for website hosting, blog posts, and event promotion. He explained that Miranda Creative (previously the Snyder Group) had handled this work and that the $52,058 line item for other professional services, which has been in the budget since approximately 2020 or 2021, may be removed entirely. Mr. Kleppin noted that conversations are ongoing with Jen McMurr to transition to cheaper alternatives or the city website, and that this change should result in meaningful savings once finalized in the coming month. He added that other line items with high percentage increases are small in actual dollar value and that the department remains largely static elsewhere.

Mr. Kleppin observed that while large projects have slowed, several approved ones are still moving forward, including the Merit 7 retrofit of two commercial office buildings to residential use, the 200 Connecticut Avenue partial office-to-residential conversion, and two additional significant projects expected in the next month or so. He stated that the current pace feels manageable and should allow the department to avoid simply reacting to deadlines.

Mr. Kassimis asked whether any BET members had questions. Ms. Yang asked what annual revenue Planning and Zoning generates. Mr. Kleppin replied that the fees are not significant compared with the Building Department but confirmed that updating the fee schedule is number four on his priority list. He stated that it has been three or four years since the last review and that he plans to examine what comparable municipalities are charging to ensure consistency. Mr. Ellis interjected with current revenue figures. He reported that through early February of the current fiscal year the department had collected $237,000 against a $200,000 target. He noted that 2024 revenue was $294,000 and 2025 revenue was $299,000. Mr. Ellis confirmed that the proposed target for next year is $300,000, which is consistent with the last two full fiscal years. Mr. Kassimis thanked Mr. Ellis for the information and asked whether there were any additional questions. There were none.

E. Code Enforcement
Mr. Ellis introduced the Code Enforcement section and noted that Mr. Ireland’s total budget is relatively stable, with most of the increase coming from the salaries line for a total of $72,000 or 5.8 percent. Mr. Ireland greeted the board and thanked them for their efforts to keep taxes at a low level. He reported that projected revenue for the year is $4.2 million and that through the end of February the department had collected approximately $3.6 million. He stated that the remaining $600,000 needed between March and June should be reached easily. Mr. Ireland noted that inspections at the high school are proceeding on schedule despite the weather. He reported

that permit issuance has picked up again after a slowdown in December, January, and part of February. He highlighted several major projects currently underway or upcoming, including the Meadow Gardens apartments, the Water Street apartment hotel, and the Norwalk Hospital addition, which is expected to include a 10-story tower with demolition and construction beginning in 2027.

Mr. Ireland stated that his staffing remains essentially the same and that he continues to operate efficiently compared with other towns of similar size, with three building inspectors, one electrical inspector, and one plumbing inspector. He noted that as apartment construction has slowed, the need for part-time inspectors has decreased and that he has already eliminated three part-time positions. He emphasized that he always returns unused funds to the city and prefers not to request additional money unless absolutely necessary.

Mr. Jellerette asked about last year's revenue, and Mr. Ireland confirmed it was $4.4 million. Mr. Jellerette observed that the slight decrease is due to large apartment projects being multi-year endeavors. Mr. Ireland agreed and listed several ongoing projects including 467 West Avenue by Toll Brothers, Chestnut Street, Belden Avenue, and the Milligan project on the old Pathmark site. He also described the hospital project in more detail, noting that two older towers will be demolished and that construction may include work on Stevens Street with a possible overhead bridge.

Ms. Yang praised the Code Enforcement department, stating that it punches well above its weight in terms of impact on the city, outward-facing professionalism, and revenue generation. She noted that the inspectors have long tenures and emphasized the importance of succession planning as Mr. Ireland may eventually retire. She highlighted that the department's budget is $1.3 million this year compared with $1.1 million in 2023 and that Mr. Ireland has proposed only a 4 percent increase, which she described as very good compared with most other departments. Mr. Ireland thanked Ms. Yang and added that Mr. Habansky had been instrumental in bringing the new online permitting system to the city. He stated that the system will streamline operations and commended Mr. Habansky for the initiative. Mr. Ellis and Mayor Smyth both agreed, noting that Mr. Habansky's prior experience with online permitting was a key factor in his hiring and that the system is expected to go live incrementally beginning this summer. Mayor Smyth added that the project came in 50 percent under budget.

Ms. Yang asked Mr. Habansky to review the department's fee schedule to ensure fees are competitive and harmonized with other towns. Mr. Habansky agreed and stated that it is best practice to review comparable cities every three years. Mr. Ireland confirmed that he already tracks fees and that Norwalk is currently one of the higher ones in Fairfield County, slightly above Stamford on building permit fees. Mr. Habansky stated that he would work with Code Enforcement, Planning and Zoning, and other licensing departments on a citywide review.
Mr. Kassimis thanked Mr. Ireland for his presentation.

F. Business Development
No discussion occurred on this item during the meeting.

G. Historical Commission
Mr. Ellis introduced the Historical Commission section and noted that the recommended budget totals $365,000, a decrease of $13,000 or approximately 3 percent, with most of the reduction in the buildings line. He turned the presentation over to Mr. Westmoreland and Mr. Hempstead.

Mr. Westmoreland explained that for the past several years the Historical Commission and its volunteers have managed the city-owned historic buildings at Mill Hill, the museum by City Hall, and the buildings in Matthews Park. He stated that the commission has handled maintenance calls, repairs, renovations, and programming in addition to supporting the nonprofit organizations that operate the sites. Mr. Westmoreland reported that the city is now stepping up to assume responsibility for these buildings through Facilities Management, which will relieve volunteers of tasks such as roof repairs, electrical work, and other building management duties that are no longer sustainable on a volunteer basis. He noted that the Lockwood-Matthews Mansion in particular has received state-of-the-art mechanical systems over the past two years and that professional management is now required.

Mr. Hempstead added that the mansion had been closed for two and a half years during major upgrades required by grants. He explained that the new heat pump system, burglar alarms, camera system, fire alarms, and sprinkler system represent significant ongoing maintenance costs the commission never faced before. He also mentioned that electricity rates have risen 60 percent since the upgrades were planned, making year-round operation more expensive. Mr. Hempstead thanked the city for its support during the transition and stated that the Historical Commission views itself as an important community asset that generates positive publicity and tourism.

Mayor Smyth expressed appreciation for the progress on transferring building management responsibilities to the city's Facilities and Guardian teams. She asked the Board of Estimate & Taxation to remain open-minded during the upcoming Facilities presentation the following night, noting that professional management is the right approach.

Mr. Habansky commended the Historical Commission under the leadership of Mr. Westmoreland and Mr. Hempstead. He stated that the volume of work performed by these volunteers to preserve the city's historical and cultural assets is remarkable and that the commission's efforts contribute significantly to tourism and the city's integrated economic development strategy.

Mr. Jellerette asked for clarification on the $266,000 public art inventory request that had been mentioned earlier. Ms. Godeski explained that the project includes professional valuation of the city's collection, including one of the largest WPA mural collections in the nation. She noted that while the WPA murals cannot be sold, most other pieces can be, and the inventory will support insurance purposes, repair prioritization, display decisions, and long-term asset management. Mr. Westmoreland added that the city collection contains approximately 800 paintings, many of significant value, with some WPA murals being priceless. He confirmed that none of the art is currently insured except for a few sculptures.

Ms. Yang suggested that the commission first conduct a cursory review of the 800 pieces to prioritize valuation, applying an 80-20 rule so that professional evaluators focus only on the highest-value items and potentially reduce the cost from $266,000 to around $60,000. Mr.

Westmoreland agreed that many pieces have little or no value and stated that the commission would prioritize accordingly. He noted that some painted scenes of Norwalk on old saws are probably not worth evaluating professionally.

Mr. Schmitt reminded the board that the discussion had shifted to a capital item and that there would be a separate opportunity to address capital expenditures later in the process.

Mr. Kassimis thanked Mr. Westmoreland and Mr. Hempstead for their presentation and for the important volunteer work they perform for the city.

H. Arts Commission

Mr. Ellis stated that the Board would next review the Arts Commission and Business Development and Tourism sections, both presented by Ms. Godeski. He noted that the Arts Commission budget totals $33,000 with a zero percent increase. For Business Development and Tourism, the recommended budget is $508,000, a decrease of $60,000 or 11 percent from the prior year.

Ms. Godeski began with the Arts Commission. She reported that the only change was an increase of $100 in the Membership and Dues line due to a fee increase from the statewide arts commission organization. The Other Professional Services line was reduced after the completion of consultant work for the new cultural district logo. A small amount was reallocated to Business Expenses to support increased educational and outreach activities. Ms. Godeski noted that the new Arts and Cultural Plan had just been approved that evening. The overall Arts Commission budget remained flat.

Ms. Godeski then addressed Business Development and Tourism. She explained that the salary line reflects the continuation of the Business Development Manager position, which is being retitled Assistant Director of Business Development and Tourism. This position has taken on substantially expanded duties, including support for small businesses and entrepreneurs, execution of small business programs, and administration of a new $1 million Storefront Improvement Fund grant. Ms. Godeski informed the board that she will be on maternity leave for four months later in the year and that retaining this position is critical for continuity. The Special Events Coordinator position is not included in the operating budget. Instead, $50,000 will be contributed by the Parking Authority toward that role. A small modification will be requested to reduce the advertising line by $24,514 to cover the balance of the Assistant Director salary. This advertising reduction is feasible because in-house staff will now perform much of the marketing work previously outsourced to consultants. The Security Systems line was decreased as the department had been over-budgeting for police and EMS overtime related to events.

Mr. Jellerette thanked Ms. Godeski and commented that he wished all departments came in with budgets like this.

Ms. Yang inquired about capital expenditure requests. Ms. Godeski replied that approximately $200,000 is requested for special events and $150,000 for the Small Business Main Streets program. On the Arts Commission side, requests include $27,000 for signage and $266,000 for a public art inventory and valuation project. Ms. Yang asked for more information on the $266,000 art inventory and later requested that the department return at a future meeting with a presentation on the department's expenses, successes, and return on investment for its roughly half-million-dollar annual budget. Ms. Godeski agreed and explained that the art inventory includes professional valuation of the city's collection, including one of the largest WPA mural collections in the nation. She noted this information would be valuable for the city's bond rating and asset management.

Mayor Smyth confirmed that the public art inventory request had been made for approximately six years and remained unfunded until now. Mr. Habansky expressed enthusiasm for presenting metrics and success stories for the department, highlighting the significant workload managed by a very small team.

Mr. Kassimis thanked Ms. Godeski for her presentation. Ms. Godeski noted that the department has remained flat or below flat for the past three budget cycles.

Mr. Westmoreland commented that he is familiar with the collection and that most pieces are of significant value, although somewhere well under 100 may be of little or no value. Mr. Westmoreland noted that a collection of painted scenes of Norwalk on old saws is probably not worth much and that professional evaluation could be prioritized accordingly.

I. Redevelopment Agency
No discussion occurred on this item during the meeting.

J. Parking Authority
No discussion occurred on this item during the meeting.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

****MAYOR SMYTH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**
****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED.**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Courtney Baldwin
Recording Secretary

Outlook

Public Comment

From Tony Bacigalupo <tonybacigalupo@gmail.com>
Date Wed 03/04/2026 3:01 PM
To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

Hi Tom,

Thanks as always for your service! I'm submitting a comment to the Board of Estimate & Taxation regarding today's meeting on the budget.

My name is Tony Bacigalupo. I live at 515 West Avenue in District A.

Over the past year, I have seen smiling faces I've met people who have just recently moved into the city. I've learned about and patronized local small businesses in town. And I've celebrated this city alongside thousands of my fellow citizens.

I did all of these things at the public events produced by Norwalk's Office of Business Development and Tourism. The SoNo Saturday Markets, the Earth Day Festival, the Halloween Nightmarket, and so many more.

I watched firsthand as that team—Sabrina, Anna, and Alex—labored to plan, promote, coordinate, pitch tents, work with vendors, answer questions, and stick around hours afterward picking up trash in the dark and the cold.

They overachieve for such a small team. Their work achieves impact across multiple metrics:

1. Local businesses get a rare opportunity to get in front of fellow citizens to sell their wares but also to simply show folks that they exist
2. It gives people from outside Norwalk an excuse to visit and patronize our local businesses
3. Citizens and visitors alike get to experience a positive and impressive experience with Norwalk and its people
4. Families and children get special, free entertainment
5. Local musicians and other artists get a chance to share their craft

In short, they provide a massive ROI to the city for the work they do.

As the budget currently stands, they will have to cut their tiny, already overworked team down.

That means potentially less of these programs we've come to know and love, right at a time when we need them the most.

To fully fund them would require a negligible portion of the city's budget—and it will make future budget conversations easier, because we'll have more tax revenue.

This is an easy win. Give these folks the funds they need to keep doing what they're doing so well, for everyone's sake.

Thanks for your time.

Tony Bacigalupo
Chairman of DTC District A
Chair of the Sustainability Task Force's Health & Happiness Committee
Sustainable Streets leadership team