

ALL COMMON COUNCIL ACTIONS TAKEN AT THIS MEETING TO APPROVE EXPENDITURES AND CONTRACTS OR TO ACCEPT BIDS AND OTHER PROPOSALS REQUIRING THE EXPENDITURE OF CITY FUNDS ARE SUBJECT TO THE AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

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 Irene Dixon at idxon@norwalkct.gov with the subject line "Public Comment" to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

Ms. Smyth called the special meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. and led the Assembly in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

I. ROLL CALL

Ms. Dixon called the Roll as follows:

Council at Large: Mr. Gregory Burnett Mr. Johan Lopez (7:16 p.m.)
 Ms. Nora Niedzielski Eichner
 Ms. Barbara Smyth

District A: Ms. Nicol Ayers Mr. Jalin Sead

District B:

District C: Ms. Nicole Eaddy Ms. Anne Wennerstrand

District D: Ms. Heather Dunn Mr. Douglas W. Sutton

District E: Mr. James Frayer Ms. Lisa Shanahan

At Roll Call there were eleven (11) Common Councilmembers present and four (4) absent (Mr. Goldstein, Mr. Lopez, Mr. Wiggins and Ms. Young). A Quorum was present.

Also present were Mayor Harry Rilling (7:27 p.m.), City Clerk, Irene Dixon, Corporation Counsel, Mario Coppola and Chief Financial Officer Jared Schmit

II. PRESENTATION OF THE 2025-2026 OPERATING BUDGET

Mr. Smyth explained the purpose of this meeting was to present the 2025-2026 Operating Budget. She turned the meeting over to Mr. Burnett, Chair of the Finance Claims Committee.

Mr. Burnett said this was an opportunity to review the Mayor's budget and determine the post possible recommendation for the City so there is not a tremendous tax burden for the residents.

Mr. Schmitt shared his screen and presented the budget. He expressed his thanks to Mr. Ellis, Director of Management and Budgets and Ms. Cawai, Assistant of Management and Budgets for the massive amount of work that went into this. He reviewed the schedule up to May 5th the final operating budget and tax levy will be set.

Mr. Schmitt introduced the 2025-2026 operating budget and explained this is a challenging year and presented the issues. He also presented the steps being proposed to meet those challenges such as doing a 1% salary lapse, increasing the personal mill rate and holding a tax sale in the summer of 2026. He noted they are budgeting some fund balance to be used in the amount of \$8 million.

Mr. Schmitt explained the Recreation and Parks department is restricting their fees and is honoring their commitment to add a Community Resources Specialist.

Mr. Schmitt presented the department expenditures and said every department is different and when they look at the percentage difference that is not broad strokes. They can make the numbers from each division appear to be inflated. What is driving the increase is the hiring freeze. He said the City is dependent on tax revenue and there are not a lot of other sources. He said investment income will start to decrease this year and most of the cash invested is very short term.

Mr. Schmitt presented expenditures. He said that 54% of the budget is Education and shared a slide showing the items in the City budget that are Board of Education related. He said the actual breakdown is then 61% Board of Education and 39% City.

Mr. Schmitt presented the Mill Rate Sheet with ranges between 8.4% - 14.6% depending on the given district. He said a lot is being driven by the phase in revaluation and the motor vehicle tax changes.

Mr. Schmitt presented the history of the fund balance use and said they are assuming it will happen in 2025. He added they will still be at 16% of the overall budget.

Mr. Schmitt concluded his presentation and reiterated his thanks to Mr. Ellis and Ms. Cawai. He then fielded questions from the Common Council members.

Mr. Burnett referred to the mill rate table. Mr. Schmitt explained that in real estate they estimate it at the median and motor vehicle is an average.

Mr. Sead asked about the hiring freeze. Mr. Schmitt said it was not a hard hiring freeze and not every department was frozen. Mr. Sead asked about the effect on the DEI Officer's position. Mr. Schmitt said the hiring freeze ended on January 1st. The DEI Officer's position is open and is being actively recruited.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner asked what was being done to increase revenue from grants. Mr. Schmitt said a number of departments have the opportunity to access grants. A lot of grants are reoccurring every year. He said a grant policy grant was just completed and is out for review. He noted that most of the grants are for capital projects; there are less opportunities for operating grants. He said currently there is a part time Grants Coordinator on staff.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner asked how much revenue the Grants Coordinator brings in. Mr. Schmitt said he believes they identified \$40 million in grants. Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said she believed they would be doing more if they had a full time Grants Coordinator. Mr. Schmitt explained the returns quickly diminish if they bring in a full time person.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner asked if there were any new programs related to affordable housing. Mr. Schmitt said there weren't any.

Mr. Lopez joined the meeting at 7:16 p.m.

Mr. Lopez asked for a general sense about the contribution to the pension. Mr. Schmitt explained the Actuary will be presenting to the Pension Board tomorrow night and he will distribute that presentation once it is finalized.

Mr. Frayer asked if there was any movement in the Grant List. Mr. Schmitt explained the amount of natural growth last year was \$253 million between this year and last year. Mr. Frayer commented that most departments that collect revenue have been relatively conservative and if

they've loosened up the estimates. Mr. Schmitt said they looked at the large increase in the Building Department and factored that in. He said they need to look at development by development and make the best estimate and then increase the conveyance tax.

Mr. Frayer said they need to look at functionality in IT, Purchasing and Human Resources where the City and the Board of Education have the same departments. They need to look at where they can achieve synergy. Mr. Schmitt explained they had a department meeting today and they are making small steps such as going with the same vendor used by the Board of Education for their copiers.

Ms. Smyth asked about the proposed \$8 million drawdown and believes they do not want the fund balance to go below \$15 million. She asked Mr. Schmitt if he felt confident they would have enough in there for the potential loss of growth. Mr. Schmitt explained they are tracking and following everything the people say could happen at the State and Federal level. He feels there is nothing to act upon. Mr. Schmitt said the policy is to keep the fund balance at around 10-15%; their financial advisors advise not going much lower than they are reducing the fund balance. This is part of an effort to lessen the burden on the taxpayers.

Mayor Rilling joined the meeting at 7:27 p.m.

III. ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO ADJOURN**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

ATTEST: _____
 Irene Dixon, City Clerk