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.gov/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.

CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
SPECIAL MEETING
VIA TELECONFERENCE
MARCH 7, 2024

ATTENDANCE: Ed Abrams; Mayor Harry Rilling; Kendrick Constant; Troy Jellerette; Anne Yang

STAFF: Irene Dixon, City Clerk; Thomas Ellis, Director of Management and Budgets; Lamond Daniels, Chief f Community Services; Deanna D'Amore, Director of Health; Sherelle Harris, Library Director; Vanessa Valdares, Chief of Operations and Public Works; Robert Stowers, Director of Recreation and Parks; Ken Hughes, Superintendent of Parks and Public Property; Neil Rennie, Building Management; David Walenczyk, Director of Youth Services

Mr. Abrams called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Ms. Dixon called the Roll as indicated above.

Mr. Jellerette asked Mr. Ellis if they looked at staff reductions. Mr. Ellis said they looked at not just lay offs, but also hiring freezes. He noted they would need to cut $1 million before they see anything significant to the mill rate and tax bills.

1. **BOARD OF ESTIMATE & TAXATION – BUDGET DELIBERATIONS**:

Mr. Abrams invited Mayor Rilling to make opening remarks.

Mayor Rilling said they know this is a particularly difficult budget year due to the revaluation. He expressed his thanks to Mr. Ellis and Ms. Cawai as well as everyone who assisted in preparing the budget. He also expressed his thanks to the department heads and the members of the Board of Estimate and Taxation.

Mr. Ellis shared his screen and reviewed the titles. He said the actuals go back to 2019.

Mr. Daniels read prepared remarks and said this budget request was his most challenging in in 10 years with the City.

Mr. Daniels highlighted the budget overall requests and said it reflects no new programs or initiatives.

Early Childhood

Mr. Abrams noted there was an advertising budget for the first time. Mr. Daniels said those funds are used to promote early learning by branding the books.

Fair Rent

Mr. Daniels described the staffing costs and noted they contract an attorney when they hold Fair Rent hearings.

Human Services

Mr. Daniels explained the budget increase was due to branding changes.

Youth Services

Mr. Walenczyk gave a brief overview and said they kept their request under 3%. He added they are appropriately staffed now.

Community Services

Mr. Lamond said they made some significant changed in their grants program.

Health

Ms. D'Amore said that overall their increase was 10% due to staffing and contractual obligations.

Building Management

Mr. Rennie said the increases are due to contractual obligations and because they added more City properties.

Environmental Health, Weights and Measurements, Community Health, Lab and Preventable Diseases

Ms. D'Amore briefly reviewed the budget requests.

Library

Ms. Harris explained the Library did not add any new initiatives. She expressed concern about the Custodian position but said they will utilize part time Custodians. She said they need to keep the Library technology current. Ms. Harris said Library visits have increased.

Mr. Daniels fielded questions about the outside grounds cost that are a contractual obligation associated with parking at the adjoining property. He also explained that the increase to the Security contract is due to the rates of pay being tied to the Living Wage, which has gone up significantly.

Public Works

Mr. Ellis said Public Works came in at 3.2% overall.

Ms. Valdares said they could not find any more savings.

Operations, Road and Markings, Snow and Ice removal, Storm Drainage, Solid Waste, Tree Maintenance, Engineering, Signalization, Disposal, Centralized Fleet Maintenance and Building Maintenance

Ms. Valdares reviewed the budget requests and fielded questions.

Mr. Abrams noted a significant increase in the over time budget. Ms. Valdares said they increased the amount of services they are providing to the City.

Mr. Abrams suggested leaving the salt purchase budget item open. It was noted that the price of salt is not available until September.

Ms. Valdares said the recycling market has changed and what used to be a revenue is not a cost, resulting in a $750,000 change.

Ms. Valdares reviewed the tree maintenance budget and said they do a lot of tree cutting in house; however, they use a contractor if they have to go over a certain height. The budget request is based on actual experience.

Engineering increased 5% for full time salaries.

The signalization is the corresponding down that offsets the up from the transfer.

Mr. Ellis noted there was a reduction in fleet maintenance.

In building management, there was an overall increase of 5% because they added new buildings and there was an increase in the cost of utilities. In addition, the cost of janitorial supplies increased significantly and the use increased significantly as well. Ms. Valdares said the costs are similar to before covid.

Recreation & Parks, Social Programs, Veteran's Committee, Grounds Facilities

Mr. Hughes and Mr. Stowers were present to answer questions. Mr. Stowers said that they passed the Park Master Plan last year and completed a conversion of a new reservation/scheduling system. He said there is no increase in full time positions but requested funding for a position that controls scheduling and reservations.

Mr. Stowers also asked for funding for either Park Ambassadors or Park Rangers to control conflict around the parks. He said they need eyes on the parks.

Mr. Hughes said the fireworks contract went up to $47,000 from $43,500.

The Veteran's Committee was transferred to the City Clerk's budget.

The Grounds Facilities budget went up less than 1% and that was driven by salary and step increases.

Ms. Yang asked where the Calf Pasture Beach parking fees go. Mr. Hughes said they go to the Parking Authority.

Mr. Hughes said they opened their camp registration on Friday and took in over $300,000 due to the new software. Mr. Stowers added that over 570 youth are registered for camp.

Ms. Valdares made closing remarks and noted they were extremely conservative in their budget requests. She said the Department of Public Works is responsible for all operations in the City and asked if they could bring back the position that brings in revenue. Ms. Valdares said they brought in over $8 million in grants for projects. She expressed her thanks to Mr. Ellis for his guidance.

Mayor Rilling made closing remarks and acknowledged this is a very tough year and they have to do all they can to ease the pain. A lot of residents are on fixed incomes and he does not want to see them forced out of Norwalk.

Mayor Rilling expressed his thanks to Mr. Ellis, Ms. Cawai, the members of the Board of Estimate and Taxation and the department heads who met the challenge.

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services