

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2024
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

ATTENDANCE: Nicol Ayers; Chair, Greg Burnett, Heather Dunn, Barbara Smyth,
Douglas Sutton, Anne Wennerstrand, Dajauan Wiggins (7:05) p.m.)

STAFF: Lamond Daniels; Chief of Community Services

OTHER: Mary Oster; Early Childhood Coordinator

1. CALL TO ORDER/ ROLL CALL

Ms. Ayers called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

She called the roll as reflected above.

2. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There was no one present for public comments

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETING HELD ON OCTOBER 16, 2024

**** MR. BURNETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE
OCTOBER 16, 2024 MEETING.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH FIVE IN FAVOUR AND ONE
ABSTENTION (MS. WENNERSTRAND).**

4. DISCUSSION

a. Presentation from Early Childhood Division – Mary Oster, Early Childhood Coordinator
Ms. Oster presented a series of slides on Early Care and Education in Norwalk. She outlined the various early care and education programs. She described the center-based and family childcare programs. Ms. Oster then discussed the challenges in early care and education which include staffing, recruitment and retention, expense for families, and meeting the needs of families. She followed up with what is being done to support young children and families in Norwalk. She explained this included early literacy initiatives, events sponsored/co-sponsored by the Early Childhood Office, conference presentations, and partnership activities.

Ms. Smyth was interested in the effects the zoning changes have had. Ms. Oster defined the differences between family childcare and a group home. She described the requirements for a group home and the jump to having a center. It was agreed that the recent zoning changes would allow that to happen. Ms. Smyth remarked about the low wages for childcare providers. She wanted to know how much Ms. Oster advocated for them on the state level. Ms. Oster stated they were always doing things to try and get more money into the system. She hinted at a plan in the works that involves an early childhood fund.

Mr. Wiggins Joined the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

Mr. Burnett wanted to know what the Community Services Committee, the Common Council, The BOE, and the city of Norwalk could do to enhance the provided services. Ms. Oster stated that providing structure and advocating at the state level was very important. She noted she feels fortunate to have received all the city support. Mr. Burnett asked if there was an impact funding statement that outlined what could be done with additional funding. Ms. Oster said they have something at the state level and she would work on something on the local level.

Ms. Dunn was interested in issues like immunization and the children's health. Ms. Oster stated all children have to have an updated health form and be up to date with their immunizations. She noted that in Norwalk they were running around 90% on immunizations in children aged 0 to 3. She indicated there was no longer a vaccine exemption. Ms. Oster pointed out the Norwalk Community Health Center has been a wonderful partner as has the Health Department. Mr. Daniels made clear the Health Department doesn't lead the initiative and they rely on their qualified health clinics. Ms. Dunn wanted to know what were the barriers and where the needs were. Ms. Oster stated that was a question for the health department. Ms. Dunn was curious about food insecurity. Ms. Oster explained they had tried to put together a program similar to Head Start but the cost was prohibitive. She noted some of their programs had been able to access the summer meals program.

Ms. Wennerstrand wanted information on the social-emotional aspect of promoting families. Ms. Oster explained they used books and play-based programs. She described connections and skills developed through play. She noted the importance of the involvement of the caregivers and

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parents in promoting social and emotional development. She stated their programs were designed to be an anchor and a place to form secure bonds and attachments. Ms. Wennerstrand asked if there was an infrastructure that allowed families to access these services. Ms. Oster stated housing was an issue for families. She described scenarios that may not be ideal.

Ms. Ayers complimented the comprehensive nature of Ms. Oster's presentation and the work done by her department.

5. ACTION ITEMS

A. Chief of Community Services

Authorize Mayor Harry W. Rilling to execute any and all necessary agreements, documents, instruments, or amendments to fund the Multi-System Coordination Program in partnership with the Fairfield County Community Foundation in the amount \$200,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) administered by the Community Services Department. Funding Source: ARPA Account 140000-5796-ACMF5 (\$200,000).

Mr. Daniels described the work of his department and how valuable Ms. Oster is in coordinating all the various entities.

Mr. Daniels discussed the funding his department has distributed to non-profits and social service entities. He indicated the item before the committee was the last of the ARPA funding. He acknowledged the funding came through Senator Duff. Mr. Daniels described the nature of the initiative. He cited cases indicating a lack of coordination of departments and services causing at-risk young people to fall through the cracks. He stated such youth were in urgent need of targeted intervention. He noted this initiative was a one-time investment and they would think strategically about long-term funding. He explained it would meet the needs of 30 to 40 youths and their families. Mr. Daniels talked about the systems they would bring together under the initiative.

Mr. Wiggins wanted a description of what they would be doing. Mr. Daniels described the process and who they would work with to identify youth in high need. He stressed the importance of having all the relevant entities in the same room. He stated the initiative was designed to bring these organizations together.

Ms. Ayers said the initiative was about building a system, not a program. She noted they were committing to pouring the foundation to build a system where the various entities could come together to talk. She stated in a system there is a level of accountability and checks and balances. Ms. Ayers thanked Chief Daniels for his department's transparency in assessing what the needs are.

Ms. Smyth thanked Msw. Ayers and Mr. Daniels for their work so far. She wanted to know how they planned to sustain it. Mr. Daniels indicated he was already working on it. He also pointed out the value of having the Fairfield County Community Foundation working with them.

Ms. Dunn expressed her excitement at the capacity, stating often she would like to refer a student but the program is full. She remarked she loved the initiative which may highlight areas that require more resources.

Mr. Daniels noted they were in the process of the mental health gap analysis and they would be building on that. He also explained if you look on the City of Norwalk Website you can see how all the ARPA money has been spent.

**** MR. BURNETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE AUTHORIZATION.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

6. ADJOURN

**** MS. DUNN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Respectfully Submitted
China Mayhew
Telesco Secretarial Services