

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
SPECIAL MEETING
MARCH 23, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Greg Burnett, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling. James Feigenbaum, Edward Camacho, Anne Yang-Dwyer, Laoise King, James Page

STAFF: Robert Barron, Finance Director

CALL TO ORDER.

Mr. Burnett called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

ROLL CALL

City Clerk King called the roll. A quorum was present.

Mr. Barron announced that this was a procedural meeting to vote on the cap on the Capital budget funding that the Common Council can allocated.

Mr. Burnett said that there were a number of items on the Capital Budget including:

- Facilities Studies
- Basketball and Tennis courts at Ely
- Turf field at BMHS
- Renovation of the Sixth District Community Center

Mayor Rilling said that he wanted to highlight the 1.8 million for the turf field at BMHS. He said that the City would not proceed with the tire based rubber turf field due to concerns about health hazards. The Recreation and Parks Director recommended a cork based turf field. The cost for this type of field is slightly more than the 1.8 million.

Mayor Rilling said that the Planning Commission had recommended removing the 3 million dollars from the School Facilities Design project. However, because the BOE is operating at 104% capacity at the schools, he felt it would be appropriate to return that money. The City can not continue to allow the school infrastructure to fail or deteriorate further.

Mr. Burnett then said that it was the judgment of the Board of Estimate and Taxation that the Capital Budget for the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 should be capped at \$29,034,000 with the amount to be bonded and repaid from the City's General Fund capped at \$21,696,000. The amount of \$7,338,000 will be financed from grants and other non-general fund sources.

**** MR. CAMACHO MOVED TO APPROVE THE CAPITAL BUDGET FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2016-2017 SHOULD BE CAPPED AT \$29,034,000 WITH THE AMOUNT TO BE BONDED AND REPAID FROM THE CITY'S GENERAL FUND CAPPED AT \$21,696,000 AND WITH THE AMOUNT OF \$7,338,000 WILL BE FINANCED FROM GRANTS AND OTHER NON-GENERAL FUND SOURCES.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. FEIGENBAUM MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 23, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Greg Burnett, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling. James Feigenbaum, Edward Camacho, Anne Yang-Dwyer, Laoise King, James Page

STAFF: Robert Barron, Finance Director

CALL TO ORDER.

Mr. Burnett called the meeting to order at 7:16 p.m.

ROLL CALL

City Clerk King called the roll. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. Burnett welcomed everyone and said that the Board had reviewed the Finance Director's recommendation and would like to hear from the public before finalizing the budget of April 4th. The goal is to keep tax increases as low as possible. The City Department heads were present to answer questions. He requested that the speaker's comments be limited to three minutes or less.

Mayor Rilling thanked the department heads for their attendance and the public for their interest in how the City spends their money. He said that levying taxes is not an easy thing and the staff was told that they should keep the taxes as low as possible.

He also noted that Mr. Barron had been working for many ways to keep the taxes as low as possible. He said that he expected that the tax levy would most likely be the lowest level in the last 10 years. This year, one big issue was the fact that the BOE and the City were about \$600,000 apart. He said that this gap has been closed. He thanked the public for their attendance and the BET.

Mr. Burnett said that there were copies of the proposed budget available and it would be posted on the website by the next day.

Mr. Bryan Meek from the Board of Education came forward to speak about the BOE budget. He thanked the BET for these hearings and for restoring the \$600,000 to the budget. Mr. Meek said that it would enable the BOE to move forward with their strategic plan.

Mr. Meek said that the BOE needs 2.3 million for Special Education and the BOE needs to offer students services in Norwalk rather than transporting them out of town. The staff suggested that this could be done by raising taxes to protect its triple A rating. The BOE needed a temporary bridge to move forward with this plan. The BOE will put their reserves forward and requested that the City match the funds. Right now the Fund Balance is at \$42 million and that is 7 million dollars higher than Greenwich. The plan is to keep this down to the 3% growth. The BOE expects to save over \$700,000 in the coming years. He said that if the figures were put into a perpetuity calculator, the 3.6 million investment would have a net value savings of over 35 million dollars.

He pointed out that there have been 3 State audits in the past eight years and the City has done nothing. The District could be sued. The SPED costs will continue to double each year by about a million each year. Darien ended up with a situation that cost them 25 million in legal fees. He encouraged the City to do what was right and not end up in the same situation as Darien.

Mr. Meek said that Dr. Crevecoeur was not able to attend the meeting but had a letter expressing his concerns. He then submitted the letter to the Board.

Ms. Joanne Cooper came forward to speak as a parent of a special Education student. She said that she was requesting that the City support the Dr. Adamowski's plan. Given the four CREC reports, each of which demand that the Special Education issues be corrected. This will affect children ages 3 to 21, and 13 - 14 % of the school age population. These are Federal mandates and are not optional. If you don't fund this, it will be in the news. She added that this would be part of keeping the superintendent. Otherwise, they cycle through. This could also result in a class action lawsuit. She added that the City was risking a state take over of the Special Education. She said that this turns the IEP on its head. By sending the students out of town, the City is doing this backwards. The BOE is trying to establish a continuum of service that would provide assistance to the students. This is done through tiered intervention and it is not being applied consistently. There is no continuum of services for children from birth to age 3. This will take at least three years to establish. this will hurt both the special education students and those who are in the classes with that student, along with the parents of sped student. She said that she did not appreciate this ping pong game and the City is building a turf field rather than helping the Special Education students. She ended by saying they hope the City would fully fund the program.

Ms. Patsy Brescia came forward and said that she had been a Norwalk taxpayer for many years. She said that she was present to speak about the Lockwood Mathews Mansion and said that the mansion was owned by the City of Norwalk. The trustee are Stewart's of the building. The trustees raises money to keep the mansion open. She said that she hoped that the BET would support them.

Mr. Lou Guimand came forward to speak about the Planning and Zoning meetings and said that attendance was sparse. He said that the Police Chief Kulhawik and Deputy Chief Gonzalez were not responding and that they will not give him answers to his questions. They really don't care.

Ms. Yvonne Zuero, from the Sexual Assault Center and said that she was present to thank the City for their support. She said that she works with residents who have experienced sexual abuse and then gave several figures about the clients her Center serves.

Ms. Bonnie Stoutenberg, came forward to address the BET. She said that it was frustrating to have to pay all these taxes and said that the Special Education program needs more funding.

Ms. Diane Lauricella came forward and thanked the BET for all their work. She asked if there was a chance that if anyone who could not attend could send their comments to the Board.

Mayor Rilling said that all the written comments have to be submitted before April 4th.

Ms. Lauricella said that she wanted to recommend Mr. Barron for providing a large amount of data. She said that she wanted to make suggestions about the revenue side. She said that it would be important to take a look at the business enforcement. She mentioned the Planning and Zoning Department and said that the residents should know that there are laws that they need to abide by. She mentioned the former "treble damages" have been removed and said that it would be important to have the enforcements in the area of health and construction. There has been a lack-a-daisical attitude.

She pointed out that the salaries often don't reflect the true cost when the benefits were added in. After observing various committees, she saw a lack of willingness to implements the various advocates suggestions. She said that she wanted to see staff starting to develop some solutions and ask tough questions. The staff should be bringing to the Commissions and Boards the information they need.

Ms. Lauricella said that Recreation and Parks had been trying to think outside the box. However, with Cranbury Park, the plans have gone too far.

Ms. Lauricella said that the notice of the public hearing should have the Early Childhood position should be put back with the Board of Education. She said that the Council people need. To do their due diligence and suggested that student interns be utilized.

She said that Corporation Counsel was settling too easily and that the information was not being disseminated. The IT department needs to fix their website.

Personnel and Labor Relation needs to have more training to keep up with modern day requirements. The staff are the ones that training the Boards and Commission.

Ms. Lauricella said that Public Works, the BOE and Recreation and Parks needs to work on recycling. She said that she had worked on this for many years, but there has been no progress. She said that she is not being taken seriously. The recycling process in the BOE has not been optimized. She asked for a conversation about this.

Atty. Jeff Sparh came forward and said that he was present to speak in favor of the BOE Special Education program. He said that there was a group of parents with children in SPED or need special services. The SPED program has been underfunded for too long. He said that Norwalk has been driving along with the CHECK ENGINE light on for too long. It's time to fix the problem. He pointed out that CREC 1 had come out, his son was in elementary school and now his son is in high school and CREC 3 just came out. The same problems are being identified. As a parent, having a child placed out of the District is not good. He said that his son's school mates are from New York State and New Canaan. He'd rather have his son going to school with his neighbors and fellow church members. It is important to have an economy of scale.

Mr. Eric Anderson came forward and aid that he was a member of the BOE and formerly a member of the BET. He said that he was present to speak about the Special education program. It is imperative that the SPED program be funded. He said that he had spoken with many constituents on both the BET and BOE sides. He said that there was a proposal to increase taxes rather than drawing down the Fund Balance. Last year, the City took a million out of the Fund Balance, but added some 8 million dollars to the Fund Balance. With the building that is going on in the City, he felt that the Fund Balance will not be harmed in any way by giving the 2.3 million for SPED. This is an absolute necessity and will not raise the BOE budget next year. He requested that the BET fund the SPED request so that the ship can be righted.

Mr. Anthony DeLauro came forward and said that he was a resident of 11 Pine Wood Extension and has children in the District. He said that by balancing the budget by bringing more revenue in. When he moved to Norwalk from NY, he looked at the school system. The taxes were competitive and the streets were safe. When things are balanced well, people stay rather than move elsewhere.

Mr. Burnett asked if there was anyone else who wished to address the Board.

Ms. Elizabeth Chahine of 32 Strawberry Hill came forward to speak about her SPED child and said that she was a former educator. She said that her son had made some progress in the last two years and hoped that the decisions that the BET makes will allow her son to continue his progress. If these children do not get the services that they need, it will cost the City more down the road.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Burnett asked if there was anyone else who wished to address the Board. No one came forward. He asked a second time. Hearing none, Mr. Burnett adjourned the public hearing at 8:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services