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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
PUBLIC HEARING
FEBRUARY 10, 2025
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

ATTENDANCE: Gregory Burnett, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling; Heather Dunn; James Frayer; Johan Lopez; Douglas Sutton (6:59 p.m.)

STAFF: Thomas Ellis, Director Management and Budgets; Paul Gorman, Tax Assessor; Chitsamay Lam, Comptroller; Jared Schmitt, Chief Financial Officer

OTHERS: Nicol Ayers; Anne Wennerstrand; Barbara Smyth, Common Council members

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Burnett called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Burnett called the Roll as indicated above. A Quorum was present.

PUBLIC HERING ON THE FISCAL YEAR 2025-2025 RECOMMENDED OPERATING BUDGET

Mr. Burnett explained this evening's public hearing would not address the Capital Budget which will be addressed in April at the Economic and Community Development Committee meeting. This evening will be an opportunity for residents to share their comments.

Mr. Burnett highlighted the budget and explained it will draw down \$8 million from the fund balance to provide relief to the residents. He said this budget was presented to the Board of Estimate and Taxation and the Common Council. The budget proposes a 4% increase for the Board of Education and a 2.5% increase for the City. Mr. Burnett said that following this meeting, the Finance Claims Committee will hold a special meeting to vote on the recommended operating budget cap.

Mr. Burnett reviewed the budget time line and said the Board of Estimate and Taxation will hold a public hearing on March 26th.

Mr. Burnett reviewed the public hearing procedures and asked speakers to limit their comments to three minutes to allow everyone the opportunity to speak. He announced the translation services that are available on line. As of this evening, no letters or e-mails have been received.

Mayor Rilling offered opening remarks. He explained this budget is still a work in progress and is the initial iteration of the budget. He said this year is particularly difficult due to the revaluation, the housing boom in Norwalk and vacancies in commercial real estate.

Mayor Rilling expressed his thanks to the Finance Claims Committee, the members of the Board of Estimate and Taxation and Mr. Schmitt, Ms. Cawai and Mr. Ellis for their hard work. He explained that \$8 million will be drawn down from the rainy day fund. He also thanked the people in the community.

Mr. Lopez asked for a sense of what they are looking at. Mr. Schmitt said the recommended increase for the Board of Education is 4%. He explained if they increase the 4% to 5.5% the numbers would increase as follows:

City of Norwalk

Board of Estimate and Taxation

Public Hearing

February 13, 2025

Via Teleconference

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District 1 - \$848 - \$873
District 2 - \$904 - \$928
District 3 - \$964- \$994
District 4 - \$691-\$718
District 5 - \$789 - \$824
District 6 \$2,043 - \$2,118

Mr. Frayer asked about the significance of drawing down \$8 million from the rainy day fund. Mr. Schmitt explained they do not believe this will effect the credit rating, but would be a little concerned if they go lower. He said the biggest challenge is the phase in. He noted if they keep drawing down, that money will not be there next year, but the costs will still be there. Ms. Dunn noted that if a landlord passes the tax increase to their tenants, in the worst case scenario that could add \$300.00 a month to rent, which is a significant amount.

Mr. Burnett opened the public hearing.

Public hearing comments are not verbatim and represent a summarization of statements unless otherwise noted. Speakers are Norwalk residents unless otherwise noted.

Ms. Jennifer Jeffries spoke in support of funding the Board of Education as closely as possible to their request.

Ms. Mary Yordan, Norwalk Federation of Teachers said a 4% increase is a very positive thing but raises concern. She said she did not see language that helps ensure this funding is used effectively for the students.

Mr. Nick Seran spoke in support of fully funding the Board of Education budget and said he did not see a lot of waste in the budget. He said it was money well spent.

Ms. Brandalyn Fulton Williams asked to consider funding the Board of Education as an investment for Special Education and asked to consider a special appropriation until funding is received from the State.

Mr. Sutton joined the meeting at 6:59 p.m.

Ms. Abby Shiner spoke in support of funding the Board of Education and said she was upset at recommendation of a 4% increase and asked to consider the requested 9.7% increase.

Ms. Amanda Trimboli said a 9.7% increase is a little scary, but does not agree that 4% is enough. As a Substitute Teacher she sees how valuable every staff member is in the schools and is frustrated that the Common Council members do not work closely with the Board of Education. She said

there are only 11,000 children in the school system and it is time to start investing in the schools. She said it was imperative to work together to find a solution; she said she knows they are not doing that now.

Ms. Kara Baeky, Board of Education requested reconsideration of the budget. She said they already reduced their budget request by 10% bringing it to 9.7%. She said 4% will have negative impacts. She said they need to stand up for the kids. Ms. Baeky said she heard the Chief Financial Officer described the impact of the tax burden and can appreciate that but asked to consider increasing the budget greater than 4% and closer to 9.7%.

Ms. Diana Carpio, Board of Education Chair spoke about sustaining the education budget and said that without full approval the schools will lack resources. She said the budget helps ensure necessary resources for all students. She asked to approve an amount higher than 4% and closer to 9.7%.

Ms. Maria Myslinski spoke in support of fully funding the Board of Education budget. She asked what message this sends to the children.

Ms. Melissa Matuska spoke in support of the Board of Education budget. She said Norwalk spends \$22,279 compared to Fairfield, where they spend \$23,083 per pupil. She said the suggestion to share Nurses is concerning and the plan to decentralize Early Childhood is challenging.

Ms. Isobel Owen spoke in support of fully funding the Board of Education budget. She noted that it mostly consists of staff funding and asked Norwalk to find a way to provide for the needs of the students.

Ms. Stefanie Moraine spoke in support of fully funding the Board of Education budget. She said the difference between the proposed budget and the requested budget is too large and would mean cuts. She expressed concern for students having medical emergencies in schools without a Nurse on site. She said Educators and other staff would be expected to take on the role as Nurse. The risk of cutting services like Nursing can end up costing more.

Dr. Lynn Moore, President Administration Union said that on February 12th she received a call from an executive that she had to cut 17 positions at Norwalk High School. She said there not 17 positions to cut. She asked why they were building a new school if they can't offer programs for students. She said other principals are in the same position and received the same call. She said cuts could be made at the Central Office and doing a better job of managing grant funding. She said 4% is not enough.

Ms. Sherry McCreedy Pritchett, Board of Education Co-Chair spoke in support of funding the Board of Education north of 4% so all Norwalk student will graduate future ready.

Mr. Morris Rett spoke in support of fully funding the Board of Education budget. He said Norwalk schools experience challenges stemming from budget cuts; worst case scenario would be funding at the same level. The schools need to be fully funded.

Ms. Diane Lauricella said they need to look at needs verses wants and asked that the budget cap not be increase until the following ideas are vetted and reviewed:

Increase enforcement of Health and Zoning violations

Hire a full time Grant Coordinator reporting to Finance

Savings in Corporation Counsel and Chief of Staff

Board of Education parents should be angry at Dr. Estrella and should consider transferring the Welcome Center to a Norwalk owned building.

Mr. Tom Train spoke in support of raising taxes and fully funding the Board of Education budget.

Mr. Larry Anastasia spoke in support of fully funding the Board of Education budget and said his position, Dean of Students, is proposed to be cut.

Mr. Burnett asked if there were any other members of the public who wished to speak. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. LOPEZ MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further discussion and the public hearing was adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services