COMMON COUNCIL	SPECIAL MEETING	MARCH 7, 2023
NORWALK, CONNECTICUT	COMMON COUNCIL CHAMBERS & VIA TELECONFERENCE	

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

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Mayor Rilling called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. and led the Assembly in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance

I. **ROLL CALL**

Ms. Dixon called the Roll:

Council at Large:	Mr. Gregory Burnett	Mr. Edwin Camacho
	Mr. Joshua Goldstein	Ms. Nora Niedzielski Eichner
	Ms. Barbara Smyth	

District A:	Ms. Nicol Ayers	Mr. David Heuvelman
District B:	Ms. Diana Revolus	Ms. Darlene Young
District C:	Mr. John Kydes	Ms. Jenn McMurrer
District D:	Mr. Bryan Meek	Ms. Heidi Alterman
District E:	Mr. Thomas Livingston	Ms. Lisa Shanahan

At Roll Call there were 15 (fifteen) Councilmembers. A Quorum was present.

Also present were Mayor, Harry Rilling; City Clerk, Irene Dixon, Assistant City Clerk, Jordan Schantz and Corporation Counsel, Mario Coppola.

III. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

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

Mayor Rilling reviewed public participation procedures. He said tonight's business will be to set the cap on the budget and determine what can be spent. Once the cap is approved, the Board of Estimate and Taxation will allocate line item funds. He added that it has been a very challenging budget year.

There will be live interpretation in Spanish and Haitian Creole this evening.

Lisa Brinton said she was not advocating one way or another on this budget. This budget cycle has been the most embarrassing since 2005 due to the process. This year it is embarrassing because the gap is so wide. She asked where the money is and why can't they fund the schools. She said that Land Use is 90% of the budget and Education makes up 60% of the budget.

Godfrey Azima, Vice Chair, Norwalk Board of Education said the expectation is to no provide the children with the bare minimum. He is concerned that the numbers will send an unintentional message to the youth. he said what they are asking for will not go away and to be mindful of the youth.

Lisa Henderson thanked Ms. Young for her op-ed. She said they all support the educating the children. It is disingenuous to compare Norwalk to the surrounding towns. The residents can't fund the special interests of the Superintendent and the Board of Education. This is not to minimize that all children of Norwalk should be well educated. Any talk of using the rainy day

funds to fund the Board of Education is not a good use of that money. She compared it to an insurance policy that makes Norwalk debt worthy. The Norwalk public schools must live within the four percent increase and stop blaming last year's budget.

Patrick O'Connell said the needs for the Board of Education are endless and a 12.8% increase for the board is not sustainable. We can't have taxes rise faster than incomes. Unions are going to come back and negotiate higher salaries due to inflation. It is not sustainable and is not competitive with other towns.

Amanda Trimboli talked about transparency and said it is her duty to know what efforts the school system is taking. She said there are a lot of opinions and misinformation. She said she reached out to members of the Common Council and the Board of Education regarding the budget. She suggested that both start communicating with each other and told the Board of Education to assume that they will have to make budget cuts however she implored them to make those cuts at the top. she said if anything the people working directly with the students deserve a raise.

Marlene Debilis asked for approval of the 12.7% increase requested by the Board of Education. She said it will protect salaries, programs and resources that address needs of the students. She said the teachers do an exceptional job.

Sheri McCready Pritchett, Board of Education member when the District was level funded the City warned that it would create a cliff but now three years later what was warned about is happening. Going forward they need to focus on how to maximize the budget.

Kara Baekey, Board of Education member said she wished she could say she was proud to be a Norwalk resident, but since being elected to the Board of Education she is not. She compared the numbers spent on students in surrounding towns and asked how Norwalk students can compete with students in neighboring towns. She said the increase for Norwalk Public Schools would amount to $8.00 – $20.00 per month and does not believe those numbers will drive people out of town. He said the students are struggling and she remains skeptical but hopeful.

Christian Devral asked the plan for the budget. They do not want to see a weakening in the schools and said there needs to be options. They asked the Common Council to not deprive the children of an education.

Jessica Jones she was nervous for the children, because by not fully funding the budget they're going to remove the wonderful things that were put into place to help them. The mental health issue is beyond epidemic and not everyone has the resources. She said a lot of us here have that privilege and a lot don't. The children count on the schools to be a healthy place. This represents all of Norwalk. She asked the Common Council members to vote their conscience.

Iliana Zuniga said she is tired of asking and people are feeling defeated. She asked the members of the Common Council to find a way to fund as much of the Board of Education's budget request as possible. She asked them to vote with the ideas they had when they ran for office.

Adriana Romero said she was doing this as a last Hail Mary. She asked that as you tally up the numbers that you remember these are our children and their future. She said she knows you are in a position to make a system or break a system.

Sarah LeMieux talked about economics and said that most people are asking for an investment tin the school system. This will create more opportunities in Norwalk. She said that not making this investment will create a crisis. She said that if you want a wealthier society, you need to encourage people to invest.

Melissa Dino advocated for fully funding the Board of Education. She said that earlier this month the City recommended a 4% increase; however, this will not allow the Board of Education to finance contractual obligations. She said there truly is a crisis and the kids need support now more than ever. Our District has worse challenges than the surrounding towns but they fund their board of educations at a higher rate. She asked that the City not underfund the budget because there will be ramifications for all students.

Richard Bonenfant asked the Common Council to keep the taxes down and not chase people out of town. He said there are no senior tax breaks if people collect a pension. When he hears people talk about how much is spent on the Board of Education in other towns, it is not an accurate comparison. He asked to please consider the people who pay the bills when voting on the cap.

Julie Fleming advocated for fully funding the Board of Education's budget request. She said there is no one who cannot afford this increase. She said there are arguments about how much people can afford. She added that the Common Council needs to use their voices to advocate for more funding from the State.

John Levin said that up until now little commentary was made from taxpayers and he is speaking as a taxpayer. He said this is an election year and official representatives are up for election and seeking to avoid raising taxes. He said it is his job to pay the bills and while some people can afford it and others cannot afford it, then it is the job of the taxpayer to pay for the City and the schools. If the City needs to raise taxes to get the schools properly funded and to meet the needs of the City, then it is the job of the taxpayer to pay the bill. He said he understands that some property owners will suffer with their property tax, but they are suffering already. He said that Norwalk has high need students, but it is our bill.

Jalin Sead said that many of his friends left Norwalk because they could no longer afford to live here. Norwalk's greatest strength is its diversity. He said he knows the schools need money, but there are people who can't afford it. He said he wants to give the kids everything possible, but asked the Common Council to think about the people who have no choice.

Julie Mendez asked the Common Council to think about the children and fund the Board of Education's request.

Erika DePalma, Board of Education member said she is privy to a number of crisis calls. She spoke about the trauma experienced by children during a lock down when the SWAT team went into the school. She said these are our babies and they are not numbers. They are in crisis.

April Wenestrom advocated for fully funding the Board of Education's request.

Cristy Robinson said she hoped the Common Council would make the right decision. She said she has grown to embrace emotional intelligence and hopes those resources will not be taken away.

Dr. Robin Gredinger, NPS Social Worker spoke about how taking way from the budget will take away safety from the students. Social Workers are in the front lines with the kids who suffered during covid and going back to school. Sports is one of the main thinks that alleviate anxiety. If sports are taken away, they the students will be stripped of their coping skills. She asked the Common Council to look at the Paraeducator positions. She said that in the last two weeks, she had eight students who were self harming. She asked the Common Council to look at the safety of the students when they look at the numbers.

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

IV. **COMMON COUNCIL COMMITTEES**

A. FINANCE AND CLAIMS COMMITTEE

1. RESOLUTION:

**** MR. BURNETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:**

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMIT ON LOCALLY EXPENDITURES DURING THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK THAT:

THE MAXIMUM LIMIT ON THE TOTAL APPROPRIATION FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2023 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN $402,559,982. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF $424,361,207 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF $21,801,225. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2023-2024 BUDGET BOOK, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Mr. Burnett thanked his colleagues on the Common Council for their hard work and for offering creative solutions during this budget cycle. He said they are faced with several challenges with the primary focus on keeping taxes low, while ensuring there are no interruptions to the City's services. He said it is extremely difficult to achieve a balance when the City is being asked for an increase of $27 million.

Mr. Burnett said they have to remain committed to create innovative solutions so as to not create a burden to the taxpayers. This Common Council remains open to working with the Board of Education to ensure the students receive the best education.

Mr. Dachowitz shared his screen and summarized different iterations on the budget based on requests made by Common Council members.

Mr. Livingston thanked members of the community who shared their comments. He thanked Mayor Rilling and his staff for putting the budget together.

**** MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENT**

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMIT ON LOCALLY EXPENDITURES DURING THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET.

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Mr. Livingston explained that this is $3 million less than the proposed amount. He said they represent all the citizens of Norwalk and would love to give people everything they want, but they can't. He added that he feels this amount can be found by the Board of Education. This budget includes several one time sources of revenue and those dollars will have to be made up next year. There is no such thing as a one time increase in the Board of Education.

Mr. Livingston said we are in a revaluation year and ideally these lower mill rates will compensate for the higher home values. He said the taxes are too high. He just heard from a neighbor who said she had to sell her home because of the taxes. Half of the households are struggling. He noted how Ms. Revolus reminds everyone of how an increase will impact the residents.

Ms. Shanahan spoke in support of Mr. Livingston's amendment. She said that adding last year's increase to this year's increase will result in a 10% increase over the last two years. The tax increase compounds and is not sustainable. Ms. Shanahan said they do care about providing the best schools for the students. She that 60% of the budget is allocated to the Board of Education, while school aged students make up 12% of the residents.

Ms. Shanahan said that every year they are told that if the Board of Education is not fully funded, teachers will get laid off and they will loose sports; however, every year, sports are being offered and the teacher's jobs are safe. There are currently 70 positions open, making it unlikely there will be cuts.

Across the City, people what better services for the elderly and public works projects. Ms. Shanahan said they do not want to push people out of the City.

Ms. Revolus spoke in support of Mr. Livingston's amendment and appreciated his acknowledgement. She spoke about how tax increases can harm people in all districts. She said the taxes can't increase in an amount that is disproportionate to the amount people are earning.

**** MOTION FAILED WITH FOUR (4) VOTES IN FAVOR (MS. REVOLUS; MR. MEEK; MR. LIVINGSTON AND MS. SHANAHAN) AND ELEVEN (11) IN**

OPPOSITION (MR. BURNETT; MR. CAMACHO; MR. GOLDSTEIN; MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. SMYTH; MS. AYERS; MR. HEUVELMAN; MS. YOUNG; MR. KYDES; MS. MCMURRER AND MS. ALTERMAN)

** MS. AYERS MOVED THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENT

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Ms. Ayers said that as a parent and taxpayer and a person who knows fiscal constraints, she said they have to do better. She said she was not in support of the Board of Education's 12% increase, but knows they need more than the Mayor's request.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner spoke in support of Ms. Ayers' amendment. She said she could not support a 12% increase and feels 4% is lower than what would be ideal for the students. She said they need to find a point that would be ideal for the schools. She said they need to find a point where they can support and sustain the core services.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said she continues to have concerns about transparency and how the ESSER funds were used and how that was conveyed to the parents. She said they are deeply committed to the schools and for providing services. She told the students that they are valued and they believe in the teachers. She said they need to find a balance to keep the City diverse and to support the schools.

Ms. McMurrer spoke in support of Ms. Ayers' amendment. She said this has been a tough budget cycle and noted there are a lot of education advocates and parents on the Common Council. She said they need to do better in partnership and collaboration between the Common Council and the Board of Education. She said that more money does not necessarily create better schools. She said she heard so many success stories due to our teachers.

Ms. McMurrer said that when they asked questions, they did not get direct answers from the Board of Education. She said they often talk about the schools, but not about investing in the town. This all comes with a price tag. It requires a partnership in order to support the students. They need to talk about what is realistic on both sides.

Ms. Smyth spoke in support of Ms. Ayer's amendment. She said this has been a difficult budget cycle and has been back and forth all day about this resolution. She said she knows what the kids go through; covid took a real toll on them and the City needs to wrap its arms around the kids. She said she believes a creative solution will be found to fund the mental health of the kids.

Ms. Alterman spoke in support of the amendment and said when she did the math, the increase comes to about $21.00 a month. She said her family could handle that, but that adds up for people. She said the teachers and kids need support.

****** **MOTION FAILED WITH FIVE (5) VOTES IN FAVOR (MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. SMYTH; MS. AYERS; MS. MCMURRER AND MS. ALTERMAN) AND TEN (10) OPPOSED (MR. BURNETT; MR. CAMACHO; MR. GOLDSTEIN; MR. HEUVELMAN; MS. REVOLUS; MS. YOUNG; MR. KYDES; MR. MEEK; MR. LIVINGSTON AND MS. SHANAHAN)**

The discussion went back to the main Resolution as follows:

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMIT ON LOCALLY EXPENDITURES DURING THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET.

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RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2023-2024 BUDGET BOOK, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Mr. Meek said he would vote against the overall budget. He rejects the notion that kids are worse than kids in others in other countries. He said if they are treated like victims, they will be victims. He said this tax increase is not sustainable.

Mr. Goldstein said they have all been talking about how tough this is. He said he feels a tremendous responsibility to strike an equitable and affordable process. He said he was alarmed that the Superintendent and her team have not engaged in the conversation. The fact that the Superintendent did not come to the negotiating table is a disservice to the students and all involved in the process. He noted that every increase becomes permanent.

Mr. Goldstein said that 60% of the budget is for the Board of Education. Education is the City's top priority and the numbers prove that. It is imperative to find ways to address the mental health issues. He said that half of the households are struggling to make meet their household expenses. He said they are all committed to making the City the best it can be and is deeply proud to have colleagues who are committed to the City.

Mr. Heuvelman said this has been a struggle and spoke about the needs of the kids and what they can do to best serve them and to best serve the City. He referred to the Norwalk Public School parents who were scared their special needs children would not get services if the Board of Education's budget was not fully funded. Mr. Heuvelman said that $27 million is a record ask by the Board of Education.

Mr. Heuvelman spoke about the year of flat funding and said there were many discussions about how that funding would be used. He said he questioned whether or not he could support this increase because of the rhetoric that has been spewed. He said he never got the information from the other side and that needs to be corrected.

Ms. Alterman said she did not know which questions were not answered and asked for an example. Mr. Heuvelman said at the last meeting they had a lengthy presentation by the Board of Education and he also sat through a joint meeting where they looked at facilities. They never spoke about the budget or what the budget cycle would look like.

Ms. Shanahan said her recent question was about a line item for fringe benefits. She said she wants to know what the increase was and why it was going up millions of dollars. She said she did not receive an answer. Ms. Shanahan and Mr. Heuvelman said they asked questions, but did not receive answers from the Board of Education. Ms. Shanahan added that when she got an answer the numbers were inaccurate. No where did the Board of Education reveal that the

schools hired 10 new positions. There are serious concerns about the answers received from the Board of Education.

Mr. Meek asked for clarification on page 10 of the budget book. Mr. Dachowitz said that the Board of Education will get a 4% increase and some City departments will get more than a .75% increase.

Ms. Young said that there were extensive conversations so they could make a decision that would be best for everyone. She said that anyone who elects them, wants them to do their best. She said they want to become strategic and answer the needs of all residents to the best of their ability. Ms. Young said she believed a partnership would help everyone get to a better place.

Ms. Revolus said she did not want the budget to go higher than 4%. She said there is a problem with the process and the overall inability to have clarification. She said that no one speaks about housing. She said she supported Mr. Livingston's amendment. She said there needs to be honesty in how and what is being spent. The Rainy Day Fund is for emergencies.

Ms. Alterman said that all e-mailing should be done in public meetings. She said that if everyone is saying that the Board of Education is leaving them with questions, then it should be on the record. She said she wants the public to have the same information they have.

Ms. Revolus said that this back and forth likes like they are fighting among themselves, although they are trying to show their point of view.

Mr. Goldstein responded to Ms. Alterman and said that it is not about how many meeting they have; the transparency they are seeking is answers to questions and a fuller understanding of the Norwalk Public Schools expenditures. The fundamental problem is the struggle with the Superintendent and the team.

Ms. Young said it is not about the person, but it is about the process and being transparent. The budget process has to change. She said they are here to guard the interests of the City.

**** MAIN MOTION FAILED WITH SEVEN (7) VOTES IN FAVOR (MR. BURNETT; MR. CAMACHO; MR. GOLDSTEIN; MS. SMYTH; MR. HEUVELMAN; MS. YOUNG; MR. KYDES) AND EIGHT (8) VOTES IN OPPOSITION (MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. AYERS; MS. REVOLUS; MS. MCMURRER; MS. ALTERMAN; MR. MEEK; MR. LIVINGSTON AND MS. SHANAHAN)**

A Recess was called at 10:07 p.m.
The meeting resumed at 10:16 p.m.

**** MS. YOUNG MOVED THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENT:**

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Ms. Shanahan said this increase will result in a 5.95% tax rate for her district. She said she can not support this.

**** MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MS. AYERS), SIX (6) VOTES IN OPPOSITION (MR. HEUVELMAN; MS. REVOLUS; MS. ALTERMAN; MR. MEEK; MR. LIVINGSTON AND MS. SHANAHAN) AND EIGHT (8) VOTES IN FAVOR (MR. BURNETT; MR. CAMACHO; MR. GOLDSTEIN; MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. SMYTH; MS. YOUNG; MR. KYDES AND MS. MCMURRER)**

XI. **ADJOURNMENT**

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

There was no further business, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

ATTEST:_____
Irene Dixon, City Clerk

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	Ms. Barbara Smyth	

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funds to fund the Board of Education is not a good use of that money. She compared it to an insurance policy that makes Norwalk debt worthy. The Norwalk public schools must live within the four percent increase and stop blaming last year's budget.

Patrick O'Connell said the needs for the Board of Education are endless and a 12.8% increase for the board is not sustainable. We can't have taxes rise faster than incomes. Unions are going to come back and negotiate higher salaries due to inflation. It is not sustainable and is not competitive with other towns.

Amanda Trimboli talked about transparency and said it is her duty to know what efforts the school system is taking. She said there are a lot of opinions and misinformation. She said she reached out to members of the Common Council and the Board of Education regarding the budget. She suggested that both start communicating with each other and told the Board of Education to assume that they will have to make budget cuts however she implored them to make those cuts at the top. she said if anything the people working directly with the students deserve a raise.

Marlene Debilis asked for approval of the 12.7% increase requested by the Board of Education. She said it will protect salaries, programs and resources that address needs of the students. She said the teachers do an exceptional job.

Sheri McCready Pritchett, Board of Education member when the District was level funded the City warned that it would create a cliff but now three years later what was warned about is happening. Going forward they need to focus on how to maximize the budget.

Kara Baekey, Board of Education member said she wished she could say she was proud to be a Norwalk resident, but since being elected to the Board of Education she is not. She compared the numbers spent on students in surrounding towns and asked how Norwalk students can compete with students in neighboring towns. She said the increase for Norwalk Public Schools would amount to $8.00 – $20.00 per month and does not believe those numbers will drive people out of town. He said the students are struggling and she remains skeptical but hopeful.

Christian Devral asked the plan for the budget. They do not want to see a weakening in the schools and said there needs to be options. They asked the Common Council to not deprive the children of an education.

Jessica Jones she was nervous for the children, because by not fully funding the budget they're going to remove the wonderful things that were put into place to help them. The mental health issue is beyond epidemic and not everyone has the resources. She said a lot of us here have that privilege and a lot don't. The children count on the schools to be a healthy place. This represents all of Norwalk. She asked the Common Council members to vote their conscience.

Iliana Zuniga said she is tired of asking and people are feeling defeated. She asked the members of the Common Council to find a way to fund as much of the Board of Education's budget request as possible. She asked them to vote with the ideas they had when they ran for office.

Adriana Romero said she was doing this as a last Hail Mary. She asked that as you tally up the numbers that you remember these are our children and their future. She said she knows you are in a position to make a system or break a system.

Sarah LeMieux talked about economics and said that most people are asking for an investment tin the school system. This will create more opportunities in Norwalk. She said that not making this investment will create a crisis. She said that if you want a wealthier society, you need to encourage people to invest.

Melissa Dino advocated for fully funding the Board of Education. She said that earlier this month the City recommended a 4% increase; however, this will not allow the Board of Education to finance contractual obligations. She said there truly is a crisis and the kids need support now more than ever. Our District has worse challenges than the surrounding towns but they fund their board of educations at a higher rate. She asked that the City not underfund the budget because there will be ramifications for all students.

Richard Bonenfant asked the Common Council to keep the taxes down and not chase people out of town. He said there are no senior tax breaks if people collect a pension. When he hears people talk about how much is spent on the Board of Education in other towns, it is not an accurate comparison. He asked to please consider the people who pay the bills when voting on the cap.

Julie Fleming advocated for fully funding the Board of Education's budget request. She said there is no one who cannot afford this increase. She said there are arguments about how much people can afford. She added that the Common Council needs to use their voices to advocate for more funding from the State.

John Levin said that up until now little commentary was made from taxpayers and he is speaking as a taxpayer. He said this is an election year and official representatives are up for election and seeking to avoid raising taxes. He said it is his job to pay the bills and while some people can afford it and others cannot afford it, then it is the job of the taxpayer to pay for the City and the schools. If the City needs to raise taxes to get the schools properly funded and to meet the needs of the City, then it is the job of the taxpayer to pay the bill. He said he understands that some property owners will suffer with their property tax, but they are suffering already. He said that Norwalk has high need students, but it is our bill.

Jalin Sead said that many of his friends left Norwalk because they could no longer afford to live here. Norwalk's greatest strength is its diversity. He said he knows the schools need money, but there are people who can't afford it. He said he wants to give the kids everything possible, but asked the Common Council to think about the people who have no choice.

Julie Mendez asked the Common Council to think about the children and fund the Board of Education's request.

Erika DePalma, Board of Education member said she is privy to a number of crisis calls. She spoke about the trauma experienced by children during a lock down when the SWAT team went into the school. She said these are our babies and they are not numbers. They are in crisis.

April Wenestrom advocated for fully funding the Board of Education's request.

Cristy Robinson said she hoped the Common Council would make the right decision. She said she has grown to embrace emotional intelligence and hopes those resources will not be taken away.

Dr. Robin Gredinger, NPS Social Worker spoke about how taking way from the budget will take away safety from the students. Social Workers are in the front lines with the kids who suffered during covid and going back to school. Sports is one of the main thinks that alleviate anxiety. If sports are taken away, they the students will be stripped of their coping skills. She asked the Common Council to look at the Paraeducator positions. She said that in the last two weeks, she had eight students who were self harming. She asked the Common Council to look at the safety of the students when they look at the numbers.

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

IV. **COMMON COUNCIL COMMITTEES**

A. FINANCE AND CLAIMS COMMITTEE

1. RESOLUTION:

**** MR. BURNETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:**

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMIT ON LOCALLY EXPENDITURES DURING THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK THAT:

THE MAXIMUM LIMIT ON THE TOTAL APPROPRIATION FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2023 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN $402,559,982. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF $424,361,207 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF $21,801,225. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2023-2024 BUDGET BOOK, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Mr. Burnett thanked his colleagues on the Common Council for their hard work and for offering creative solutions during this budget cycle. He said they are faced with several challenges with the primary focus on keeping taxes low, while ensuring there are no interruptions to the City's services. He said it is extremely difficult to achieve a balance when the City is being asked for an increase of $27 million.

Mr. Burnett said they have to remain committed to create innovative solutions so as to not create a burden to the taxpayers. This Common Council remains open to working with the Board of Education to ensure the students receive the best education.

Mr. Dachowitz shared his screen and summarized different iterations on the budget based on requests made by Common Council members.

Mr. Livingston thanked members of the community who shared their comments. He thanked Mayor Rilling and his staff for putting the budget together.

**** MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENT**

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMIT ON LOCALLY EXPENDITURES DURING THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK THAT:

THE MAXIMUM LIMIT ON THE TOTAL APPROPRIATION FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2023 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN $399,559,982. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF $421,361,207 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF $21,801,225. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2023-2024 BUDGET BOOK, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Mr. Livingston explained that this is $3 million less than the proposed amount. He said they represent all the citizens of Norwalk and would love to give people everything they want, but they can't. He added that he feels this amount can be found by the Board of Education. This budget includes several one time sources of revenue and those dollars will have to be made up next year. There is no such thing as a one time increase in the Board of Education.

Mr. Livingston said we are in a revaluation year and ideally these lower mill rates will compensate for the higher home values. He said the taxes are too high. He just heard from a neighbor who said she had to sell her home because of the taxes. Half of the households are struggling. He noted how Ms. Revolus reminds everyone of how an increase will impact the residents.

Ms. Shanahan spoke in support of Mr. Livingston's amendment. She said that adding last year's increase to this year's increase will result in a 10% increase over the last two years. The tax increase compounds and is not sustainable. Ms. Shanahan said they do care about providing the best schools for the students. She that 60% of the budget is allocated to the Board of Education, while school aged students make up 12% of the residents.

Ms. Shanahan said that every year they are told that if the Board of Education is not fully funded, teachers will get laid off and they will loose sports; however, every year, sports are being offered and the teacher's jobs are safe. There are currently 70 positions open, making it unlikely there will be cuts.

Across the City, people what better services for the elderly and public works projects. Ms. Shanahan said they do not want to push people out of the City.

Ms. Revolus spoke in support of Mr. Livingston's amendment and appreciated his acknowledgement. She spoke about how tax increases can harm people in all districts. She said the taxes can't increase in an amount that is disproportionate to the amount people are earning.

**** MOTION FAILED WITH FOUR (4) VOTES IN FAVOR (MS. REVOLUS; MR. MEEK; MR. LIVINGSTON AND MS. SHANAHAN) AND ELEVEN (11) IN**

OPPOSITION (MR. BURNETT; MR. CAMACHO; MR. GOLDSTEIN; MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. SMYTH; MS. AYERS; MR. HEUVELMAN; MS. YOUNG; MR. KYDES; MS. MCMURRER AND MS. ALTERMAN)

** MS. AYERS MOVED THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENT

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMIT ON LOCALLY EXPENDITURES DURING THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK THAT:

THE MAXIMUM LIMIT ON THE TOTAL APPROPRIATION FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2023 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN $405,559,982. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF $427,361,207 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF $21,801,225. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2023-2024 BUDGET BOOK, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Ms. Ayers said that as a parent and taxpayer and a person who knows fiscal constraints, she said they have to do better. She said she was not in support of the Board of Education's 12% increase, but knows they need more than the Mayor's request.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner spoke in support of Ms. Ayers' amendment. She said she could not support a 12% increase and feels 4% is lower than what would be ideal for the students. She said they need to find a point that would be ideal for the schools. She said they need to find a point where they can support and sustain the core services.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said she continues to have concerns about transparency and how the ESSER funds were used and how that was conveyed to the parents. She said they are deeply committed to the schools and for providing services. She told the students that they are valued and they believe in the teachers. She said they need to find a balance to keep the City diverse and to support the schools.

Ms. McMurrer spoke in support of Ms. Ayers' amendment. She said this has been a tough budget cycle and noted there are a lot of education advocates and parents on the Common Council. She said they need to do better in partnership and collaboration between the Common Council and the Board of Education. She said that more money does not necessarily create better schools. She said she heard so many success stories due to our teachers.

Ms. McMurrer said that when they asked questions, they did not get direct answers from the Board of Education. She said they often talk about the schools, but not about investing in the town. This all comes with a price tag. It requires a partnership in order to support the students. They need to talk about what is realistic on both sides.

Ms. Smyth spoke in support of Ms. Ayer's amendment. She said this has been a difficult budget cycle and has been back and forth all day about this resolution. She said she knows what the kids go through; covid took a real toll on them and the City needs to wrap its arms around the kids. She said she believes a creative solution will be found to fund the mental health of the kids.

Ms. Alterman spoke in support of the amendment and said when she did the math, the increase comes to about $21.00 a month. She said her family could handle that, but that adds up for people. She said the teachers and kids need support.

****** **MOTION FAILED WITH FIVE (5) VOTES IN FAVOR (MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. SMYTH; MS. AYERS; MS. MCMURRER AND MS. ALTERMAN) AND TEN (10) OPPOSED (MR. BURNETT; MR. CAMACHO; MR. GOLDSTEIN; MR. HEUVELMAN; MS. REVOLUS; MS. YOUNG; MR. KYDES; MR. MEEK; MR. LIVINGSTON AND MS. SHANAHAN)**

The discussion went back to the main Resolution as follows:

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMIT ON LOCALLY EXPENDITURES DURING THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK THAT:

THE MAXIMUM LIMIT ON THE TOTAL APPROPRIATION FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2023 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN $402,559,982. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF $424,361,207 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF $21,801,225. BE IT FURTHER

RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2023-2024 BUDGET BOOK, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Mr. Meek said he would vote against the overall budget. He rejects the notion that kids are worse than kids in others in other countries. He said if they are treated like victims, they will be victims. He said this tax increase is not sustainable.

Mr. Goldstein said they have all been talking about how tough this is. He said he feels a tremendous responsibility to strike an equitable and affordable process. He said he was alarmed that the Superintendent and her team have not engaged in the conversation. The fact that the Superintendent did not come to the negotiating table is a disservice to the students and all involved in the process. He noted that every increase becomes permanent.

Mr. Goldstein said that 60% of the budget is for the Board of Education. Education is the City's top priority and the numbers prove that. It is imperative to find ways to address the mental health issues. He said that half of the households are struggling to make meet their household expenses. He said they are all committed to making the City the best it can be and is deeply proud to have colleagues who are committed to the City.

Mr. Heuvelman said this has been a struggle and spoke about the needs of the kids and what they can do to best serve them and to best serve the City. He referred to the Norwalk Public School parents who were scared their special needs children would not get services if the Board of Education's budget was not fully funded. Mr. Heuvelman said that $27 million is a record ask by the Board of Education.

Mr. Heuvelman spoke about the year of flat funding and said there were many discussions about how that funding would be used. He said he questioned whether or not he could support this increase because of the rhetoric that has been spewed. He said he never got the information from the other side and that needs to be corrected.

Ms. Alterman said she did not know which questions were not answered and asked for an example. Mr. Heuvelman said at the last meeting they had a lengthy presentation by the Board of Education and he also sat through a joint meeting where they looked at facilities. They never spoke about the budget or what the budget cycle would look like.

Ms. Shanahan said her recent question was about a line item for fringe benefits. She said she wants to know what the increase was and why it was going up millions of dollars. She said she did not receive an answer. Ms. Shanahan and Mr. Heuvelman said they asked questions, but did not receive answers from the Board of Education. Ms. Shanahan added that when she got an answer the numbers were inaccurate. No where did the Board of Education reveal that the

schools hired 10 new positions. There are serious concerns about the answers received from the Board of Education.

Mr. Meek asked for clarification on page 10 of the budget book. Mr. Dachowitz said that the Board of Education will get a 4% increase and some City departments will get more than a .75% increase.

Ms. Young said that there were extensive conversations so they could make a decision that would be best for everyone. She said that anyone who elects them, wants them to do their best. She said they want to become strategic and answer the needs of all residents to the best of their ability. Ms. Young said she believed a partnership would help everyone get to a better place.

Ms. Revolus said she did not want the budget to go higher than 4%. She said there is a problem with the process and the overall inability to have clarification. She said that no one speaks about housing. She said she supported Mr. Livingston's amendment. She said there needs to be honesty in how and what is being spent. The Rainy Day Fund is for emergencies.

Ms. Alterman said that all e-mailing should be done in public meetings. She said that if everyone is saying that the Board of Education is leaving them with questions, then it should be on the record. She said she wants the public to have the same information they have.

Ms. Revolus said that this back and forth likes like they are fighting among themselves, although they are trying to show their point of view.

Mr. Goldstein responded to Ms. Alterman and said that it is not about how many meeting they have; the transparency they are seeking is answers to questions and a fuller understanding of the Norwalk Public Schools expenditures. The fundamental problem is the struggle with the Superintendent and the team.

Ms. Young said it is not about the person, but it is about the process and being transparent. The budget process has to change. She said they are here to guard the interests of the City.

**** MAIN MOTION FAILED WITH SEVEN (7) VOTES IN FAVOR (MR. BURNETT; MR. CAMACHO; MR. GOLDSTEIN; MS. SMYTH; MR. HEUVELMAN; MS. YOUNG; MR. KYDES) AND EIGHT (8) VOTES IN OPPOSITION (MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. AYERS; MS. REVOLUS; MS. MCMURRER; MS. ALTERMAN; MR. MEEK; MR. LIVINGSTON AND MS. SHANAHAN)**

A Recess was called at 10:07 p.m.
The meeting resumed at 10:16 p.m.

**** MS. YOUNG MOVED THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENT:**

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMIT ON LOCALLY EXPENDITURES DURING THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK THAT:

THE MAXIMUM LIMIT ON THE TOTAL APPROPRIATION FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2023 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN $403,559,982. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF $425,361,207 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF $21,801,225. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2023-2024 BUDGET BOOK, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Ms. Shanahan said this increase will result in a 5.95% tax rate for her district. She said she can not support this.

**** MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MS. AYERS), SIX (6) VOTES IN OPPOSITION (MR. HEUVELMAN; MS. REVOLUS; MS. ALTERMAN; MR. MEEK; MR. LIVINGSTON AND MS. SHANAHAN) AND EIGHT (8) VOTES IN FAVOR (MR. BURNETT; MR. CAMACHO; MR. GOLDSTEIN; MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. SMYTH; MS. YOUNG; MR. KYDES AND MS. MCMURRER)**

XI. **ADJOURNMENT**

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

There was no further business, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

ATTEST:_____
Irene Dixon, City Clerk

COMMON COUNCIL **ACTION** **MARCH 7, 2023**
NORWALK, CONNECTICUT **7:30 PM EST** **COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

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, Zoom, and/or the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. Specific instructions and links can be found at **norwalkct.org/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 provide "live comments" will need to register in advance and 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. 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.

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 read into the record, they should be submitted at least three hours in advance of the meeting start time. Please email Irene Dixon at idixon@norwalkct.org to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

SPECIAL MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL 15

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION 23

IV. COMMON COUNCIL COMMITTEES

A. FINANCE AND CLAIMS COMMITTEE

1. RESOLUTION:

WHEREAS, Section 1-289 of the Norwalk Charter requires that a majority of the Common Council vote to establish a specific spending limit on locally expenditures during the process of establishing the next fiscal year's operating budget.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK THAT:

The maximum limit on the total appropriation for the City of Norwalk for Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 2023 shall be no more than $402,559,982. This appropriation cap represents total expenditures of $424,361,207 less estimated intergovernmental grants of $21,801,225. Be it further resolved that the result of this vote and resolution, together with the attached 2023-2024 Budget Book, be forwarded by the Clerk of the City of Norwalk to the Board of Estimate and Taxation. APPROVED AS AMENDED

XI. ADJOURNMENT 10:20 PM

Prepared by: Irene T. Dixon, City Clerk