

Community Services Committee

Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, April 20, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.

Via Teleconference 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 www.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.



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 on by the host of the meeting during the public comment section.



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.



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 Lamond Daniels at ldaniels@norwalkct.org to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

MEETING AGENDA

1. Call to order/ roll call
2. Public comments
3. Approval of minutes from meeting held on March 16, 2022
4. Discussion
 - a. COVID-19 Updates from the Health Department – Theresa Argondezzi, Assistant Health Director and Brian Weeks, Epidemiologist
 - b. Norwalk Public Library Presentation – Sherelle Harris, Library Director
 - c. Chief of Community Services, Lamond Daniels
 - Introduction AnaVivian Estrella, Human Services Director
 - American Rescue Plan Act Community Recovery Fund Program

5. Action Items:

Early Childhood

1. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all documents necessary to apply for and accept the School Readiness Grant which includes the Quality Enhancement Grant for the period July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023.

Health Department

1. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all agreements, documents, instruments, or amendments as may be necessary to contract services provided by the

Health Education Center at a total cost of no more than \$2500 for the purpose of employee training and education. Account No. 0120-11-5272.

2a. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all documents necessary to apply for and accept grant funds from the State of Connecticut Department of Public Health for the "A Public Health Approach to Comprehensive Suicide Prevention in Connecticut" program in the amount of \$159,000.00 for the period August 1, 2022 through August 31, 2025.

2b. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all agreements, documents, instruments, or amendments as may be necessary to implement the "A Public Health Approach to Comprehensive Suicide Prevention in Connecticut" program for the period August 1, 2022 through August 31, 2025

Human Services Department

1. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all documents or amendments as may be necessary to distribute grant funding to nonprofit organizations allocated to the ARPA Community Recovery Fund administered by the Community Services Department to respond to and address community needs due to the negative economic impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Adjourn

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 18, 2022

cc: Mayor Harry W. Rilling
Irene Dixon, City Clerk
Mario Coppola, Corp Counsel

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMUNITY SERVICES
REGULAR MEETING
VIA TELECONFERENCE
MARCH 16, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: Dominique Johnson, Chair; Nicol Ayers, Greg Burnett,
Thomas Keegan, Diana Revolus, Barbara Smyth

STAFF: Lamond Daniels, Chief of Community Services

OTHERS: Deanna D'Amore, Health Director; Brian Weeks, Epidemiologist;
Theresa Argondezzi, Assistant Director, Community Health;
Kelly Meier, Education Programs Coordinator, Health Department;
Jonathan Delgado, Bridgeport, Economic Development

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Johnson called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m., acknowledged the above members in attendance, (as appeared on the Zoom meeting screen), and stated that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Johnson thanked Mr. Manzi, I.T. for his tech assistance with the zoom meeting, and apologized for the delay with starting the meeting.

Note: Public Comments are limited to three minutes, must pertain to an agenda item, and the following are summarizations, not verbatim comments:

Public Participation:

1. Diane Lauricella, 21 Blue Mountain Road, Norwalk thanked the Committee for opportunity to speak and requested corrections to the minutes of last month's meeting so that the record was accurate: Please add the word 'mask' before professionals. Mask messaging is still a tool in the toolbox to use for communicating to the community, and K-9 masks are the safest option. Bi-Weekly Mayor's reports are not enough and COVID prevention reminders should continue to still be used. She added the Equity and Inclusion Officer needs to be put in place now. She supports the creation of a Police Civilian Advisory Board to be formed soon.

Public Comments – cont.

2. Anne Watkin, 12 Kreiner Lane, Norwalk, District D, Social Justice Committee member attended the meeting presentation by the Consultant and supports the discussion about the Equity Officer position. She endorses an appointment of a well-qualified officer for the City to be hired under clear priorities, to address and regulate hiring practices. She spoke about cumbersome meeting notices on the website that require some digging and suggested Social Media use as a more user-friendly option.
3. Gail Bindley Taylor, 10 Norvel Road, Norwalk reiterated her comments of the February meeting regarding Social Justice Coalition and creation of the next steps. She requested a change to public comments to be accepted during the agenda items rather than collectively stated at the beginning of the meeting to allow for relative comments directly on the outcome of items. She added that it is discouraging when no reply is sent to letters or public comments and the only way to move forward is to take equity into account. She had hoped that the consultants would have looked at the issue of a civilian Review Board beyond just Connecticut as there are many examples in other parts of the country where these efforts have been successful. Again, as she stated in her letter, we do not simply need an extension of the three- person commission which has absolutely no real transparency, but a Review Board that would be fair and just and have teeth to truly carry out the oversight work necessary for the Community to believe in justice that makes a difference. She agrees with comments about cumbersome meeting notices on the website and suggested access on a multi-language platform.

The following emails were read by Mr. Daniels:

4. Susan Cole, dated March 16, attended last month's meeting representing District C. As a member of the Social Justice Review Committee, the DEI Officer should be a Cabinet level position reporting directly to the Mayor, with a chief focus of restoring loss of trust with the City Police Department. There should be more than policies, as there is a need for efficacy and greater lead for the Community.
5. Virginia Balser, District C member of the Review Social Justice Committee, attended last month's meeting and presentation of the Consultant's report and agrees that economic issues and education disparities are huge and should be looked into. The Police Civilian Review Board should be empowered, noting CT is not the only state to move forward in this area. If Norwalk remains static, then we would not be able to move forward, we need to use the recommendations in this initiative to build upon for change.

Ms. Johnson read the following email and noted that emails would be attached to the minutes:

6. Sarah Johnson, District E, member of Coalition asked for the update on progress to unanswered letters and public comments on the following: Formation of Citizen's Group, Hiring of DEI Officer, issue a formal report to the public; create a Civilian Review Commission; Community Enforcement Officer.

Ms. Johnson closed Public Participation at 7:33 p.m.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

February 16, 2022 – Regular Meeting

Ms. Smyth noted corrections: Pg. 9 last paragraph time for Ordinance Committee is 'now' to be involved. Mr. Burnett noted correction to pg. 3 at bottom VA2 variant should be BA.2 Omicron sub-variant.

Ms. Johnson noted the following grammatical corrections to the minutes: Pg.2 KN95 CDC guidelines are excerpted from the CDS website and can be posted on the City's COVID site. Under attendance: Change 'Council Young' to Council member Young.

Page 5 Unite CT residents to pay rent email FairRent@NoralkCT.org.

Page 5: Ms. Scribs should be Attorney Suib; Library Director: Sharelle 'Harris'.

Mr. Keegan noted to delete '1' after Norwalk. Pg. 6 Correctly spell Vonachek.

There was discussion on comments by the Consultant on pages 7 and Ms. Johnson will review further to determine what was actually said.

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF MEETING OF
FEBRUARY 16, 2022 AS AMENDED WITH CORRECTIONS AS NOTED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Discussion

a. COVID-19 Updates from the Health Department

Ms. D'Amore, introduced staff members from the Health Dept. and asked Mr. Weeks to present the COVID Update. Mr. Weeks shared charts on COVID cases, hospitalizations, and mask guidelines based upon CDC documentation.

Questions and comments were fielded. Mr. Weeks read excerpts from the narrative part of the Mayor's Bi-Weekly COVID report on the City's website:

Mayor's Bi-Weekly COVID report:

As we wrap up our first full week of the lifting of the city-wide mask mandate, I am happy to report cases and hospitalizations remain on the decline with current state COVID-associated hospitalizations at 171 and the Norwalk case rate at 6.8 per 100,000 residents. I remain deeply grateful and impressed with our city for our continued and coordinated efforts throughout the pandemic.

Late on Friday of last week, the CDC debuted new community guidelines. This 3-tiered system helps guide community decision-making and actions, while factoring in current county COVID metrics such as new COVID-associated hospitalization rates, percent of staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID patients, and COVID-19 case rates for the last 7 days to make an informed decision. Under these new community measures, Fairfield County, along with all other CT counties, are in the "Low" category, which is great news. Prospectively, we remain wary of other threats that can change our current trajectory. This includes BA.2, the Omicron sub-variant dubbed "stealth Omicron." Due to its increased infectivity, some researchers initially predicted BA.2 would rapidly outcompete the original Omicron strains that peaked in January--BA.2 continues to grow in incidence and is present in new cases in CT and across the country, but more slowly than anticipated. We will continue to monitor the variant situation closely.

Our COVID-19 testing clinic at Shady Beach will be updating their schedule next week.

COVID-19 testing performed by Quest Diagnostics will now be Monday – Thursday from 2:00 pm – 6:00 pm and Saturday from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm.

As always, we encourage those who have symptoms or have been exposed to get tested and isolate accordingly per CDC guidelines. For more details, go to norwalkct.org/testing.

With cases and hospitalizations remaining on a steady decline, I have decided to adjust the weekly COVID report. Our team has been providing a comprehensive COVID report since the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

As we enter this new phase of the pandemic and approach the springtime, I have decided it is the right time to transition the report to a bi-weekly schedule.

Thank you for your support over the arduous two years and more of the pandemic. We look forward to continue to update our community with important information about COVID-19 to keep residents safe and informed.

b. Community Health presentation

Ms. Theresa Argondezzi, Assistant Director of Health -Community Health presented slides on the Food and Nutrition programs.

Ms. Kelly Meier, Educational Program Coordinator for Community Health provided an overview of the on-going educational programs.

Mr. Delgado, Economic Development Director provided an overview of the Community Housing programs available in the City.

Questions and comments were fielded throughout the presentations.

Ms. Ayres noted there was a great deal of information to absorb and asked if the reports could be emailed for further review. Ms. Argondezzi replied yes, and that everything is posted on the Community Health website.

Mr. Burnett questioned the date of the reports as January 2020, which is pre-COVID. Mr. Delgado replied that programs in the Community relative to Health Education have been in place and upgraded in response to COVID needs in the community.

Ms. Revolus asked about SNAP and the products that are included for purchase, specifically fresh produce. Ms. Argondezzi replied that yes, produce is available for purchase. Ms. Revolus spoke about an app 'YUKA' and described it as one that can identify healthy or hazardous aspects of foods.

Mr. Burnett asked about feedback from the community and if there were grant opportunities. Ms. Argondezzi replied that yes, they continue to play an active role in working collaboratively with the Grants Office when they are made aware of grant programs.

Ms. Revolus asked to circle back on that grants question as it relates to the connection with Mental Health and grant opportunities. Ms. Argondezzi replied that yes, there are impacts of COVID on mental health issues with coping strategies and activity levels. Here again, they continue to play an active role in working collaboratively with grant programs.

Chief of Community Services Updates

Mr. Daniels thanked the Health Department and Community Health members for their reports and for the services they provide for our residents.

Mr. Daniels reviewed the updates for the community as presented and outlined the infrastructure improvements made that represented a City enlightened to address needs of the residents. He announced there is a new Director of Human Services Anna Melania Estrella who starts April 11. In addition, Mandy Cherry has joined the Community Services as a bi-lingual Coordinator who speaks Spanish and Haitian/Creole.

American Rescue Plan Act Community Recovery Fund Program

Mr. Daniels reviewed that ARPA funds have been allocated and the application process has closed. He noted that 35 applications have been received. He added that services have been expanded to meet the demand for the following programs:

Pre-K Program, Workforce Initiatives, Unemployment Services, Early Childhood Services.

He noted that areas such as landscape sector have been impacted with employment gaps, and he is hopeful that the initiatives can address this segment of the local workforce.

Mr. Daniels thanked those that work behind the scenes to address the management of the ARRP funds.

Equity and Justice for All Initiative

Mr. Daniels spoke about the need for developing focus areas of priority in addressing needs and managing these initiatives and specifically the role of the DEI Officer. He referred to the problem of evictions and the need for local residents to have a place to go. The initiatives are such that we need to resolve struggles that our residents face, and to put it in perspective with aid to Ukraine, it is important to look in our own town first as many are struggling.

Mr. Daniels noted that next month's meeting is to present the proposed budget for 2023 and to have an independent review board to review program recommendations. He spoke about mentoring rubrics and government organizations where funding is based on evidence-based practices. He defined this as equity impacts for desired output. He added that there needs to be a discussion on what other municipalities are doing with Equity Management and to look at best practices for shared knowledge.

There was discussion on implementation of the initiative and next steps.

Mr. Keegan noted that he appreciates all of this work on implementing the initiative, but it is a long-term quest, so what should be done now in the meantime?

Mr. Burnett commented that we should not feel comfortable that problems are not yet solved, but this is only the first and huge step forward to bring about change.

Ms. Ayers explained that the goal is to illustrate what the next steps are and more importantly, what we doing right now to be address the resistance to change. Ms. Ayers stated that systemic racism is not something we can put a time stamp on but continued longevity. A position who can continue the work; addressing the problem, cultural changes will take a number of years. We need to give resources with the support and framework of the commission. That is why the DEI officer must be put into place now. The systemic racism is something that can be erased in 6 months, we are placing ourselves in a position to fail. We need to formulate a system that will support and assist in a resolution. We would sell ourselves short if it could be resolved in 6 to 12 months.

Ms. Revolus spoke about issues in CT in towns that should not be overlooked, that the community is not engaged in the police department. People are asking for a task force to overlook the police department not dealing with the Police Chief as that is Administration, but to relate to those officers out there in the streets.

Ms. Ayers asked to come back reiterate previous comments and letters from the public. She stated there is work to do in putting the two documents together, there is a need for someone who is grounded in the city to do the work and help us move this initiative forward. We need to be intentional in our language, but also careful in our language.

This initiative was developed by something happening nationally to push us toward this initiative. We need to realize that there are things to do and where we want to go. We need to be ready to go. We need to look into a DEI officer in the city to help frame the work that has been brought forth to help direct this activity. Look at other data at our fingertips as well as data around youth and families. Hold ourselves accountable and be proud of the work we do.

Ms. Revolus stated we need someone that has lived the experience, a person who is qualified person to help get people through the process of the healing.

Ms. Ayers asked to address the problem of evictions and the need for local residents to have a place to go. She outlined issues with the steps involved with implementing the initiatives are such that we need to resolve struggles that our residents face here and now.

Ms. Revolus shared her experience with a Police Department simulation exercise where one looks at a living experience based on community concerns and actions for change. The Police Department needs to come to a more civil approach and it start here with resources and initiatives that affect community stakeholders.

Ms. Smyth said she was in agreement with the placement of the DEI Officer to report directly to the Mayor. She suggested Town Hall meetings could be an effective forum for this initiative.

Ms. Revolus asked to illustrate that the first step is what are we doing right now that needs to be addressed to circumvent that resistance to change. She asked if Chief Kulhawik should present to the Committee as he is the one dealing with officers on the ground, so this encourages raw engagement and interaction.

Ms. Johnson thanked the Committee for the discussion and interactive comments and apologized for the length of this meeting. She suggested next month to continue the discussion and to take a deeper dive into implementation and addressing the work to be done by the Ordinance Committee on developing City code compliance requirements with this initiative at the next meeting.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 20, 2022.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:52 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
M. Knox
Telesco Secretarial Services

City Of Norwalk
Community Services Committee
March 16, 2022

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMUNITY SERVICES
REGULAR MEETING
March 16, 2022**

Public Comments

Dear Mr. Daniels,

I am Susan Cole and I attended last month's Community Services Committee zoom meeting on Feb.16, 2022. I live in district C and I am a member of the Race and Social Justice Coalition.

I applaud your interest in forming an "Equity and Justice for all Initiative" as well Norwalk's initiative in moving to hire a (DEI) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer for the City of Norwalk.

I ask that you make this Officer a full-time, permanent cabinet level Chief to demonstrate that Norwalk is truly committed to address issues relating to systemic racism. As Councilman Keegan suggested at your last meeting, there is a need "to focus on the loss of trust in the community between citizens and police." This Chief should have a wide range of executive experience in working with cities and towns. We need someone capable and excited about moving equity work forward through our various municipal Departments. In other words we need more than new policies, we need these policies enacted with efficacy.

I would also like to recommend that people of many different backgrounds be included in the "Equity and Justice for all Initiative." Norwalk says it takes pride in our diversity, and several members of the Committee said at the last meeting that they would like to see those who are disenfranchised have a seat at the table. One of your committee members mentioned that there is a great deal of "lived experience" in Norwalk.

Now is the time to act. Now is the time to work towards a community that exemplifies social and racial justice.

I ask that my comments be included in the public record of your March 16, 2022 meeting. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Susan Cole

My name is Virginia Balser and I am an involved resident of Norwalk in District C. I am interested in issues of diversity and equity, am a member of the Race and Social Justice Coalition and attended, via Zoom, the Community Services Committee Meeting last month. I cannot attend tonight's meeting, but would appreciate having this letter read into the public record.

I was interested in hearing the discussion around the report of the Led By Us group and am particularly pleased that there seemed to be general agreement, including from Mayor Rilling, about the hiring of a DEI Officer for the City of Norwalk. This person should be hired to fill a permanent full-time position, and if at all possible, the highly qualified individual should be familiar with Norwalk and the issues of the city, including race and equity concerns in housing and policing.

I also was very pleased to hear about the new Communications Director and look forward to her making the workings of the City of Norwalk more transparent to the citizens so that we can be aware of and involved in the many important decisions taken by our elected and appointed officials.

In a recent letter to Mayor Rilling and a follow-up letter to Mr. Daniels, we of the Race and Social Justice Coalition offered to be part of the process of making Norwalk an even better place to live. To that end, we stand ready to be involved in the "Equity and Justice for All" initiative and look forward to hearing more about that and other concerns expressed in our communications.

Thank you for all you do for the citizens of Norwalk.

Sincerely,
Virginia Balser
Norwalk resident

The School Readiness Preschool Program provides affordable, high-quality early care and education services in high-need communities that help young children prepare for kindergarten. The Norwalk SR grant began in 1998.

The program funds spaces for children ages 3, 4, and 5 who aren't yet eligible for kindergarten. At least 60 percent of the children enrolled must be at or below 75 percent of the State Median Income.

Benefits for children

- **Promote health and safety** and provide open access to quality programs that prepare children for formal schooling
- **Minimize developmental delays** in children prior to their reaching the age of 5
- **Integrate children with disabilities** into programs available to children who aren't disabled

Benefits for families

- **Improve local options** so that parents can choose among affordable, high-quality programs
- **Encourage parental involvement** in a child's development and education
- **Enhance family abilities** to meet the special needs of children, including children with disabilities

A community may be eligible to receive school readiness funds if:

- It's a community designated as a priority school district — either currently or in the past
- It's a community in the lowest 50 towns ranked by wealth

Each year, OEC determines eligibility and issues a request for proposals from communities.

There is a range of space types, from part-time to full-time, year-round programs. Each space type has specific requirements that determine how much the program will be reimbursed for each enrolled child.

Programs charge parent fees based on the [OEC Fee Schedule](#).

Communities receiving School Readiness Grant funds have a School Readiness Council (SRC) that's responsible for making recommendations about the school readiness grant program.



CITY OF NORWALK
Norwalk Health Department

To: Members of the Common Council
From: Deanna D'Amore, Director of Health
Re: Business Agreement for training and education of health department staff
Date: April 8, 2022

The Norwalk Health Department is seeking to arrange staff training sessions with the Health Education Center. The training is contracted on a per staff attendee basis and will total no more than \$2500, payable within 30 days of completion of the service.

We request approval for the following authorization:

1. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all agreements, documents, instruments, or amendments as may be necessary to contract services provided by the Health Education Center at a total cost of no more than \$2500 for the purpose of employee training and education. Account No. 0120-11-5272.

Training Description: The Health Education Center is a non-profit organization whose mission is to eliminate health disparities through recruiting, training, sustaining, and supporting health professionals from diverse backgrounds, community engagement, and advocacy. The training is being provided as part of the health department's workforce development and training for health department staff in the areas of cultural competency and language barriers. This will include addressing unconscious bias, exploring individual biases, reviewing core features of effective communication skills, defining culture and cultural humility, addressing health disparities and health literacy, highlighting best practices for working with medical interpreters, and managing stereotypes.



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