

Community Services Committee

Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, March 16, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.

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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 February 16, 2022
4. Discussion
 - a. COVID-19 Updates from the Health Department Deanna D'Amore, Health Director and Brian Weeks, Epidemiologist
 - b. Community Health presentation, Theresa Argondezzi, Assistant Director of Health - Community Health
 - c. Chief of Community Services Updates - Lamond Daniels
 1. Community Updates
 2. American Rescue Plan Act Community Recovery Fund Program
 3. Equity and Justice for All Initiative
5. Adjourn

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

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

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

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

STAFF: Lamond Daniels, Chief of Community Services

OTHERS: Mayor Rilling, Council Darlene Young, Deanna D'Amore, Health Director; Brian Weeks, Epidemiologist, Diane Lauricella, Gail Bindley-Taylor

CALL TO ORDER/ ROLL CALL

Chair Johnson called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chair Johnson opened Public Comments with Diane Lauricella as first speaker.

Ms. Lauricella thanked the Health Department, Council and the Mayor for standing firm on the mask issue for the City of Norwalk. She continued by saying to keep the mask mandate until March until weather gets warmer. Mask messaging still needs to be put out into the community. She also gave a comment on the difference between the mask types especially those addressed by Mr. Weeks, K95 brand, being insufficient for children. Stated the people giving information are not professionals and there needs to be more information on the masks for the population that are of quality especially for children.

She further stated that the Equity and Justice section of the report was inadequate with respect to the review. She questioned why her name was not on the contributor list as she spent time with Ms. Price and the special advisory committee would be formed and was told there would be subsequent meetings, but she never heard back from Ms. Price. The section marked Environmental, is woefully...does not contain many of the important facets of equity and justice. Professionally speaking, on air quality, the location of the air quality threats to the target population and demographic. Rightly the Bike Walk Task Force was turned into a full body commission within three months for which she applauded the Mayor and the council. She did not see any reason to hire

someone new to start all over again for equity and justice for all. She does not see why the task was taken. She stated that she feels that others see the inadequate review. There are many willing people to serve on a board or commission. She suggested that the City emulate the Arts Task Force and the Bike Walk Task Force make them into a Commission.

Ms. Lauricella thanked the council for listening.

Chair Johnson asked if there were others who wished to comment. She then introduced Gail Bindley-Taylor

Gail Bindley-Taylor spoke to the group from Chile South America. She also addressed the Equity and Justice report. She said there were many suggestions and recommendations to be taken account of and looked at. She commented that the community has to be reached at all levels it is not homogeneous. People can only be reached where they are. She stated looking at the recommendations already input, on communications that are key. Not bringing in someone new to start over once again does not make sense to some extent. Work on equity and justice is hard work and understanding of the issues before one can do it. Starting all over again with someone new will have to start all over again. Looking at recommendations and what can be done and looking at areas that have been flagged and are important to look at. The issues; economic issues, and education disparities are huge and should be looked at. The police civilian review board and CT is not the only state to do this. Many examples where people are comfortable with the outcome. Move beyond the fear of change, Many are afraid of change, but if Norwalk remains static then we would not be able to move forward. Use the recommendations to build on rather than start over.

Chair Johnson thanked Ms. Bindley-Taylor.

Chair Johnson moved on to written comments which will be attached to these minutes read by Mr. Daniels.

Mr. Daniels read the e-mails to the Community Services Committee members in the order in which they were received.

No other comments to committee members had been received for this meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON JANUARY 19, 2022

Chair Johnson asked for a motion to approve of the minutes of January 19, 2022.

Chair Johnson made the following corrections:

Page 1 paragraph 1		Johnon should be Johnson
Page 1 paragraph 3	Line 2	should be 'she said she
Page 2 paragraph 1	Line 1	insert "if we need to table"
Page 2 Motion	Line 1	should be Lauricella
Page 2 paragraph 6	Line 5	verbalize should be verbalized
Page 4 paragraph 5	Line 3	decease should be disease
Page 5 paragraph 5	Line 1	has should be have
Page 7 paragraph 2	Line 1	During a rebidding process Lead By Us firm Was selected
Page 7 paragraph 2	Line 1	Jury should be Community
Page 7 paragraph 7	Line 1	Johnaon should be Johnson
Page 8 paragraph 2	Line 1	Altman should be Alterman

**** MS. AYERS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 19, 2022, AS AMENDED.**

**** MS. REVOLUS SECONDED APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES AS AMENDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

DISCUSSION

COVID-19 Updates from the Health Department - Deanna D'Amore and Brian Weeks

Ms. D'Amore spoke to the activities in coordination with the Mayor's office with regard to the monitoring of COVID in Norwalk.

Mr. Weeks moved forward with charts as of February 15, 2022, on COVID in Connecticut. Case averages are lower than they were a few weeks ago. These charts will become a part of these minutes. Connecticut has seen a lowering of hospitalizations. Chair Johnson asked whether there were any other questions. There were none on this subject. The age group numbers are noted for those 10 to 19 years of age. Norwalk vaccinations shown on the chart were for both initial and booster shots relative to all ages. KN95 information was repeated directly from the CDC documentation which can be read to clear up the comments in the January 19, 2022, minutes that were questioned by the Chair.

Councilman Burnett questioned the VA2 variant which seems to be growing.

Mr. Weeks stated that Denmark is the highest in COVID numbers. It is present in Connecticut and other areas in the United States. It poses concern as it can be a game changer in the US.

Chair Johnson questioned the spike in 30 to 50 year olds.

Mr. Weeks stated that exposure can be between children in those family age groups and the adults who come in contact with these individuals. The seasons have also been a factor in run of the variants.

Ms. Revolus thanked the Chair for her proactivity with regard to nutrition in this committee.

Chair inquired of the Health Department members for advice on masking.

Ms. D'Amore said the department continued to promote the previous guards to help lower the virus within the community.

Mr. Weeks noted that low vitamin D levels with relation to viral infections and nutrition. During a wellness visit one should check with their doctor on their individual vitamin D levels.

Ms. D'Amore commented on information on social media where community residents can learn what is offered. Distribution of Radon kits were sent out and they were free.

Ms. Alterman asked about mental health contacts for individuals.

Mr. Daniels said flyers in English and Spanish as well as social media has been used to assist the community.

Chair Johnson stated that the library is participating in putting out information to the community

CHIEF OF COMMUNITY SERVICES UPDATES - Lamond Daniels
Fair Rent Resources for Residents and UniteCT program
American Rescue Plan Act Community Recovery Fund Program

Mr. Daniels asked to combined item "e" in his initial report.

Chair Johnson agreed.

Mr. Daniels reminded the commission that Norwalk was one of the first cities to be a part of the UniteCT which is an emergency assistance program to help residents pay their rent especially due to COVID. This is the program the department facilitated to

assist residents pay their rent who were impacted by COVID. He announced the rent assistance program has been suspended at this time.

If an application is already in place, the resident will be reviewed. If no application has been made out prior, the Urban League of Southern Connecticut will help a resident in Norwalk to process a form in City Hall where the League meets so residents do not have to go to Stamford. Norwalk has the swing space that is used by the Urban League who initially helped Norwalkers with this program and is located in Stamford. The residents did not have to go to Stamford from Norwalk for help. The Urban League is the only entity in the region who is authorized and licensed to go into the UniteCT program and help our residents know where they are in that process. The number for contact is a Stamford number 203-561-3993. Norwalk residents are encouraged to call and see where you stand in this program if you have processed an application previously

Renters are reminded that they have the Office of Human Relations and Fair rent which is a support service for residents. If one feels that their rent has been unfairly increased or that one has concerns about staying. Individuals can make a complaint and a commission can will hear the complaint and make a ruling whether the rent should be increased or can be increased with stipulations. Contact 203-854-7989 for assistance. You may also contact the department via email at fairrent@cp.org or call 203-854-7820.

There is also the Fair Housing Officer, if you feel you have been discriminated against. Ms. Scribbs, Fair Housing officer, can be reached at 203 854 7820.

The Resource Support Center should be called for assistance in housing, employment, and other living issues in Norwalk at 203-854-7999. There are dedicated bi-lingual staff. The Creole staff member will be on board March 1st.

The POD is being delivered to the library for residents to obtain assistance for mental health needs. Ms. Sherelle Hariss, Library Director, has been instrumental in expanding the use of the library beside books to read. These are for use by private citizens for mental health and emotional support.

The non-profit communities will be supported with almost \$2M under Mayor Rillings' administration. The portal is open accepting applications for non-profits as of this meeting, which is **norwalkct.orgARPA**. It is all on-line and there is a webinar to learn about the requirements. It is a Federal program and must fulfill requirements.

Mr. Daniels listed some of the items in the initiative for the non-profits: Eviction Prevention, Homeless intervention, behavior and mental health, early care and education, provide mental health care for little ones, workforce initiative address under employed, under skilled, programs for youth serve young people impacted by COVID. Portal closes on February 25, 2022, promptly at 5 p.m.

Once the proposals are in and the Common Council and Mayor signs off on the contracts the money will flow into the non-profits.

Ms. Ayers asked whether Mr. Daniels was aware of Point in Time possibly he please obtain the date and data which was collected on homeless and see what is happening with our homeless municipalities. This is performed nationally.

Mr. Daniels will get info for the commission as it was just completed in January in Norwalk.

Mr. Burnett asked Mr. Daniels to repeat the website for the non-profit application.

Mr. Daniels repeated **norwalkct.org \ARPA.**

Mr. Keegan asked about a pathway to home ownership was that being considered.

Mr. Daniel stated there are homeowner programs. He ran a webinar for 6 weeks but it was during COVID. The timing may not have been good due to COVID.

Mr. Keegan stated it should be on our radar in Norwalki.

Mr. Daniels will pursue these programs.

Ms. Revolus said entrepreneurship should be added as well to Mr. Keegans suggestion.

Mr. Daniel will pursue non profit along with Jessica and with Ms. Revolus

Mayor Rilling stated Seed and Feed should be looked into,

Mayor Rilling commented Mr. Daniels is a great hire, as well as Ms. D'Amore and Mr. Weeks. This team is a dedicated group of public servants.

Mayor Rilling stated Ms. Sherelle Harris is doing a remarkable job with the library. Tremendous results. Volunteers will assist citizens complete their taxes in an hour.

Ms. Ayers suggested that we need to do a press event about the PODS. This is a secure way to publicize mental health. This is something that we should have publicity about. People are always asking about mental health. Mayor Rilling nodded in agreement.

Mr. Daniels said that through the Mayors' office he will orchestrate a press conference.

Mayor Rilling stated that all council members will be invited to boost the POD usage. Many have been affected by COVID and will want to take advantage of this service offered at the library.

Chair Johnson moved to the next item and turned the portion meeting over to Mr. Daniels.

Equity and Justice for All Initiative

Mr. Daniels stated his thoughts are personal to him as a man of color during Black History Month and forward. He stated that the separation of close to him and he is looking forward on feedback from the committee. He said he would respond to any questions and/or suggestions.

Chair Johnson thanked Mr. Daniels for his comments. She then asked the group what can be used from this report since all members had a time to review and digest the information?

Ms. Ayers commented between the Blue Ribbon Report of 1993 in combination with this report, there is enough for this committee to move forward. She stated there is work to do. Between 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 in the two documents and 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.

Chair Johnson mentioned that Data Haven put out an equity report for towns and cities in the state. She also told Ms. Ayers she had hit crucial points in the document.

Chair Johnson asked whether there are other points to review.

Ms. Smyth commented that Ms. Ayers had hit many points in the report. There was information missing from this report that is in the Blue Ribbon Report and should have been included in the report they were reviewing.

Mr. Keegan stated that he thought this was a “big bite” forming this commission. It seemed a number of things were being tried to do all at once. As a police officer he felt there was this tragic event in MN and it may have bogged the committee down. This is not a simple situation. Are there things that can be done to regain the trust in the police department. The committee needs help from community to get the committee to get there for the community. He stated there needs to be someone to help us get there.

Mr. Burnett said the report opened eyes to see there are things to be addressed in Norwalk. How to utilize this report and the 1993 Blue Ribbon Report as a spring board and in a third phase to implement what is needed to proceed in Norwalk to make a difference. Some may say they have lost patience with us. The group is trying to do something to make a difference for us and those coming after us. It is valuable work and everyone is committed in making a difference and is the committee goal.

Ms. Revulus should not forget what has happened in CT. There have been issues in CT in towns that should not be overlooked. She noticed that the community is not engaged in the police department. Residential task force to see what PD is doing in CT is not being done here. Initially it was inequity between brown and black children in the community. People who are asking for a task force to overlook the police department seems to be overlooked now in lieu of other items.

Mayor Rilling interjected this goes beyond systemic racism. Permanent commission and determine how to do it was the initial intent. With Led by Us there were new hiccups. Now we are trying to stop those hiccups To move forward forming a commission of young people and those who live the experience is needed. We need to help those on the commission, new people, hearing problems and looking at things on their own. There should be someone brought in to train them to help this move forward.

Ms. Ayers stated that systemic racism is not something we can put a time stamp on them. She concurred with Mayor Rillings' comment to train and follow through without a time stamp, 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 she suggested the DEI officer. 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. With the right person to scratch to surface, we need a person who is qualified person to help get people through the process and get the community through the healing process. The position has to have longevity with the support and framework of the commission.

Chair Johnson agreed that an DEI officer is a position to consider.

Chair Johnson agreed with the above comments.

Ms. Revulus stated we need someone who not holding a degree only but has lived the experience which happens, we overlook the lived experience. Don't overlook the "lived experience" in the community has experienced this "lived experience" people who will be here 5 10 years down the road in the community. Don't over the lived experience by bringing in a person with a degree.

Chair Johnson said that this is a part of the initiative, our commission is a part of working with the consultant.

Daniels explained what Led By Us has planned and wanted to wait til later to consider the police component. This was to be done in quarter four. There is a lot of misconception for the separation. There was an agreed upon outline. We as the contractor supported their outline for the initiative. Based on the timeline only a portion of their goals for the project, which were agreed to, were not fulfilled.

Mayor Rilling spoke to the courage Norwalk has shown by using a consulting firm. This is a city that opened up its books to make things better, which is very unusual. Norwalk has always been bold and looks internally to see where the city could do better. Others will see what we have done and replicate our success.

Ms. Smyth thanked the Mayor for his input

Ms. Alterman left the meeting at 8:50 p.m.

Mayor Rilling offered a position to a potential applicant for the position of Communications Director; fluent in Spanish with a broad background and experience.

Ms. Revolus commented there is a mix of languages, Creole, Portuguese, etc. She asked how are we going to do better in communication.

Mayor Rilling commented that the dial-in line will be encouraged for all persons to communicate in Norwalk.

Ms. Revolus asked for a representative to sit on a panel to help us with our use of the language line.

Mayor Rilling is in agreement because the City pays for the usage monthly.

Mr. Daniels is already hiring a person to be on the language line to further the representation on the language line for Norwalk.

Ms. Revolus asked if we can reduce our costs by increased use.

Mayor Rilling left at 9:15 p.m.

Chair Johnson recommended that the Ordinance Committee will have to come into play.

Ms. Ayers suggested moving items to other departments.

Ms. Smyth agreed that the Ordinance Committee needs to be created to move items out for assistance.

Chair Johnson suggested working on the Ordinance piece to present in March. Chair Johnson will work with Mr. Keegan for on this for the March meeting together.

Mr. Daniels recommended consulting Mayor Rilling as to which department items can be turned over to help get things done now. The outline for doing so should be asked of the Mayor initially.

Ms. Ayers Community asked about surrets, how can that be done.

Mr. Daniels would work with people with expertise to help us in the consultant field.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Revolus moved to adjourn the meeting.

**** COUNCIL REVOLUS MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 9:25.PM
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 16, 2022.

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alvina L Richardson Decker
Telesco Secretarial Services

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

Public Comments

Dear Mr. Daniels

I am a 40+ year resident of Norwalk, having first come to live here in my early 20's. I, currently reside in District D and am an active member of the Race & Social Justice Coalition here. I have voted consistently in City elections and have supported this administration. I was present on the City-wide Zoom call that Mayor Rilling called in 2020 in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. What seemed like promising movement forward in that moment has proven to be most disappointing to me, primarily because of the City of Norwalk's neglect in adequately following through on Mayor Rilling's promise to establish some kind of Equity and Justice Commission that could make real progress for our city.

I was actively involved in the process initiated by Led By Us. What I observed is that the City's initial 1-year contract was short-sighted at best, after taking a full year to produce in the first place. This kind of work needs ongoing commitment. Even worse, was curtailing that work at only 6-months. There was little to no transparency on the City's part as to what was happening in that intervening year, nor was there much visible support observed by the City towards its citizens in lifting up and promoting the Led By Us process.

I have read their report. I would not characterize it -- as the city has -- as incomplete especially given the lack of full support the City seems to have provided. I remain skeptical that Mayor Rilling's and the City of Norwalk's commitment to working toward real, sustained equity and justice is any more than lip service.

Again, as a citizen I am discouraged and disappointed at this juncture. I intend to be virtually present at tonight's meeting.

Anne Watkins
12 Kreiner Lane
Norwalk, CT 06850

Hi Lamont,
Hope you're well. Below are comments I am submitting for tonight's community meeting.

At the original Zoom call in May of 2020, which was called by the mayor specifically to address police accountability, there were so many citizens on the call that it lasted over an hour longer than planned. After various organizations requested, and were granted, a "seat at the table," which the mayor promised, we heard nothing for over a year.

Despite the mayor's promise, there is still no table at which to sit. Why? It took over a year to hire the consultant team from *Led By Us*, yet when they started operating the city did nothing to publicize the *Led By Us* campaign and meetings. Why? *Led By Us* was given a wider agenda than that originally promised by the mayor and the subject of police accountability was virtually buried. Why? Abruptly and secretly, *Led By Us* was terminated in August 2021, after half their contracted time, with no input from those of us who met with them. Why? Even though *Led By Us* was terminated in August 2021, the public wasn't notified until January 2022. Why? The city didn't publicize tonight's meeting as a service to those many who attended the first and subsequent meetings. Why?

I am a citizen of Norwalk and a member of The Race & Social Justice Coalition that has been waiting for close to two years for the mayor to carry through on the project which he initiated. I expect transparency and truth from my city government, which hasn't been the case. *Equity and Justice For All*, the title of this non-existent project, has become just a noble sounding phrase of empty words. Worst of all, does the mayor realize that his empty promises and lack of action affect real people, people who cannot afford rent or food, and whose taxpayer dollars he has wasted on consultant firms?

As a citizen I should expect these questions to be answered, not with political talk but with facts. I should expect that the mayor will not blame others (remember when he blamed Bridgeport for not vetting the police officers properly?), but take responsibility for his false promises. I say "should expect" because, given the track record, my questions, and those of others, will not be answered.

Thank you.
Bob Giolitto

Dear Mr. Daniels,
First I must apologise that this will arrive late but I am currently out of the country in South America and travelled today, so I could not meet your three hour deadline. I hope that despite this you may still find it possible if you find my comments relevant to include them.

My organization The Race and Social Justice Coalition was one of those consulted by "Led by Us" and I personally was able to speak with the consultants as they carried out their work. Having read the report I am deeply troubled by your remarks that they were fired in large measure because there were differences of approach that "were not in the best interest of the community?" I would be very interested to find out what those are.

There are several important recommendations that the report makes on governance, on communication, social well being, the environment, community knowledge and the changing demographics in Norwalk and its impact on all of those areas of our community life. I would be very interested to find out what are the areas of the report with which your office takes exception and why. You have mentioned that you think the community needs to be heard, well this report offers many ways for that to happen I just am totally perplexed by what was found wanting and would think in the interest of transparency and in an effort to encourage greater community participation especially by people of colour at all levels in the society that it is important for us to understand the differences of approach between Led by Us and your office as I worry that simply bringing in someone else to finish the work may end of doing more of a disservice if we have not learnt from the mistakes or missteps of this process.

I 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. 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.

Best regards,
Gail Bindley-Taylor

Gail Bindley-Taylor (she, her, hers)