

**COMMON COUNCIL
NORWALK, CONNECTICUT
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

SPECIAL MEETING

**MARCH 5, 2024
COUNCIL CHAMBERS AND**

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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I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Rilling called the special meeting to order at 7:32 and led the assembly in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Dixon called the Roll:

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

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

Also present were Mayor, Harry Rilling; City Clerk, Irene Dixon 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.

Ms. Diane Lauricella asked the members of the Common Council to do their homework and get opinions from others who are not in City Hall. She requested not raising the cap and noted she has been studying the budget for decades. There is room to cut out the fat such as making cuts to the Board of Education and the cost of electricity. She asked the members of the Common Council to look at other revenue sources such as the need for a full time grant writer, including good IT staff.

Ms. Lauricella said many expenses are due to short sighted political decisions such as renting space for the Family Center, electricity and the waste management policy. City Hall and the Board of Education is too heavy in top administrators. She said the City needs a fair but robust enforcement structure. Ms. Lauricella said she knows the City is looking at business development; Washington Street is an alarm bell due to the many empty store fronts.

Ms. Lauricella urged the Common Council members to not raise the cap and to speak to the people to find more options.

Mr. Richard Bonenfant asked the members of the Common Council to keep the taxes as low as possible. It is rough on the taxpayers and will eventually chase them out of town. He suggested rethinking the Enterprise Zone and added that it does not create jobs.

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

IV. RESOLUTIONS FROM COMMON COUNCIL

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

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 LOCAL 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, 2024 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN \$440,611,996. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF \$467,591,788 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF \$26,979,792. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Mr. Burnett provided a re-cap of the budget process and said this item had been tabled at the last Common Council meeting in order to receive more information. By Charter, the Common Council is required to set the cap by March 5th.

**** MS. AYERS MOVED TO AMEND THE RESOLUTION AS FOLLOWS:**

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Ms. Ayers explained her reason for this amendment is because a number of things unfolded since the last meeting. She said she did not see an allocation for IT in the budget and with all the hate, the time is now to address the cyber needs and technology. In addition, she said it was brought

to her attention that there is no allocation for Family Navigators. Ms. Ayers said she understood those positions were grant funded and they were then supposed to be brought into the budget. She said this was a friendly amendment requesting an additional \$300,000. Ms. Ayers expressed her concerns over funding these positions.

Mr. Sead said Ms. Ayers' amendment was a good amendment and that the \$300,000 increase will not break the budget.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said she supported Ms. Ayers' amendment. The role of the Common Council is to hear from the community. She said she hoped this would signal to the Board of Estimate and Taxation to be more strategic. She said she was unaware the Family Navigators were not in the budget. She echoed the need to fund IT and the Family Navigators.

Ms. Murray said \$300,000 is reasonable and said she would support Ms. Ayers' amendment.

Mr. Burnett asked for clarification on the amendment. He noted they are not voting on individual line items; they are voting on a maximum amount that will be presented to the Board of Estimate and Taxation. If the Board of Estimate and Taxation recommends allotting additional money to a department they will come back with their recommendation in which case, the Common Council would vote on their recommendation. Mr. Burnett said that by increasing the cap, they are increasing taxes.

Ms. Ayers explained that this amendment is about increasing the cap by \$300,000, not a particular line item.

Mr. Goldstein commented that taxes are going up for a lot of reasons. He said the reason the revaluation is the way it is, is because people want to live in Norwalk. He said that in answer to Mr. Burnett's question, this amendment signals to the Board of Estimate and Taxation to invest within their means. Mr. Goldstein said a \$300,000 increase is negligible; it is important for the Board of Estimate and Taxation to see the strategic investment.

Mr. Wiggins acknowledged that people want to live here and it is important to focus on the people who made this city. He said to support this amendment he would have to be sure other things that are not needed are being cut. He said that if raising taxes trickles down to raising rents, he is not in support of this amendment. Mr. Wiggins agreed that a grant writer is needed, but not if it is going to ultimately raise rents.

Ms. Smyth said it was a problem not having the budget book and wants to go back and ask for a list of requested positions. She noted that she supported the Community Services positions from the start and was aware that the City was supposed to absorb those positions this year. She said this is a painful season because of the revaluation. Ms. Smyth said funding IT and the grant writer may not be in the plan for next year, but the Family Navigators can't go away. Ms. Smyth said she will support the amendment.

Mayor Rilling said they are in discussions about keeping the Family Navigators.

Mr. Lopez said that in looking at the numbers, it is difficult for him to impose an increase on the residents.

Ms. Shanahan said that whatever they do in this budget, will remain. She said the City is very frugal and believes the Mayor and staff scrubbed the budget. She said she continues to worry about transparency and hopes the Board of Education and Board of Estimate and Taxation will find some revenue. This is a crushing tax burden on the residents and although \$300,000 is symbolic it is important for others to say we appreciate the residents. She said she could not support this amendment.

Mr. Frayer said this is a very difficult budget. As a resident for 48 years, he said he has not realized anything this onerous. He said that to suggest raising the cap by even \$1.00 is insulting to all citizens and shows that the members of the Common Council are not finding ways to make the City more efficient and cheaper to operate. Mr. Frayer said he would not vote to raise the cap.

Ms. McMurrer said the next few years are going to be brutal, but questioned how they will grow the City if they say no to everything. She said they need to look at this strategically. Ms. McMurrer said she will vote yes on the amendment and added that she did not feel it was enough and only amounts to a couple of dollars a year.

Mr. Sead said the Family Navigators will keep people in Norwalk because they will have resources and be able to find assistance. He said he will vote in favor of this amendment because they need the Family Navigators.

Ms. Nora Niedzielski Eichner said she sees the potential where a tremendous amount of people will need the services. She suggested leveraging a grant writer by bringing in funds to support the City. She said that in reviewing the budget book she saw that IT added five members since 2016. Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said they need to be more efficient and approves Ms. Ayers' amendment. She said this is an opportunity to signal to the residents that everyone is deeply concerned about the impact of the taxes.

Ms. McMurrer said she was moved by Mr. Wiggins' comments about not getting their bang for the buck; she noted concerns over seniors looking for services.

Mr. Wiggins said the City needs more services, but he sees the community he serves being uprooted and pushed to other towns such as Bridgeport, Hartford and Waterbury, because they can't live here. He said services are good, but they do not know when the services are being effective. It is important to look at the system. The Family Navigator is good, but it puts a band aid on a gun shot wound.

Mr. Wiggins said the more he learns about the process, it makes him sick to his stomach. The elderly community, that helped build the City are not getting help and he sees them being pushed out. He said he feels the position is not needed and asked what they were getting for their buck.

Ms. Dunn said she they have to spend what they have. Overall the \$8 million from the Rainy Day Fund is using their savings to cover the shortfall. Ms. Dunn said they need to start with a flat budget and is not in favor of a 4% increase.

Ms. Smyth said they know this will go to the Board of Estimate and Taxation and said she will be satisfied if they can find funding for the Family Navigators. The Board of Estimate's job is to look at what the City can afford. Ms. Smyth said she feels the City will be able to fund these positions.

Ms. Young said she understands it is up to the Board of Estimate and Taxation to make the decision. She said she was happy to hear the Family Navigators are included in the budget. She added they need IT staff and a grant writer, but they need to determine how to find funding for those positions. Ms. Young said she would not support the increase.

**** MOTION FAILED BY ROLL CALL VOTE WITH SEVEN (7) VOTES IN FAVOR (MR. GOLDSTEIN; MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. SMYTH; MS. AYERS; MR. SEAD; MS. MCMURRER; MS. MURRAY) AND EIGHT (8) IN OPPOSITION (MR. BURNETT; MR. LOPEZ; MR. WIGGINS; MS. YOUNG; MS. DUNN; MR. SUTTON; MR. FRAYER; MS. SHANAHAN)**

**** THE RESOLUTION PASSED AS PRESENTED WITH ELEVEN (11) IN FAVOR (MR. BURNETT; MR. GOLDSTEIN; MR. LOPEZ; MS. NEIDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. SMYTH; MR. SEAD; MS. YOUNG; MS. MURRAY; MR. SUTTON MR. FRAYER; MS. SHANAHAN) AND FOUR (4) VOTES IN OPPOSITION (MS. AYERS; MR. WIGGINS; MS. MCMURRER; MS. DUNN)**

Mayor Rilling explained he feels they can keep the Family Navigators.

V. ADJOURNMENT

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

There was no further business, and the special meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

ATTEST: _____
Irene Dixon, City Clerk

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SPECIAL MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER 7:31 PM

II. ROLL CALL 15

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION 2

IV. RESOLUTIONS FROM COMMON COUNCIL

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 local 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, 2024 shall be no more than \$440,611,996. This appropriation cap represents total expenditures of \$467,591,788 less estimated intergovernmental grants of \$26,979,792. Be it further resolved that the result of this vote and resolution be forwarded by the Clerk of the City of Norwalk to the Board of Estimate and Taxation.

APPROVED

V. ADJOURNMENT 8:32 PM

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**** THE RESOLUTION PASSED AS PRESENTED WITH ELEVEN (11) IN FAVOR (MR. BURNETT; MR. GOLDSTEIN; MR. LOPEZ; MS. NEIDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. SMYTH; MR. SEAD; MS. YOUNG; MS. MURRAY; MR. SUTTON MR. FRAYER; MS. SHANAHAN) AND FOUR (4) VOTES IN OPPOSITION (MS. AYERS; MR. WIGGINS; MS. MCMURRER; MS. DUNN)**

Mayor Rilling explained he feels they can keep the Family Navigators.

V. ADJOURNMENT

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

There was no further business, and the special meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

ATTEST: _____
Irene Dixon, City Clerk