CITY OF NORWALK COMMON COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
DECEMBER 3, 2023
NORWALK, CONNECTICUT THE BUNKHOUSE, 300 GRUMMAN AVE., AND VIA TELECONFERENCE

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COMMON COUNCIL DECEMBER 3, 2023

NORWALK, CONNECTICUT 9:00AM THE BUNKHOUSE, 300 GRUMMAN AVE.

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I. ROLL CALL

Mayor Rilling called the meeting to order at 9:00AM. and led the Assembly in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Young called the Roll. The following Common Council members were present:

Council at Large:	Mr. Greg Burnett	Mr. Josh Goldstein
	Mr. Johan Lopez	Ms. Nora Niedzielski-Eichner
	Ms. Barbara Smyth	
District A:	Ms. Nicol Ayers	Mr. Jalin Sead
District B:	Ms. Darlene Young	Mr. Dajuan Wiggins
District C:	Ms. Jenn McMurrer	Ms. Melissa Murray
District D:	Ms. Heather Dunn	Mr. Doug Sutton
District E:	Mr. James Frayer	Ms. Lisa Shanahan

There were fifteen (15) Common Council members present.

Also present were Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, Corporation Council Mario Coppola, and Director of Communications, Michelle Woods-Matthews

II. MAYOR RILLING WELCOME

Mayor Rilling welcomed back the re-elected council members and newly elected council members and said he is looking forward to working together as a team.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public who wished to comment.

IV. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES

Ms. Young reviewed the committee assignments and said that Ms. Nicol Ayers will chair the Community Services Committee, Mr. Josh Goldstein will chair the Economic and Community Development Committee, Mr. Gregory Burnett with chair the Finance and Claims Committee, Ms. Barbara Smyth will chair the Land Use and Building Management Committee, Mr. James Frayer will chair the Public Works Committee, Ms. Lisa Shanahan will chair the Ordinance Committee, Ms. McMurrer will chair the Public Safety and General Government Committee, and Ms. Darlene Young will chair the Recreation and Parks Committee. She said there are also two Ad Hoc Committees that will meet from time to time and Mr. James Sead will chair the Ad Hoc Affordable Housing Committee, and Mr. Lopez will chair the Ad Hoc Sustainability and Resilience Committee. She said from time to time there will need to be a charter revision commission and Ms. Murray will be the facilitator.

Ms. Ayers and Mr. Burnett joined the meeting at 9:06AM.

**** MS. YOUNG MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO TAKE THE AGENDA OUT OF ORDER.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

VI. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Mr. Coppola provided his contact information with the members of the Common Council and said that he is generally available anytime. He recommended that the new members review the Board of Ethics and Citizens Guide to the Board of Ethics which is available on the city's website, and he will also send a link to Ms. Young to share with the new members. He said first and foremost it is important to know it is an honor to be a councilmember and are now a city official but with that comes certain responsibilities and restrictions to some degree, and the Code of Ethics does apply to the members as they are a city official.

Mr. Coppola reviewed the conflicts of interest and said that each member must determine if there is a conflict of interest which may disqualify them from participating in the consideration of a matter, and he recommends that if a committee member feels there is a conflict of interest, they should recuse themselves.

Ms. Young requested that Mr. Coppola review what would constitute a meeting that is outside of a committee or council meeting. Mr. Coppola said anytime there are more than eight council members it will constitute a quorum and should be a publicly noticed meeting and is subject to FOI, and the members should be careful with emails and text messages with eight or more members of the council. Mr. Coppola suggested holding another FOI informational session for the new members. Mr. Burnett said that a tentative date for the FOI annual training is scheduled for Monday, January 29, 2024, but will need to confirm but he beliefs that Mr. Sphar has taken the lead on confirming the date with the FOI Commission. Mr. Coppola said in the past there were councilmembers that were using personal email addresses, but he does not believe that is any longer an issue in recent years but said that all city business that is electronic should be done using the city email addresses. He said that text messages could also be subject to a FOI request as well as discovery and litigation and to be careful when texting as well. Ms. Young said the council email addresses have all been changed to councilmember.gov. Mr. Coppola requested that Ms. Young ensures that the IT department has set up any emails that go to the previous email be forwarded to the new email address.

Ms. Smyth recommended that the members ask Mr. Coppola for a legal opinion if they are unsure if they have a conflict of interest. Mr. Coppola agreed and said if a member is involved or employed by an organization that has a matter before the council, they should reach out to him so that he can assist them in making a determination if there is a conflict.

VII. DASHBOARD PRESENTATION

Ms. Woods-Matthews introduced herself and said that she is the Communications Director for the city and congratulated the members on winning the election.

Ms. Woods-Matthews presented the relaunch of the mayor's dashboard and said that it is an accountability tool and shows all of the metrics, data, and trends of the programs and services the city offers, and also the gaps in where the city can improve. She said that seven categories were created for the dashboard based on the city and mayors' vision and each category highlights the things that are going on in terms of programs and services and new metrics can always be added. Ms. Young said the information is updated on a consistent basis. Mayor Rilling said there is a tremendous amount of information on the dashboard. Mayor Rilling asked if there was a record of how many people view the dashboard. Ms. Woods-Matthews said that she can get that information from the IT Department. Ms. Dunn suggested adding links to where the data comes from to the dashboard. Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said the click and request app is great and the response time is incredible.

V. GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS OF THE NORWALK COMMON COUNCIL

Ms. Young provided an overview of the rules of the Common Council and said the council meets on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:30PM, with a caucus meeting the Monday prior to each meeting. She said the next meeting will be held on December 12^{th,} but she believes the meeting of December 26th will be cancelled. She suggested that the chairs of the committees reach out to their department heads to see if there are any pressing issues that need to be on the agenda for December 12th. Mr. Burnett asked Ms. Young to discuss the mode that the council meets and have set somewhat of an understanding that the preferred method of meeting would be in person for the council meetings. Ms. Young said that can be discussed moving forward and that a lot of folks in the community would prefer in person meetings and they try to do that whenever and wherever possible and the Common Council meetings will be held in person unless a member is not feeling well or have something that is keeping them from doing that.

Ms. Young said there should be no less than 10 committee meetings per year. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner said the chair of the committee with work with the staff member to be sure the agendas are complete. Mayor Rilling said if a council member has a question for a department head that it is best to go through the committee chair. Ms. Dunn asked if items can be right to the council for approval if there is not a committee meeting held. Ms. Young said “yes” but only for time sensitive matters. Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said items are discussed and voted on at the committee level, but no contract is valid until it is approved by the full Council.

Ms. Shanahan discussed the difference between public comments and a public hearing. Ms. Dunn asked if the public hearings are held in person or by zoom. Ms. Shanahan said they are generally held on zoom. Ms. Young said there is an opportunity for both. Ms. Dunn said she thinks that is part of transparency issue from what the neighbors have said because if they are held in person people know who else is present rather than on zoom where people don’t know who else is present. Ms. Smyth suggested during a public hearing the committee chair say the number of people that are participating. Ms. Young said that they had heard about this issue before and that it may be changed and suggested a conversation with the IT department. Mr. Frayer asked if when holding a public hearing if a separate public hearing is required or can it be included as part of the public comment portion of the meeting, if it should it be publicized that a public hearing will be part of a committee meeting, and if should it be done in multiple languages. Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said that public hearings are held as part of the committee meetings but they do have to be noticed as public hearings, and the language issue is a very important one that several of the council members want to discuss but were waiting until after the election to do that and she feels they do need to begin increasing the publications in Spanish and potentially in Creole as well. Mr. Frayer agreed and said he thinks its important but asked if a translator would need to be available to people who may have questions that don’t speak English. Ms. Young said that has been done in the past and she believes it was done in both Spanish and Creole. Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said this is something that the council should undertake and suggested beginning a conversation with the IT department and Ms. Dixon to begin the process. Mr. Sead suggested contacting community groups to further engage public participation for public hearings. Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said the Assistant City Clerk position is open and there is a job description that was used last year and are working to get it reposted as quickly as possible but that is the kind of thing the assistant city clerk could assist with. Ms. Dunn suggested contacting the Community Services Department to see if there is a demographic need to have them in other languages besides Spanish and Creole.

Ms. Smyth recommended that the new members make an appointment and meet with the Chief’s to get an update on any items they have been working on or items that may be coming up. Ms. Niedzielski Eichner agreed and suggested meetings in small groups but reminded the members to be sure they are not doing anything in a quorum and said to keep the groups to three or less and the same goes for text messaging and emails as well.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner recommended the members read the first 86 pages of the city charter and she will send a link to that. She said it outlines the responsibilities and authority for the council.

Mr. Goldstein said that Economic and Community Development will be having each of the department heads provide an update for their department in the public meeting.

Ms. Young suggested setting two or three priorities as a council and for the members to start thinking of some ideas such as a green city, housing, etc.

Ms. Smyth thanked Ms. Young for creating the onboarding packet and that it is very helpful for the new members.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**
The meeting was adjourned at 10:59AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd

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