CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
REGULAR MEETING
VIA TELECONFERENCE
JANUARY 8, 2024

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; Troy Jellerette; Artie Kassimis; Anne Yang; Kendrick Constant (6:33 p.m arrival)
STAFF:	Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector; Deanna D'Amore, Director of Health; Irene Dixon, City Clerk; Thomas Ellis, Director of Management and Budgets; Ken Hughes, Superintendent of Recreation and Parks; Ed McCabe, Assistant Fire Chief; William Mooney, Assistant Director of Health; Robert Stowers, Director of Recreation and Parks
OTHERS:	Alan Dutton, Oak Hills Park Authority; Darlene Young, Common Council President

Mr. Abrams called the meeting to order at 6:31 and called the Roll as indicated above.

Mayor Rilling expressed his gratitude to Ms. Cawai, Mr. Ellis and Ms. Lam for their work on the budget.

1. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

December 4, 2023 – Regular Meeting

**** MR. KASSIMIS MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED**

** **MOTON PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Constant joined the meeting at 6:33 p.m.

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

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

** **MR. JELLERETTE MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING TRANSFER AGENDA:**

FISCAL YEAR 2023-24:

CITY CLERK:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-1420-5110	Salary & Wages – Regular	$35,000

This transfer is to cover funding for the Assistant City Clerk role that provides support to the Common Council.

Finance recommends approval.

Ms. Young presented the item and explained that this position is in the Charter provides support to the Common Council.

FIRE DEPARTMENT:

From		To		Amount
01-3130-5140	Salary & Wages – Part-Time	01-3130-5110	Salary & Wages – Regular	$40,000

This transfer is to cover 1 Firefighter moved from Firefighting to Fire Prevention.

Finance recommends approval.

Mr. McCabe presented the item.

TAX COLLECTOR DEPT.:

From		To		Amount
01-1330-5259	Professional Services	01-1330-5742	IT Software	$67,500

This transfer is to cover Tax Software (QDS) to be put in proper account.

Finance recommends approval.

Mr. Ellis presented the item. Mr. Jellerette asked if they could go back to the vendor to ask for a fee rebate. Mr. Ellis explained there have been strong ongoing conversations with the vendor for a better part of a year.

Ms. Biagiarelli said her division does not plan additional payments until they receive and operator's manual. This is a breach of contract because it calls for an operator's manual.

BUILDING MANAGEMENT:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-2012-5296	Security – Health Dept.	$3,500
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-4075-5296	Security – City Hall	4,000
				$7,500

This transfer is to cover Living Wage increases for outside contractor Orion (Security).

Finance recommends approval.

Mr. Ellis reviewed the item and said the contract with Orion has to be revised to reflect the new living wage.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-2020-5613	Condemnation	$50,000

This transfer is to cover additional funds for relocation expenses due to fires.

Finance recommends approval.

Mr. Ellis explained that the City is responsible for helping people following an emergency. Ms. D'Amore said they were requesting additional funds to cover the costs following recent events.

Mr. Jellerette asked if they are able to collect funds from the property owner's insurance. Mr. Mooney said they can only do that if the landlord was under violation. Ms. D'Amore added that they have collected $8,000 so far this year. Mr. Mooney said they had five fires and had to relocate the residents.

Mr. Kassimis asked if there is an actual amount that they need. Ms. D'Amore said they know they need $30,000.   Mr. Jellerette said they should use what they need and are then welcome to come back if they need more funding.

** **MR. JELLERETTE MOVED TO AMEND THE REQUESTED AMOUNT FROM $50,000 TO $30,000 BASED ON THE ACTUAL NEED OF THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

** **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

** **MOTION TO PASS THE TRANSFER AGENDA AS AMENDED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

4. **OTHER BUSINESS** (Section C)

1. Contingency Tracker

Mr. Ellis explained that following this evening's request, the balance is $625,000 for the rest of the fiscal year.

Mr. Abrams said that at last month's meeting he asked Mr. Ellis to reach out to department heads to ask what they may need for the rest of the fiscal year. Mr. Ellis reached out and noted they did not have figures at this time. He will follow up.

2. Proposed Recreation & Parks Fund

Mr. Ellis explained that this request is to create a new revenue fund. This is step one in the process.

** **MR. KASSIMIS MOVED TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED RECREATION AND PARKS FUND**

The Recreation and Parks department is requesting approval to work with the Finance department to have a fund that can be used to create programs, which will increase revenues.

Mr. Stowers explained that he has a revolving, separate account and the fund is not budgeted. Doing this will allow them to budget all of their project expenses and give them a clear track of their revenues.

Mr. Jellerette asked if it is common for a department to handle their accounts this way. Mr. Ellis said he had never seen this before, but noted that Mr. Stowers did this in Seattle. Mr. Stowers said that most big cities have a park fund.

Ms. Yang said she is all for greater accountability and transparency, but would like a better understanding of this. Mr. Stowers said the carryover will stay in the 4000 account and not go into the general fund. These funds will help the department prepare for next year's summer camp. Mr. Abrams said it makes sense, but the explanation in the backup is confusing.

**** MAYOR RILLING MOVED TO TABLE THE ITEM TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND DETAILS**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

5. **<u>ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</u>** (Section D)

<u>Financial reports</u>

• Tax Collector's Narrative – November 2023

• Tax Collector's Report – November, 2023

Ms. Biagiarelli reviewed her report as follows:

> As of the end of November 2023, having concluded the first five months of the fiscal year, we collected more than $207 million against what is now our $379 million adjusted levy. Our adjusted levy increased (from $375 million to $379 million) since last month's report with the addition of $4.2 million in supplemental motor vehicle taxes that are payable by February 1, 2024.
>
> Although we added these billable taxes in November 2023, the newly adjusted levy is still down from the budgeted levy (as of the beginning of the fiscal year) by more than $3.6 million, primarily due to credits resulting from stipulated judgments in property tax appeal cases. Due to the addition of the newly billable motor vehicle supplemental, our current collection rate decreased from 54.81% as of the end of October to 54.65% as of the end of November (because the amount now due increased). We also collected 53.23% of our sewer use levy, more than $9.8 million, and 77.50% of the Industrial Pretreatment Program (IPP) fee billing on behalf of the WPCA. Compared with the prior fiscal year, we ended November 2023
> slightly behind last year for collection of taxes (-0.59%); ahead for sewer use (1.73%), and behind for the IPP fee (-1.37%).
>
> Regarding prior years' collections, year to date through the end of November 2023, we continue to see the effects of transferred payments from prior years taxes to current taxes, in accordance with court stipulated judgments in property tax appeal cases, as noted

above. I have addressed this issue in greater detail in prior narratives. Please note that the figures we report are net of refunds and credits.

Prior narratives discussed the revised / corrected billing of 2022 grand list motor vehicle accounts that were incorrectly assessed in our July 2023 billing. Our office continues to accept and process refund applications; these appear on the “claims” report that is submitted monthly to the Finance and Claims Committee of the Common Council. Refunds related to the revised billing bear a notation indicating “assessment change.”

Our third-party collection agency that bills on our behalf for suspended motor vehicle accounts began working with us in November 2022. As of the end of November 2023, we have been collecting based on their billing for 12 calendar months. Through their efforts, we have collected more than $800,000 in past due motor vehicle taxes and interest due to the City and have processed in excess of $121,000 in fees due to the agency. Their fees are charged in addition to the taxes and interest due to the City, and are paid by the taxpayers who owe the past due
bills. We consider this a successful endeavor and will continue to work with the agency going forward.

We are also working on a wage garnishment for City and Board of Education employees who owe past due taxes, and preparing to work with the Department of Health when health permits are renewed at the beginning of the calendar year 2024. Taxpayers owing past due business personal property taxes more than one year in arrears must pay those back taxes before being issued a health permit or renewal.

We are starting to see the results of early efforts on the 2024 tax sale with an increase in collections of prior years’ taxes and interest. In October 2023, we began working on our July 2024 tax sale, and identified more than 100 properties that stand to be included in the sale. We mailed preliminary letters to those property owners in mid-November 2023, advising them of the impending sale. The sale date is Monday, July 22, 2024. As of this writing, we have already collected nearly $500,000 in approximately four weeks’ time. We will provide more information about this initiative in the coming months.

Later this month, we anticipate mailing bills for the second installment billing of the 2022 grand list, along with the 2022 supplemental motor vehicle tax billing. We had hoped to have these bills in the mail by the end of this week but are not able to achieve that goal. The bills are at the printer now, and it is our hope to mail earlier rather than later. I will update everyone as we learn more. Bills are due January 1, 2024 and are payable without interest by February 1, 2024, but are available online now. Any taxpayer who wishes to pay prior to receiving a bill in the mail is welcome to do so. Payments may be made online, by phone, by mail, or in person at our office at City Hall. Once bills have been mailed, taxpayers may also pay in person at one of 10 local bank branches.

At this Committee's suggestion, we are including with each real estate bill a pamphlet with information about our local tax relief programs for elderly and / or disabled residents. The application period for tax relief is February through May 15, 2024. We felt it was more useful to the taxpayer to send the flyer with this billing, in December 2023, rather than the June 2024 billing, since the application period will already have been concluded once those bills are mailed.

Our intent in providing this information is to try to reach anyone who may be eligible and encourage them to inquire and apply if they think they might qualify. If a taxpayer is not eligible, we are encouraging them to pass the pamphlet along to a family member or neighbor who might be eligible. These programs are administered by the office of the Tax Assessor, and their contact information is included in the pamphlet, which is also available on our website.

I will continue to keep all stakeholders advised of our progress and am available to respond to any questions, issues or concerns.

• Oak Hills Park Financials – November 2023

Mr. Dutton reviewed his report as follows. He explained that the Restaurant Committee met three times and interviewed three candidates. Two of the candidates are concessionaires who run golf courses and the third runs a restaurant. The Committee will meet again on Wednesday to discuss making a recommendation and then anticipate presenting its findings to the Oak Hills Park Authority on January 16th.

Mr. Dutton said that Dry Dock will be leaving by the end of January. He added that they are leaving on an amicable basis.

Oak Hills Park Authority
November 2023 Financial Commentary

Operations Updates:

- Golf revenue rounds, cart rounds and Discount ID cards are all performing above budget for the fi five months of FY24.
- OHPA plans on making substantial capital improvements throughout the course of this fiscal year has already spent $154k to date.
- We are at the end of our third year (of five) in our cart fleet lease and are seeing some expected and tear. However, the lithium batteries are holding up better than the standard batteries in prev leases.

YTD Financial Highlights:

- FY24 YTD net operating income was over budget by $86k and we ended November with a $796k balance which includes $45k in the capital reserve bank account.
  - Revenue was over-budget by 87k thanks to strong golf and Outings rounds.
  - Expenses remain flat compared to budget.
- OHPA made $67k in repayments to the City for the first five months of the fiscal year. The annual gross golf revenue additional debt payment will be made once the Audit Report is received.

Other:

- As part of our initiative of investing and diversifying excess cash, we now have $225k in a Certific Deposit at Chase Bank, $226k in a Money Market at Bankwell, and $45k in a Savings account at Bankwell for our Capital Reserve.
- The year-end financial audit fieldwork took place in July. The Audit Report is taking far longer tha expected and should have been completed by this point.

Mr. Ellis explained that the next meeting will take place on February 12th. He added that the "budget to actual" report in the meeting packet gives a clear picture of how finances are trending.

Mr. Jellerette asked Mayor Rilling for an update on the search for a new Chief Financial Officer. Mayor Rilling said they created a team, and they are carefully vetting all applications. There is no closing date for the applications because they want to be sure to have time to find the best candidate.

The remainder of the agenda is for informational purposes only.

• 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
• Budget to Actual – December 2023

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

There was no further business, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services