CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
REGULAR MEETING
VIA TELECONFERENCE
NOVEMBER 6, 2023

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

Members of the public can call in and listen to a meeting. They will not be able to speak or see any of the meeting participants. Each meeting will use a unique Meeting/Webinar ID. Please find the information using the link above.

Members of the public who wish to view the meeting, but are not participating, can view a live stream on the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. This stream is delayed by approximately 20 seconds. Please find the information using the link above. The meeting recording and minutes will be posted on the City of Norwalk website within seven (7) days after the meeting.

ATTENDANCE: Ed Abrams, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling; Kendrick Constant; Troy Jellerette; Artie Kassimis; Anne Yang

STAFF: Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector; Mark Conte, Assistant Fire Chief; Henry Dachowitz, Chief Financial Officer; Irene Dixon, City Clerk; Thomas Ellis, Director of Management and Budgets: Alan Lo, Building and Facilities Manager; Ken Hughes and Robert Stowers, Recreation and Parks; Thomas Livingston, Chief of Staff; Police Chief James Walsh

OTHERS: Joseph Andrasko, Oak Hills Park Authority

Mr. Abrams called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. and called the Roll. A Quorum was present.

Mayor Rilling stated that the most significant item on the agenda was the approval of the HVAC grant application. He noted that many of the schools do not have air conditioning.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

October 2, 2023 – Regular Meeting

**** MR. JELLERETTE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED**
**** MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MR. KASSIMIS)**

2. **SPECIAL APPROPRIATIONS AGENDA** (Section A) None

3. **TRANSFER AGENDA** (Section B)

Mr. Ellis explained there was $1.5 million left after the first three months of the fiscal year. If al requests are approved, there will be $730,000 remaining. Mr. Abrams asked if he was comfortable the less than half of the contingency left. Mr. Ellis said that it may be challenging if they have another request for $500,000. Mr. Dachowitz added that the contingency is for eventualities and the reality is if they need it, they need it. If they use the funding now, they are worthy requests. As they get into the spring, they may be faced with issues; however, in his time here has never seen the contingency depleted. He said it was ok, but he does not want to make it a habit.

Mr. Ellis reviewed the first request under Legislative for $27,000. This request is to cover costs associated with the Charter Revision. He added they negotiated the price down from $30,000. Mayor Rilling described the work done during the Charter Revision and added that a lot of hard work went into this.

Mr. Ellis reviewed the request for $82,000 under Building Management. Mr. Abrams questioned taking that amount of the contingency and asked if the project could be delayed this year to see if there were any other significant contingency requests. He expressed concern about the burn rate of the contingency. Mayor Rilling said he reviewed all the contingency requests and did not see them burning through the contingency. He said he would like to see them move forward with this.

Mr. Livingston explained they hired a third customer service representative, which will improve customer service for the residents. This is an asset for the public. Mr. Dachowitz said if the Board feels it is important to move forward with this request, they will manage the contingency in the spring. Ms. Yang said this project makes sense and is a relatively small amount. Mr. Jellerette said it was very early to be going this deep and suggested pushing this off for a couple of months if it is not urgent. Mr. Abrams said they will take the recommendation of the Finance team and will watch the contingency as they move through the year. Mr. Ellis noted they normally start the year with $1.5 million in contingency and it has yet to be depleted.

Mr. Ellis reviewed the request by the Police Department for $475,000 to cover staffing for Norwalk Public Schools. Chief Walsh provided details of the request. Ms. Yang asked what it would cost if it was not covered by over time. Chief Walsh said they would need five more full time Officers and would cost more than paying overtime to the existing Officers. Plus new hires are paid for training at the Police Academy.

Ms. Yang asked why this funding was coming out of the City's budget and not at least partially out of the Board of Education's budget. Mr. Ellis explained that the City can not tell the schools how to spend their money.

A discussion took place regarding whether or not the City or the Board of Education was responsible for funding Officers at the schools. Everyone recognized the importance of providing officers in the schools, but Mr. Abrams and Ms. Yang said a discussion should take place with the Board of Education regarding funding.

**** MR. JELLERETTE MOVED TO VOTE ON EACH TRANSFER AGENDA ITEM SEPARATELY**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Ellis reviewed the $33,000 request from the Fire Department. Assistant Chief Conte provided details and said it is critical to get this engine back on the road. He said it turns over 3,000 calls a year. He described the condition of the engines and said they are bare bones as far as apparatus.

Mr. Ellis presented the transfer request from the Recreation and Parks department for $28,824. Mr. Hughes explained they are consolidated some of their pat time accounts and this is a transfer.

**** MR. ABRAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE REQUEST FOR $27,600 MADE BY THE LEGISLATIVE DEPARTMENT**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**** MR. ABRAMS MOVED TO DELAY THE REQUEST FOR $82,000 MADE BY THE BUILDING MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**** MR. ABRAMS MOVED TO DELAY THE REQUEST FOR $475,000 MADE BY THE POLICE DEPARTMENT UNTIL THE FINANCE DEPARTMENT HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**
**** MR. CONSTANT; MR. KASSIMIS AND MAYOR RILLING WERE OPPOSED**

**** MR. ABRAMS AMENDED HIS MOTION TO ADD THAT THE SERVICES WILL CONTINUE TO BE PROVIDED AND FUNDING WILL BE PROVIDED,**

BUT HE WANTS A CONVERSATION WITH THE BOARD OF EDUCATION REGARDING THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE COST

Mayor Rilling said this is something that is necessary to protect the students. He said this money was charged to the school system and amounts to a kind of reimbursement.

** **MR. ABRAMS ADDED A FURTHER AMENDMENT TO APPROVE THIS REQUEST FOR $475,000 AS REQUESTED, BUT NOTE THE STRONG DISAPPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION FOR FAILING TO HELP SUPPORT THIS NEED**.

Ms. Yang suggested approving this item, subject to a discussion between the City and the Board of Education as to which pocket it gets funded from.

Chief Walsh said this funding it to continue to provide security for the school facilities.

Mr. Abrams withdrew his previous motions.

** **MR. ABRAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE REQUEST BY THE POLICE DEPARTMENT FOR $475,000 AND REQUEST THAT A SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION WITH THE BOARD OF EDUCATION BE HELD TO HELP SUPPORT THIS COST.**
** **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

** **MR. ABRAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE REQUEST FOR $33,000 BY THE FIRE DEPARTMENT**
** **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

** **MR. ABRAMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE TRANSFER REQUEST FOR $28,824 BY THE RECREATION AND PARKS DEPARTMENT**
** **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

SECTION B

CITY OF NORWALK TRANSFERS 2023-24
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION

FISCAL YEAR 2023-24:

LEGISLATIVE:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-0200-5237	Advertising	$23,000
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-0200-5221	Printing & Duplication	2,000
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-0200-5258	Other Professional Services	2,600
				$27,600

This transfer is to cover City Charter re-write; advertising and publishing; binding and printing hard copies and charges for outside Counsel.

Finance recommends approval.

BUILDING MANAGEMENT:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency.	01-4071-5561	Buildings & Renovations	$7,000
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-4071-5561	Buildings & Renovations	75,000
				$82,000

This transfer is to cover Mayor and Chief of Staff Office – new walls and doors, reception area improvements. Renovation of Customer Service area and additional room for Operations and Public Works.

Finance recommends approval.

POLICE DEPARTMENT:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency.	01-3038-5120	Salary & Wages - Overtime	$475,000

This transfer is to cover staffing for Norwalk Public School (Middle and High Schools at the request of Norwalk Public Schools.

Finance recommends approval.

FIRE DEPARTMENT:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency.	01-3152-5332	Motor Vehicle Parts	$33,000

This transfer is to cover emergency repairs for Engine 2 (highest usage vehicle).

Finance recommends approval.

RECREATION & PARKS:

From		To		Amount
01-4172-5130	Wages & Salary – Temp.	01-4100-5140	Wages & Salary – Part-time	$14,412
01-4173-5130	Wages & Salary – Temp.	01-4100-5140	Wages & Salary – Part-time	14,412
				$28,824

This transfer is to cover consolidating Part-time and Temporary employee pay into one account.

Finance recommends approval.

4. Other Business (Section C)

Ms. Dixon read the following Resolution:

** **MS. YANG MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION: REQUESTING A SPECIAL CAPITAL APPROPRIATION FROM BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES DEPARTMENT RELATING TO CONNECTICUT STATE HVAC GRANT APPLICATION IN THE AMOUNT OF $14,360,306 FOR MULTIPLE NORWALK PUBLIC SCHOOLS.**

Mr. Lo reviewed the item and explained that he has been working with the Norwalk Public Schools on this unique request. He said the state implemented this program and it is subject to a 60% reimbursement. Mr. Lo said some of the basic requirements for this is a preliminary conception design and a professional cost estimate. The deadline is December 31, 2023.

Mr. Abrams asked if the $14 million appropriation will put the City's AAA rating at risk. Mr. Lo said the City's portion will be lower than $14 million. Mr. Dachowitz explained that the City currently has $450 million of debt and the limit is $500 million. He said the issue with this project is they are getting the most value at 60% reimbursement. With next year's projects, they are going to have hundreds of millions of dollars worth of projects that need funding which will ring them close to the upper limit. The reality of the capital projects is they are going to bump up against the $500 million.

Ms. Yang asked about leasing. Mr. Dachowitz explained that no leasing agency can match the rate they can borrow against. He added that there are a lot of wants and needs with limited resources. If they get a reimbursement then their allocation is stretched further.

Mayor Rilling said that after decades of neglect, the schools are in need of renovations or replacement. He said they are trying to do what they can to keep the schools up to date and up to code. He said that right now, they have no choice because it is not going to get cheaper to fix the schools.

** **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

5. **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION** (Section D)

Financial reports

• Tax Collector's Narrative – September 2023
• Tax Collector's Report – September, 2023

Ms. Biagiarelli reviewed her report as follows:

At this writing, we have not yet completed our August 2023 month end reports. I expect to have those reports completed in time for the Finance and Claims Committee meeting on September 14.

I can report on the collection period, tax collections in general and progress in dealing with some of the issues that presented themselves over the course of the past two months. Through the month of July 2023, we had collected 43.54% of our current tax levy, and 44.93% of our current sewer use levy. On the prior grand list year, we had collected 98.65% of the 2021 grand list real estate levy and 98.91% of the sewer use levy through the month of July, 2023 (13 month period).

We had an extended grace period for current taxes this year, due to tax bills having been mailed a few days later than hoped for; the last day to pay current taxes was Monday, August 7, 2023. Around July 10, it became apparent that there were issues with some motor vehicle assessments on the 2022 grand list.

The Assessor's division began making corrections, and between that time and this week, more than 1,000 bills were manually reassessed and subsequently re-billed by my division. However, due to the volume of changes that were deemed necessary, the Assessor's division determined it best to involve the software vendor (QDS). Accordingly, QDS will be sending a mass mailing for the remainder of the revised tax bills, based on revised assessments that the assessor's office has been reviewing. Affected taxpayers will have 30 days from the mailing date in which to pay these revised bills without penalty. We anticipate that mailing being sent at the end of this week, with the last day to pay being Tuesday, October 10. This mailing affects more than 5,000 taxpayers, some of whom will owe less than the amount originally billed, and some who will owe more.

The Administration will be issuing a statement for the press and the public about this issue later this week or early next week. I am not prepared to respond to questions about the assessment process or assessed values, but can speak to the billing and recordkeeping aspects of this endeavor. My office has already processed payments on hundreds of revised bills since the first week of July. We will work with the Comptroller's office to address situations in which taxpayers have already paid, and are owed a refund or a credit due to the revision or correction. This undertaking will likely continue through the next six to eight weeks, and possibly beyond. I also need to file amended state reports, because our tax levy will change to reflect all these adjustments.

There is information on the tax collector's home page on the city website in the form of a Frequently Asked Question: I think my motor vehicle assessment is wrong! What happened?

FAQs • City of Norwalk • CivicEngage (norwalkct.gov) as well as links to articles on higher motor vehicle values in general. We have been unable to proceed with some of our normal enforcement activities due to the issues with motor vehicle assessments and what is now an extended payment period. Delinquent notices, called demand for payment notices, are being mailed this week to taxpayers owing balances due on real estate, sewer use and business personal property. Motor vehicle demand notices will be sent at a later date.

The term “demand” is prescribed by state law, and is not meant to imply rudeness to the taxpayer; the tax collector is required to “demand” payment prior to taking any other enforcement action. Once we conclude the revised motor vehicle billing, and process the payments we anticipate receiving as a result of the mailing of demand notices, we expect to focus on enforcement and begin working on our July 2024 tax sale, scheduled for Monday, July 22, 2024.

We did not have a tax sale last year; our last sale was in 2021 and normally we do a sale every two years. We expect there will be more properties eligible for inclusion in this sale due to the three years that have elapsed since the last sale. Our criteria, as in past years, will be either the dollar amount owed, or the number of years in arrears. We will have a more accurate assessment of where we stand relative to current collections as well as final reports of our sixty day collections on the immediately prior levy when we provide reports through the end of the month of August, as a significant amount of payments were processed between August 1 and August 31.

I will continue to keep stakeholders informed of our progress and will update you when additional information is available.

Mr. Abrams expressed his thanks to Ms. Biagiarelli and her team.

• Oak Hills Park Financials – September 2023

Mr. Andrasko reviewed his report as follows. He reported that they have come to a mutually agreeable dissolution with the restaurant contractor. They are actively exploring other options for the restaurant. The dissolution agreement is not finalized, but they expect it to be done in early January.

Mr. Jellerette said the course is in great shape and said he is interested in the restaurant.

Oak Hills Park Authority
September 2023 Financial Commentary

Operations Updates:

- Golf revenue rounds, cart rounds and Discount ID cards are slightly over budget for the first three months of FY24. September was below budget due to several weekends with heavy rain.
- OHPA plans on making substantial capital improvements throughout the course of this new fiscal year and has already spent over $66k to date.
- We are at the end of our third year (of five) in our cart fleet lease and are seeing some expected wear and tear. However, the lithium batteries are holding up better than the standard batteries in previous leases.

YTD Financial Highlights:

- FY24 YTD net operating income was over budget by $55k and we ended September with a $869k cash balance which includes $33k in the capital reserve bank account.
  - Revenue was over-budget by 51k thanks to strong golf and Outings rounds.
  - Expenses were $4k under-budget due mostly to using much less water expense.
- OHPA made $47k in repayments to the City for the first two months of the new fiscal year. The annual 1% of gross golf revenue additional debt payment will be made once the Audit Report is received.

Other:

- We are in the process of investing and diversifying excess cash, with $225k currently moved to a Certificate of Deposit.
- The year-end financial audit fieldwork took place in July. The Audit Report is in progress.

• Year-to-date Capital Budget Report – FY 2023-24
• Year-to-date Operating Expenditure Report – FY 2023-24
• Year-to-date Operating Revenue Report – FY 2023-24
• Police Wages FY 2023-24
• Fire Wages FY 2023-24
• Public Works Wages FY 2023-24
• Year-to-date BOE Operating Expenditure Report FY 2023-24

Mr. Abrams expressed his best wishes to Mayor Rilling and all the candidates in tomorrow's election.

****	MR. JELLERETTE MOVED TO ADJOURN**
****	MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services