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

Members of the public may call in to participate. Callers will not be able to see the meeting participants. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, dial *9 on the phone and you will be called on by the host of the meeting during the public comment section.

All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.

Members of the public who wish to provide "live comments" may also use the Zoom meeting platform. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, click the "raise your hand indicator" and you will be called by the host of the meeting during the public comment section.

All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.

Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be included into the record, they must be submitted by 12:00 p.m. the day of the meeting. Please email (Tom Ellis) at (Tellis@norwalkct.gov) with the subject line "Public Comment" to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 6, 2025

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

STAFF: Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector; Thomas Ellis, Director Management and Budgets; Jared Schmitt, Chief Financial Officer; Alan Lo, Building and Facilities Manager; Ken Hughes and Robert Stowers, Recreation and

Parks; Esther Murillo, Assistant City Clerk; Stuart Wells, Registrar of Voters

OTHERS: Douglas Stern, Judge of Probate

Mr. Abrams called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

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

1. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES** - December 2, 2024 – Regular Meeting

** **MR. KASSIMIS 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. KASSIMIS MOVED TO APPROVE THE TRANSFER AGENDA AS PRESENTED**

FISCAL YEAR 2024-25:

RECREATION & PARKS DEPARTMENT:

From		To		Amount
01-4100-5110	Wages & Salary - Regular	01-4100-5140	Wages & Salary – Part-time	$42,300
01-4100-5130	Wages & Salary - Temporary	01-4100-5120	Wages & Salary – Overtime	4,800
01-4153-5325	Recreation Supplies	01-4100-5325	Recreation Supplies	384
01-4150-5120	Wages & Salary - Overtime	01-4150-5150	Longevity	3,875
				$51,359

1. This transfer is to cover additional Part-Time help prior to hiring Recreation Superintendent.
2. This transfer is to cover full-time staff covering weekends due to hiring freeze.
3. Transfer to cover shortfall in Recreation Supply Account
4. Transfer to cover Longevity.

Finance recommends approval.

PROBATE COURT:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-7006-5B0620	Probate Court	$15,000

This transfer is Fully Fund FYE 2025 Budget Request.

Finance recommends approval.

REGISTRAR OF VOTERS:

From		To		Amount
01-9600-5900	Contingency	01-1210-5120	Wages & Salary – Overtime	$18,000
		01-1210-5130	Wages & Salary – Temporary	123,000
		01-1210-5140	Wages & Salary – Part-time	18,000
		01-1210-5296	Wages & Salary – Security (PD)	81,500
				$240,500

This transfer is to cover expenses for 14 days mandated early voting for the November 2024 Presidential Election.

Finance recommends approval.

Mr. Ellis introduced the request from the Recreation and Parks department. Mr. Hughes and Mr. Stowers provided an overview of the requests.

Mr. Ellis introduced the request from the Probate Court. Judge Stern provided an overview of the request. Ms. Yang said that theoretically the fees collected could be used to cover expenses. She asked Mr. Stern if he had a sense of the dollar amount of fees collected on an annual basis. He said he was removed from that. Ms. Yang asked if he could get any additional funding from the State and not have to rely on the City of Norwalk for funding. Mr. Stern explained that the State pays for certain things, but will check to see if additional funding can be allocated.

Mr. Camacho noted that Norwalk's share of the overall cost is recommended to be around $30,000; however, the Court already spent about $22,000. He added that Mr. Stern is only allocating $15,000.

Mr. Ellis said that if this request is approved, it will be processed tomorrow.

Mr. Ellis introduced the request from the Registrar of Voters office.

Mr. Wells reviewed the request for $240,500. He explained that going forward elections will cost twice as much as before due to early voting, which he said was very successful and popular. He noted that Norwalk had the highest turnout in the State of Connecticut.

Mr. Camacho asked Mr. Wells if he anticipates the State will provide funding to the municipalities. Mr. Wells said there was no indication when the State was approached for additional funding. Any additional funding would have been 10 – 15% of the total. He said he believes there are proposals to lift some of the requirements.

Mr. Jellerette asked how many people were involved at City Hall during the recent election. Mr. Wells said all together 25 people worked 12 hour days for 14 days. 40% of the voters were early voters.

Ms. Yang said she understands Judge Stern needs his budget, but asked if he could ask for more funds from the State.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

4. **<u>OTHER BUSINESS</u>** (Section C)

**** MR. KASSIMIS MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING:**

1. REQUESTING the allocation of $2,450,000.00 in Special Capital Appropriation funds to the Recreation and Parks Department for the development and construction of the Norwalk Community Recreation Center at 98 South Main Street as identified herein this memo.
2. REQUESTING the reduction of $2,450,000 from the free balance of the Cranbury School Improvement Project – capital budget account #09215010 5777 C0786

Mr. Ellis introduced the requests for 98 South Main Street.

Mr. Stowers described the project and Mr. Lo provided the history of the project. He also reviewed the financing for the project. Mr. Abrams noted this is a net zero project.

Mr. Jellerette questioned why there was so much funding available following the completion of the Cranbury School project. Mr. Lo explained they budgeted $45 million for the project. However construction took place during Covid and before prices went up.

Mr. Lo said Ponus Ridge Middle School and Jefferson Elementary School closed with a savings on the project. After this request, there will be $60 - $70,000 left from the Cranbury project. Mr. Jellerette expressed concern over such a big overage. Mr. Camacho asked what will happen if the money is not spent. Mr. Lo said it will go back to the City to reduce the City's debt.

Mr. Stowers described how the building will be utilized.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

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

CONTINGENCY

Mr. Ellis reported there were no requests in December and the balance was $2.4 million. The total is reduced by this evenings approvals.

Mr. Jellerette asked about the status of the labor negotiations. Mr. Ellis said they are on going. He added there are five to six unions they need to work with.

Mr. Schmitt said regarding Norwalk High School, $6.5 million additional funding is needed related to unanticipated, non reimbursable expenses. Mr. Lo added that the $6.5 million is not a new request. He said he is trying to maximize the reimbursement rate.

Mr. Schmitt said he will follow up with spread sheet details as far as cash flow within the next couple of days. He reported the second reimbursement for the South Norwalk School and Norwalk High School were received.

Mr. Lo reported that the South Norwalk School is on budget and scheduled to be finished by August 15, 2025. He said they acquired five properties and are looking for State reimbursement for the development of the properties.

Mr. Lo reported that the site work and foundation work at the new Norwalk High School have been completed. The school is scheduled to be completed in June 2027 and open in the fall of 2027.

Mr. Lo said he is working closely with the Board of Education on sports relocation.

Mr. Lo reported that six HVAC projects were approved by the State. The projects need to be finished by August 2025. He said he is looking to evaluate environmental remediation.

Ms. Yang expressed her thanks to Mr. Lo.

Financial reports

- Tax Collector's Narrative – November, 2024

- Tax Collector's Report – November, 2024

Ms. Biagiarelli reviewed her reports as follows:

As of the end of November 2024, five months into our fiscal year, we collected more than $201 million against our $367 million adjusted levy. The net adjusted levy is significantly reduced from the original budgeted levy by more than $2 million, primarily due to credits resulting from stipulated judgments in adjudicated property tax appeal cases related to the 2018 (prior) revaluation. As of the end of November 2024, our current collection rate was **54.82%.** We also collected **53.53%** of our sewer use levy, more than $10.1 million, and **73.21%** of the Industrial Pretreatment Program (IPP) fee billing on behalf of the WPCA. Compared with the prior fiscal year, we ended November 2024 slightly behind last year for collection of taxes (-0.39%), slightly ahead for sewer use (0.3%), and behind for the IPP fee (-4.29%).

We also had collected nearly $4.8 million in past due taxes, interest and fees during the first five months of the fiscal year. This amount is (net) more than $4 million more than what had been collected in back taxes during the same period last fiscal year. The increase is due to the activity involved in the tax sale held on September 9, 2024. All these figures are net of refunds and credits; in both the current and in the prior fiscal year, a sizeable portion of our past due collections were basically consumed by credits, as noted above.

At this writing, we are in the process of issuing bills for the second installment on the 2023 grand list, due January 1, 2025, and payable without interest by Monday, February 3, 2025. Our billing cycle for the second installment remains dependent to a degree upon the Assessor's office and their workload. Although most motor vehicle taxes are billed in July, supplemental motor vehicle tax bills are being issued for motor vehicles newly registered between October 2, 2023 and July 31, 2024. Bills for those vehicles are due January 1, 2025, payable by February 3, 2025. The Assessors provided us everything we needed to bill those vehicles in a timely manner; those bills are now at the printer. Real estate bills have been at the printer since before the Thanksgiving break; business personal property bills are still being worked on. If all goes well, we hope to have all our December tax bills in the mail by the second or third week of the month. Real estate bills will be mailed first; followed by motor vehicle bills, and finally, by business personal property bills. Past due motor vehicle payment notices are also at the printer now, and are being mailed this month.

Delinquent notices for real estate, business personal property and sewer use charges were mailed in late October. Our delinquent tax collector continues working with the Department of Health to identify establishments with past due taxes than will need to be brought current before a new health permit is issued in January 2025 and has been filing Uniform Commercial Code (UCC-1) liens with the office of the Secretary of the State of Connecticut to secure payment of past due business personal property taxes.

Our third-party collection agency continues to bill on our behalf for suspended motor vehicle accounts. Through the end of November 2024, in conjunction with their efforts, we have collected a total of $1,173,484.57 in past due motor vehicle taxes and interest due to the City. This agency's 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 collect what is due to us in

full, and do not sacrifice any of what is due to the City. We began working with this agency in December 2022, and December 2024 will mark the two year anniversary of this endeavor.

We are still engaged with work subsequent to our September tax sale. Our targeted collection for that sale was originally $4.5 million, but we collected more than $6.5 million directly on tax sale properties. Out of the original 225 properties included in the sale, 212 paid in full prior to the day of the sale. On the day of the sale, we were left with 7 properties.

The tax sale website remains up: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/00d984cac70d4ae49f41a8936c0c638f and this site is also reachable from the tax collector's home page. Owners of the sold properties have six months from the date of the sale to redeem their properties by paying off the bidders. The owners retain all rights to their property for six months from the date of the sale. The last day to redeem is Monday, March 10, 2025.

As noted last month, beginning in June 2024, the tax collector's office assumed responsibility for billing and for collecting a monthly municipal tax on gross receipts from cannabis sales within Norwalk. We receive information monthly from the Connecticut Department of Revenue Services on what the gross sales were, and how much tax

Mr. Jellerette noted that the City collected $144,000 from a cannabis tax. Mr. Schmitt said if the trend continues, they are taking in $25 - $30,000 a month currently from two distributors.

Mr. Ellis said the February meeting will take place on February 10th.

The remainder of the agenda was for informational purposes.

• Oak Hills Park Financials – November, 2024

• Year-to-date Capital Budget Report – FY 2024-25

• Year-to-date Operating Expenditure Report – FY 2024-25

• Year-to-date Operating Revenue Report – FY 2024-25

• Police Wages FY 2024-25

• Fire Wages FY 2024-25

• Public Works Wages – FY 2024-25

• Year-to-date BOE Operating Expenditure Report FY 2024-25

• Year-to-date Budget Expenditure Report by Division -2024-25

Mr. Jellerette noted the guidance provided on the upcoming Board of Education budget. He said it looks like it is coming in at 9% and asked about early responses. Mr. Schmitt explained that is a major amount and the Board of Education does great work and has a lot of needs, but he made it known there are a lot of challenges. He said they may see tax bills increase in double digits.

Mr. Schmitt said he will continue to ask questions and make suggestions as to where they can look to find savings. The dialogues are on going and they are trying to find solutions. There needs to be a discussion about the structural changes in order to slow the trend. Mr. Abrams said Mr. Schmitt did a good job setting expectations. He added that the good news is they are addressing the Board of Education early.

Mayor Rilling said a presentation will be made when the Mayor and Chief Financial Officer's budget is done.

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

There was no further discussion, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services