CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
REGULAR MEETING
VIA ZOOM
JUNE 5, 2023

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

STAFF: Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector; Thomas Ellis, Director Management and Budgets; Henry Dachowitz, Chief Financial Officer; Irene Dixon, City Clerk; Alan Lo, Building and Facilities Manager; Joyce Liu, Director of Information Technology; Mickey Docimo, Norwalk Police Administrative Manager; Diana D'Amore Director Norwalk Health Department; Ed McCabe, Deputy Fire Chief; Jeffrey Spahr, Corporation Counsel; Stuart Wells, Registrar of Voters

OTHERS: Alan Dutton, Oak Hills Park Authority

Mr. Abrams called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Ms. Dixon called the Roll as indicated above. A Quorum was present.

1. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

May 1, 2023 – Regular Meeting

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

2. **SPECIAL APPROPRIATIONS AGENDA** (Section A)

**** MR. KASSIMIS MOVED TO APPROVE THE RESOLUTION**

Ms. Dixon read the following resolution.

ITEM 1: RESOLUTION, REQUESTING A SPECIAL CAPITAL APPROPRIATION IN THE AMOUNT OF $2,000,000 BY THE BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES DEPARTMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING IMPROVEMENTS AT THE NEW SOUTH NORWALK SCHOOL (FORMERLY THE HATCH & BAILEY SITE) AT THE INTERSECTION OF SOUTH MAIN STREET/MEADOW STREET/WILSON AVENUE:

A. $1,000,000 FOR INTERSECTION TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENTS TO BE ALLOCATED TO TM&P

B. $1,000,000 FOR INTERSECTION FLOOD IMPROVEMENT TO BE ALLOCATED TO DPW

Mr. Lo reviewed the requests, noting they have been working on the South Norwalk School for about three years. He said there were concerns expressed about flooding in the area during high tide and during heavy rain storms. These items are not considered to be the responsibility of the school. Following a review of the budget, it was discovered there was $1 million left from the Ponus Middle School project and $3 million left from the Jefferson Elementary School project.

Mr. Lo explained that the City will benefit from solving these issues.

Mr. Abrams said there was no doubt in his mind that there would be contamination on this property and asked if that will increase the cost. Mr. Lo explained that thee ae 12 catch basins that go out to the mud flat area and chances are they will need to do dredging. That money will be used for engineers to find out what the problem is.

Mr. Constant asked if Water Street is on the DPW's radar since it floods. Mr. Lo said that all of the buildings on Water Street are elevated. Mr. Abrams said that in the press, it was indicated that the City was looking at that area.

Mr. Lo said this is a cooperative effort between the City and the Board of Education. The City is responsible for the expenditure of school funds.

Mr. Ellis described the approval process.

** **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

3. **Transfer Agenda** (Section B)

** **MR. FRAYER MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING TRANSFER REQUESTS**

SECTION B

CITY OF NORWALK TRANSFERS 2022-23
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION

FISCAL YEAR 2022-23:

Mayor's Office:

From		To		Amount
01-0100-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-0100-5741	IT Hardware	$7,575
01-0100-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-0100-5175	Retro Wage Adjustments	$2,394
01-0100-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-0100-5298	Other Professional Services	$112
01-0100-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-0100-5281	Mileage Reimbursement	$201

This transfer is to cover the installation of 3 works stations in the Mayor's office as well as cover miscellaneous line item overruns before the fiscal year end.
Finance recommends approval.

Police Department:

From		To		Amount
01-30*	Various Police accounts	01-3022-5329	Other Operating	$37,124

This transfer is to cover expenditures for police vehicle upfitting accessories. Supply chain issues and inflation are major causes. Detailed list of all the Police accounts attached.
Finance recommends approval.

Fire Department:

From		To		Amount
01-3120-5120	Wages & Salary – Overtime	01-3152-5269	Other Repair & Maintenance	$72,000

This transfer is to cover emergency repairs on Car 2 (repairs not done in-house) as well as miscellaneous repairs to a ladder truck.
Finance recommends approval.

Corporation Counsel:

From		To		Amount
01-0300-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-0300-5258	Other Professional Services	$85,000
01-0300-5140	Wages & Salary – Part Time	01-0300-5258	Other Professional Services	$40,000

This transfer is to cover transfer underruns in Wages and Salaries (Full and Part time) to Other Professional Services to cover outside counsel for tax appeals.
Finance recommends approval.

Health Administration:

From		To		Amount
01-2011-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-2020-5613	Condemnation	$48,000

This transfer request is to cover 2 recent fires in the City that resulted in displaced families. Funds to be transferred from a YTD underrun in Full Time Salaries.
Finance recommends approval.

Finance -- IT:

From		To		Amount
01-1370-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-1370-5742	IT Software	$10,000

01-1370-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-1370-5336	Electrical Supplies	$2,268
01-1370-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-1370-574C	Cyber Security	$1,000
01-1370-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-1370-5245	Telephone	$1,000
01-1370-5110	Wages & Salary – Full Time	01-1370-5120	Overtime	$20,000

This transfer request from is to cover hardware and software cost increases as well as overtime support for night committee meetings for City boards and commissions.
Finance recommends approval.

Registrar of Voters:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-1210-5120	Wages & Salary – Overtime	$22,000
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-1210-5130	Wages & Salary – Temporary	$60,000
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-1210-5140	Wages & Salary – Part Time	$5,000

This transfer request is to cover staffing expenses related to the primary and election during FYE 2023.
Finance recommends approval.

Mid-Fairfield Mental Health:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-*new*-5258	Other Professional Services	$550,260

This transfer request is to provide funding for the Mid-Fairfield Mental Health Initiative. A new ORG ID will be created upon approval.
Finance recommends approval.

Mayor Rilling reviewed the request for the Mayor's office. Mr. Docimo reviewed the request for the Police Department. Mr. Abrams asked when they will know when the fleet will arrive and Mr. Docimo said they expect to know by the next meeting. Mr. McCabe reviewed the request from the Fire Department.

Mr. Spahr reviewed the request from the Corporation Counsel's office. Ms. Yang asked Mr. Spahr if he had an estimate of the City's out of pocket expense for the Milligan lawsuit. Mr. Spahr explained that he did not handle that case, but understood there was an agreement to cap at $450,000. He noted that a lot of the expenses are due to the cost of hiring counsel for tax appeals.

Ms. D'Amore reviewed the request for the Health Department. Ms. Yang asked about the cost for displaced people. Ms. D'Amore explained that until a resident can find comparable housing, the City is responsible for relocating families and for the cost to put them up in hotels when for example, they are experienced a fire. Ms. Yang asked if the $48,000 requested is enough. Ms. D'Amore said it should cover to the end of the fiscal year. She added that they work with insurance companies. She said they also partner with other community partners.

Ms. Liu reviewed the request for the IT department.

Mayor Rilling left the meeting at 7:18 p.m.

Mr. Wells reviewed the request for the Registrar of Voters office.

Mr. Abrams asked Mr. Ellis for the contingency balance. Mr. Ellis said that after this evening, the contingency balance is $450,000.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

4. **Other Business** (Section C)

a. Approval of FY 2022-23 Suspense list

Ms. Biagiarelli reviewed the suspense list and said this is their annual transfer which is a legal requirement.

**** MR. FRAYER MOVED TO APPROVE REQUEST THAT THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION TRANSFER THE ITEMS TO THE SUSPENSE TAX BOOK IN ACCORDANCE WITH CGS 12-165. THE TOTAL DOLLAR AMOUNT (PRINCIPAL) INCLUDED IN THIS REQUEST FOR TRANSFER TO**

SUSPENSE IS $561,263.84. THIS AMOUNT INCLUDES: $256,557.10 IN BUSINESS PERSONAL PROPERTY TAXES AND $304,706.74 IN MOTOR VEHICLE TAXES.

** **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Abrams thanked Ms. Biagiarelli and her team for doing an outstanding job.

5. **Additional Information** (Section D)

Financial reports

• Tax Collector's Narrative -- April 2023
• Tax Collector's Report -- April 2023

Ms. Biagiarelli reviewed her report as follows:

As of the end of April 2023, with ten out of twelve months of the fiscal year completed, we had collected in excess of $358 million against our $365 million adjusted levy, or 98.16%. We also collected 98.55% of our sewer use levy, an additional $17 million, and 85.93% of the Industrial Pretreatment Program (IPP) fee billing on behalf of the WPCA. Compared with the prior fiscal year (April, 2022) we are slightly behind relative to taxes (-0.82%), slightly ahead relative to sewer use (0.81%); and behind relative to the IPP fee (-5.51%). Due to the extended due date of the motor vehicle supplemental billing, payable by April 1, 2023, we did anticipate a slight drop in the FYE 2023 collection numbers as compared with the prior fiscal year, when that billing was payable by February 1.

For prior years' collections, through the end of April 2023, we show a net collection of in excess of $1.3 million since the beginning of this fiscal year on July 1, 2022. This amount is $3.4 million less than what we collected during the first ten months of the prior fiscal year. The difference is partly attributable to the tax sale held in October 2021 that boosted collections in the prior fiscal year, and also due to continued effects of court stipulated judgments in assessment appeal cases, resulting in erosion of current and prior collectibles.

Our third party collection agency continues to bill on our behalf for past due motor vehicle taxes for which we had no valid address. The agency sent its first mailing to approximately 7,800 taxpayers on our behalf in November 2022. From December 2022 through April 2023 (five months) we have collected nearly $635,000 in past due motor vehicle taxes and interest due to the City as a result of the collection agency's billings, including more than $59,000 during the month of April.

Please note that these collections are made directly to the City, and payments are processed by the tax collector's office, not the collection agency, and these figures represent our net receivables, after their fees. We are also working on several other delinquent enforcement initiatives mainly related to business personal property taxes, as well as another wage garnishment initiative targeting City and Board of Education employees who may owe past due taxes to the City. Our tax sale that was scheduled to be held in July 2023 has been pushed off until Monday, July 22, 2024. We anticipate beginning work on that sale in November, 2023.

We continue to work on our software conversion that moved our tax assessment and tax collection administrative systems off Munis and onto Quality Data Services LLC (QDS) software. The city's financials, budgeting, accounting and other systems are still operating on Munis; only the assessment and tax collection modules have moved away. This conversion has been discussed in greater detail in prior months' reports since we went live on the QDS system on March 1, 2023. We are continuing to learn the system's features and how best to use it, and continue to appreciate our taxpayers' patience as we navigate the changes.

As noted in prior months' narratives, due to the delayed supplemental motor vehicle billing and the software conversion, we were not able to adhere to our normal spring schedule. We expect to file lien continuing certificates later this month; normally they are done in March. We have yet to present our suspense list to the Board of Estimate for approval; that usually happens in April, and we expect it to happen in either June or July this year. The lien continuing certificate filing processes and the generation of the suspense list will both be done on the new software.

We are working with the Assessor's office, QDS personnel, and our printer to successfully navigate changes in our billing processes for our upcoming July 2023 tax billing of the 2022 grand list. The Board of Estimate and Taxation set the rates for those taxes on May 1, and the WPCA set their rates in March 2023.

This will be our first billing, and our first complete collection cycle, on QDS software. A number of factors determine when tax bills will be issued, and we cooperate with the other divisions, chiefly the office of the Assessor, to obtain information my division needs to bill – for example, motor vehicle information they receive from the state DMV, and elderly and disabled benefits / credit information processed by the Assessor's division. If all goes well, we hope to have bills in the mail by mid June. If there are issues, the bills will be sent later, but in any event should be in the mail prior to June 30. The last day to pay without penalty, by state law, is August 1. I will continue to update everyone on our progress.

Our two new hires began work the first week of this month, and our division is now fully staffed, with eight employees, for the first time since early 2022. The tax collector's office staff has held at 8 fulltime employees for more than 25 years, while taking on significant additional duties, including collection enforcement activities such as tax sales and use of alias tax warrants, and more complex billing and collection activities such as online payments. It should also be noted that the actual levies themselves have also increased in that time, with significantly more dollars being collected, and representing an increased percentage of overall operating revenue.

I am prepared to respond to questions and will continue to keep all stakeholders informed of our progress.

• Oak Hills Park Budget – April 2023

Mr. Dutton reviewed the following report:

Oak Hills Park Authority
April 2023 Financial Commentary

Operations Updates:

- Golf rounds are nearly 20% over budget for the first 10 months of FY23. Beginning of the year and April rounds helped this overage grow so high.
- OHPA has made capital improvements on several structures and grounds year-to-date, including the tennis facility.
- Discount ID card sales were off to a slow start this calendar year but exceeded budget for the months of March and April which helped to get us back to ytd expectations.

YTD Financial Highlights:

- FY23 YTD net operating income was over budget by $286k and we ended April with a $488k cash balance which includes $24k in the capital reserve bank account.
  - Revenue was over-budget by 183k thanks to strong golf and cart rounds.
  - Expenses were $103k lower than budget due to lower than expected wages as a result of being understaffed and park maintenance.
- OHPA made $95k in repayments to the City for the first 10 months of this fiscal year. The annual 1% of gross golf revenue additional debt payment was made in November.

Other:

- Work is in progress on preparing our FY2024 fiscal budget with presentation to the Authority and approval to take place in June.

Mr. Dutton said they are taking excess funds and investing them to get 3 – 4% interest. Mr. Dachowitz discussed a tri party agreement and said he would like to work with Oak Hills Park Authority or their team to minimize risk.

Mr. Jellerette asked for an update on the restaurant. Mr. Dutton said it is open, but there is room for improvement; however, they are working on that.

The remainder of the agenda is for informational purposes.

- Year-to-date Capital Budget Report – FY 2022-23
- Year-to-date Operating Expenditure Report – FY 2022-23
- Year-to-date Operating Revenue Report – FY 2022-23
- Police Wages FY 2022-23
- Fire Wages FY 2022-23
- Public Works Wages FY 2022-23
- Year-to-date BOE Operating Expenditure Report FY 2022-23

Due to the July 4th holiday, the next meeting is scheduled for July 10th.

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

There was no further business, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services