

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMON COUNCIL FINANCE AND CLAIMS COMMITTEE
AND
BOARD OF EDUCATION
FINANCE COMMITTEE
SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 18, 2023**

ATTENDANCE (Common Council): Gregory Burnett, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling
Jan McMurrer; Bryan Meek;
Nora Niedzielski Eichner; Diana Revolus

ATTENDANCE: (Board of Education): Sheri McCready Pritchett, Chair; Diana Carpio;
Kara Nelson Baekey

STAFF (Common Council): Henry Dachowitz, Chief Financial Officer

STAFF (Board of Education): Lunda Asmani, Chief Financial Officer;
Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent of Schools

OTHERS:

Nicol Ayers and Barbara Smyth, Common Council
Members and Mary Ellen Flaherty Ludwig, Board
of Education member

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Burnett called the meeting to order at 7:04 P.M. and announced that translation was available in Spanish and in Haitian Creole.

ROLL CALL – COMMON COUNCIL AND BOE FINANCE CHAIR

Mr. Burnett and Ms. McCready Pritchett called their respective Rolls as indicated above.

**CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER OF THE CITY OF NORWALK AND NORWALK PUBLIC
SCHOOLS PRESENTATIONS**

Mayor Rilling gave opening remarks and noted that he and Dr. Estrella discussed and agreed that they want to move forward in a cohesive manner where they look out for the students and the residents of the City. He added that it was important to have this dialogue early in the process.

Dr. Estrella gave opening remarks and said there have already been conversations on how they can collaborate and determine what they need to do to support the school children. She said she hopes to build a better understanding between the City and the District as they plan the budget.

Mr. Burnett explained that this joint meeting is one of several opportunities for both the City and the school District to understand the priorities as they create the operating budget. He added that budget requests were being formulated at this time. Another joint meeting is scheduled for January 2024 where they will review specific requests. Other meetings will be conducted during the budget cycle.

Ms. McCready Pritchett said it is expected that they will listen to input and comments from the public. She noted that Norwalk Public Schools is the most successful city school system in Connecticut. Ms. McCready Pritchett said she knows there is a lot of work that needs to be done and hopes this will be an opportunity to hear from the public.

Mr. Burnett said the focus of this meeting is to hear from the public. He said that before they open the public participation portion of the meeting, Mr. Dachowitz and Mr. Asmani would be making presentations.

- A. FY23 Preliminary Year End Financials
- B. FY Key Achievements
- C. Key Issues Impacting FY25 Operating Budget

Mr. Dachowitz shared his screen showing the unaudited preliminary FY23 year end budget vs. actual financials as of June 30, 2023. He explained that at the end of the fiscal year, they had a surplus and departments requested rollover funds. State law allows the Board of Education to request up to 2% of their budget and if it is in the budget, the City will grant that request.

Mr. Dachowitz reviewed the Key Norwalk Budget Highlights for FYE 2023 and noted that Norwalk maintained its AAA rating with all three bond rating agencies. He said that the better the bond rating, the lower the interest rate will be when they borrow and issue bonds.

Mr. Dachowitz reviewed the FY2024-2025 tentative Operating Budget Calendar beginning on October 26th when the Finance Department distributes the proforma operating budget package to

departments and agencies and end on May 6, 2024 when the Board of Estimate and Taxation sets the final operating budget and tax levy.

Mr. Dachowitz presented key issues impacting the FYE 2025 budget that included exhaustion of federal ARPA funds, resulting in lower governmental revenues, ongoing inflation with possible increase in expenses, quinquennial (every five years) property revaluation and the negotiation of new labor agreements with all City unions effective July 2024.

Mr. Asmani shared his screen and presented the General Fund Budget Summary. He explained the District finished the year slightly below budget. He reviewed the budget process calendar starting in October with the proforma budget and ending in June with a final approved budget.

Mr. Asmani reviewed the Key FY2023 Achievements, including – applied for \$15 million magnet schools assistant program grant, a \$1million capital investment in the schools, implementation of Virtual Twilight Program. In addition, literacy and math coaches played a critical role in the work of teacher teams and data driven instruction.

Mr. Asmani presented the District Performance Index (DPI) for Connecticut cities with populations of over 70,000. He reviewed the State average compared to Norwalk for 2022-20223 in English Language Arts, Math and Science. He also showed how Norwalk compared to the rest of the State in the academic growth of city school districts with populations of over 70,000 in English Language Arts and Math.

Mr. Asmani presented a Look at FY2025 that includes NFT Union transition to a high deductible health plan, ratified Union contracts, a 60% increase in utility (electric) expenses and an increase in Special Education outsource provider rates.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Burnett opened the public participation portion of the special joint meeting. He said that all e-mails that were submitted prior to the meeting would be included in the meeting minutes.

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

Dr. Lynne Moore spoke about the budget; however, the majority of her comments were inaudible.

Mr. Meek asked if there would be an opportunity to ask questions as a member of the Common Council. Mr. Burnett explained that the role of the Common Council tonight was to listen. There will be future meetings with more dialogue where they will have specific budget data. He added that Mr. Meek could speak as a member of the public and would have three minutes.

Mr. Meek said he would like the actual head count data from the School Board along with the actual forecast. He said that is the main driver of cost.

ADJOURN

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

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services