

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
BUDGET REVIEW
MARCH 3, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: Edwin Camacho, Chair; James Frayer, Artie Kassimis, Troy Jellerette, Mayor Harry Rilling

OTHERS: Henry Dachowitz, Finance Director; Sharon Conners, Purchasing; Mark Conte; Irene Dixon, Tom Ellis, Norwalk Director of Management and Budgets; Fire Chief Gino Gatto, Jeffrey Spahr, Deputy Corporation Counsel; Stuart Wells, Registrar of Voters; Ms. Laoise King, Chief of Staff; Atty. Mario Coppola, Corporation Counsel; Ray Burney, Personnel Director

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Camacho called the meeting to order. A quorum was present.

DEPARTMENTAL OPERATING BUDGET REVIEW.

A. Mayor/Chief of Staff

• **Mayor** – Mr. Camacho said that the Mayor’s Office was requesting a 2.3% salary and wages increase, which was pro forma. Mayor Rilling said that they were willing to answer any questions. There were no additional questions

• **Chief of Staff** – Mr. Camacho reviewed the requested salary increases, which came to 3.2%. There was a brief discussion regarding Ms. King’s proposed salary increase. Mr. Ellis and Ms. King will clarify this issue.

The discussion moved to the City Clerk positions and Grants Administration. Mr. Dachowitz explained that the Grants Position has been changed and that Rita had been hired part time for Grants Administration and now reports to him.

B. Corporation Counsel

Atty. Coppola greeted the Board Members and gave a brief overview of the submitted budget. He requested that the Board reconsider the Other Professional Services line item. He said that they had requested \$450,000 but the Finance Department recommended \$300,000. The Other Professional Services budget covers litigation costs; filing fees, marshal service, deposition transcripts and expert fees, including assessment appeals. He noted that the Assistant Tax Assessor position was also still vacant which has increased the outside services costs.

Mayor Rilling asked why the Assistant Tax Assessor position was still vacant. Mr. Dachowitz explained that it was difficult to find Tax Assessors in Connecticut. They have made every effort to recruit qualified candidates and reposted the position. Atty. Coppola agreed.

Discussion followed about salary ranges for the Corporation Counsel Department. Mr. Dachowitz said that Mr. Ellis was keeping a running list of the proposed changes so they can adjust the budget to keep it under the cap set by the Council.

Mayor Rilling asked why Norwalk had so many real estate appeals. Atty. Coppola said that there were many high value properties in Norwalk and is one of the more desirable communities for commercial properties. Discussion followed about some of the pending cases.

Mayor Rilling said that the Law Department was run as a very professional department. He expressed that he was concerned about keeping the Other Professional Services line item as an open item and suggested that they consider the Contingency Fund should the money be needed rather than putting the money up front. Putting the money up front would require either raising the cap or taking the money from another line item. He said that he gave the Department heads a lot of credit for their management of their budgets. Discussion followed.

Mayor Rilling repeated his earlier comment about how the Law Department was run as a very professional department. He also commented that Atty. Spahr had been working with the City for 35 years.

C. Town Clerk

Mr. Dachowitz explained that there was a small adjustment in the I.T. services. However, Mr. McQuaid's budgets have been very consistent for the past years. The Board Members had no additional questions.

D. Registrar of Voters.

Mr. Wells greeted the Board. Mr. Camacho said that the request was for a 1.5% increase from 2022 and is in line with the ordinance. Mr. Wells noted that there was a good chance that there would be a primary election. The redistricting will add one additional polling place, but this is not a significant change. Mr. Camacho asked if the funding for the primary would be funded from Contingency. Mr. Wells explained that this had been done in the past with unexpected primaries. The legislature may extend the absentee voting due to COVID.

Mr. Wells explained that a primary could run as much as \$90,000.

The Board Members had no additional questions.

E. Fire

Chief Gatto greeted the Board Members. Mr. Camacho gave a brief overview of the requested line item increases and said that the total increases came to 6.2% over the 2022 budget. Chief Gatto then reviewed the reasons why some of the budget items increased, including the addition of an Assistant Chief, and Fire Inspectors.

A discussion followed about the fact that the Water Department was raising their rates again.

Mr. Jellerette asked when the firefighter's contract was up for renewal. Chief Gatto said that the renewal was due in 2024.

Mr. Dachowitz asked about the increase in the testing line item. Chief Gatto said that it was because they were required to give promotional exams on a regular basis.

Mayor Rilling said that the Fire Department has come in under budget year after year. The firefighters have been very dedicated, particularly during the pandemic.

It was noted that the Police Department was not present. It was explained that the Police Department had been scheduled for another date.

F. Purchasing

Ms. Conners greeted the Board Members. Mr. Camacho reviewed the requested increases, including the hiring of a Purchasing Officer. Ms. Conners said that it had been an existing position, but they had transferred the funding during the pandemic for training and other purposes.

Mr. Dachowitz spoke about a new program called Bonfire that helps with RFPs. This allowed the department to handle a larger work load with the same staff. Mr. Dachowitz also spoke about how the departments no longer purchase items without consulting with Purchasing. Now that the City has ARPA funding, there will be more RFPs coming in.

Ms. Conners spoke about how the cost of the telephones for City Hall were transferred to Central Services. However, this has affected the overall data. This will be consistent going forward.

Mayor Rilling said that the quality of the work reflects on the quality of the staff. Ms. Conners has worked hard and made some significant and efficient changes. He said that he believed that they need to hire the additional staff to help with ARPA.

G. Human Resources and Personnel

Mr. Camacho gave a brief overview of the requests. He noted that the biggest increase was an ordinance increase of 2.35% for three employees.

Mayor Rilling asked Mr. Burney to give an overview of the percentage increase. Mr. Burney said that four of the six employees in the officer are ordinance employees. Some of the staff also qualify for the 10 year wage progression. Mayor Rilling said that the bonus pool no longer exists and the employees will receive regular increases.

Mr. Burney said that he retired on January 1st. He is working with Ms. King to identify a replacement and smooth the transition. Mayor Rilling thanked Mr. Burney for his hard work.

Mr. Ellis noted that there was only one item that remained open, which was the Outside Service line item for the Law Office.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Camacho adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services