

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
VIA TELECONFERENCE
OCTOBER 12, 2023**

ATTENDANCE: Greg Burnett, Chair; Nora Niedzielski-Eichner, Jenn McMurrer, Diana Revolus

STAFF: Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector; Denise Brown, Oak Hills Authority;
Paul Gorman, Deputy Tax Assessor; Henry Dachowitz, Chief Financial Officer;

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Burnett called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. and called the roll. He acknowledged the above members in attendance and stated that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no one in attendance or emails received for public participation.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

August 10, 2023 – Regular Meeting

- ** MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF AUGUST 10, 2023 AS SUBMITTED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED WITH ONE ABSTENTION (MCMURRER).**

September 7, 2023 – Regular Meeting

- ** MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 7, 2023 AS SUBMITTED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED WITH ONE ABSTENTION (MCMURRER).**

September 14, 2023 – Regular Meeting

- ** MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 14, 2023 AS SUBMITTED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED WITH ONE ABSTENTION (MCMURRER).**

Claims Committee: Receive the Monthly Claims Report

Mr. Burnett asked for the minutes to reflect that Ms. Biagiarelli is attending the meeting during her vacation, and he commended her outstanding efforts.

Review and approve claims as required for Claims Report.

Ms. Biagiarelli reported there were two special requests that require approval as they are above the \$10,000 threshold. One was an erroneous duplicate tax payment of last year's bill, and the other was a compilation of excess lease credits. She noted also that there were many motor vehicle refunds for overpayments as a result of the new billing procedures, and taxpayers were offered the option of a credit applied to next year's tax or refunds.

Mr. Burnett asked about the net result of the many changes and adjustments or 'ins and outs' and she noted that the actual collection rate is slightly ahead of last year to date, and all should be okay. Mr. Burnett noted that it was basically an inconvenience with no impact to total collections.

**** MS. MCMURRER MOVED TO APPROVE THE SPECIAL REQUEST
PAYMENTS OF \$18,469.54 AND \$10, 777. 71 AS PRESENTED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Burnett noted that this item will move on to the Common Council meeting for approval at the meeting of October 24.

Narrative on Tax Collections dated September 23, 2023 – Receive Report and Discuss

Ms. Biagiarelli presented the report and noted the narrative as contained in the agenda packet, with excerpts highlighted as follows:

As of the end of September with three months of the fiscal year having been completed, collections are in excess of \$204 million against the \$375 million adjusted levy, or 54.41%. Sewer levy is at 52.94% which is ahead of last year, and IPP levy is at 72.47% which is slightly behind last year. She is heartened that they are keeping pace with last year in view of the billing issues.

Residents were given until October 10 for past due notices relative to motor vehicle value assessments and issues with inaccurate tax bills. Delinquent billing and collected billing went well, and second installment billing is on schedule, they are working closely with Mr. Gorman on the motor vehicle assessments with how this is being addressed.

The tax sale planned for July 2024, and the staff will begin working on that in November through the winter into the spring with the sale scheduled for the third Monday in July.

- ** MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE TAX COLLECTOR'S REPORTS AS SUBMITTED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Tax Assessor update on the Revaluation process

Mr. Gorman provided an update on the revaluation process and noted that is tracking well in line with expectations, referred to the spreadsheet that provides an overview of the progress of the 2023 revaluation:

Data collection has been completed for both Residential and Commercial properties. Data collectors are currently visiting properties with outstanding building permits.

All residential properties have received a data verification report. This report details the construction data the city has on file asking property owners to make corrections if necessary and return. Property owners who did not respond to the initial mailer will be receiving a second follow up notice the week of 10/9.

The analysis of residential property sales and a parcel-by-parcel review of each property continues. We anticipate wrapping the review up over the next couple weeks. We are also setting values on each condominium complex throughout the city. Sales will continue to be analyzed into November. We currently anticipate new value notices being mailed on November 22nd, 2023.

Public Relation efforts include Press Releases, Public Meeting Planning and Revaluation Brochure Handouts.

The project is progressing on schedule.

COMMERCIAL REASSESSMENT

Safeground Analytics is performing the reassessment of the commercial properties in accordance with the deadlines of the City of Norwalk contract. To date roughly 25% of all commercial final valuation is completed with the balance of the valuation being completed by October 31st. As part of the process income and expense data has been analyzed and income models have been created for all commercial properties. Statistical testing of sales data has yielded passing scores in conformance with standards set by the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) of the State of CT as well as standards promulgated by the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO). In addition, Safeground Analytics is planning to do two public presentations regarding the reassessment to the Chamber of Commerce and the Common Council during the early part of November.

Mr. Gorman reviewed the update on letters and email notices to homeowners has been positive to date. Mailers with information pamphlets will be going out over the remainder of the month, so that they may capture as much information as possible.

Mr. Dachowitz asked about the communications plan. Mr. Gorman noted that John Valente and Gary Fields have put together a presentation for the Common Council and pamphlet brochure on FAQs and education efforts are scheduled to get as much information to the public. Also, along with an information session to the public there is a Chamber of Commerce scheduled for November and date TBD.

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Mr. Burnett asked about the Elderly Tax Relief and Mr. Gorman noted that spreadsheets were provided to the Comptroller's Office. He shared the spreadsheet for comparisons from 2019-2022 and the participation reports that the participation levels show more residents are able to take advantage with the increased threshold with higher tier cost of living increased qualifications.

Mr. Dachowitz asked about the state participation levels, and Mr. Gorman outlined that the state levels don't have as much of an impact for qualifications that kept people qualified to remain in the program. He added that more data can be accessed to provide further information as needed. Mr. Dachowitz noted that the policy decision by the Council for the increase in limits bring more people into the program and amidst COVID in 2019-2021. He noted may have enabled more participation for those in need, and this may be up for discussion in future budget impacts.

Ms. Revolus asked for communications on the program, and Mr. Gorman noted it is posted on the website with a public notice in the hour. Next year there will be mailers to include a tri-fold folder or brochure on this program and key dates in conjunction with July billing. Ms. Biagiarelli suggested that December is a better timing, and she will work with the Assessor's office to coordinate this.

Oak Hills Authority

Ms. Denise Brown referred to the financial statements provided in the agenda packet and outlined updates for July and August as follows:

Operations Updates:

- Golf revenue rounds and cart rounds are slightly over budget for the first month of FY24. Discount ID card sales are in-line with budget.
- OHPA plans on making substantial capital improvements throughout the course of this new fiscal year.
- We are at the end of our third year (of five) in our cart fleet lease and are seeing some expected wear and tear. However, the lithium batteries are holding up better than the standard batteries in previous leases.

YTD Financial Highlights:

- July net operating income was over budget by \$12k and we ended July with a \$781k cash balance which includes \$33k in the capital reserve bank account.
 - Revenue was over-budget by 13k thanks to strong golf and Outings rounds.
 - Expenses were less than \$1k over.
- OHPA made \$15k in repayments to the City for the first month of the new fiscal year. The annual 1% of gross golf revenue additional debt payment will be made once the Audit Report is received.

Other:

- Our FY2024 fiscal budget has now been spread month-by-month.
- The year-end financial audit fieldwork took place in July. Controller is at the beginning stages of working on the Audit Report now.

August 2023 Financial Commentary

Operations Updates:

- Golf revenue rounds, cart rounds and Discount ID cards are slightly over budget for the first two months of FY24.
- OHPA plans on making substantial capital improvements throughout the course of this new fiscal year and has already spent over \$34k to date.
- We are at the end of our third year (of five) in our cart fleet lease and are seeing some expected wear and tear. However, the lithium batteries are holding up better than the standard batteries in previous leases.

YTD Financial Highlights:

- FY24 YTD net operating income was over budget by \$47k and we ended August with a \$909k cash balance which includes \$33k in the capital reserve bank account.
 - Revenue was over-budget by 63k thanks to strong golf and Outings rounds.
 - Expenses were \$16k over-budget due to wages and the timing of property tax on our cart fleet.
- OHPA made \$31k in repayments to the City for the first two months of the new fiscal year. The annual 1% of gross golf revenue additional debt payment will be made once the Audit Report is received.

Other:

- We are in the process of investing and diversifying excess cash.
- The year-end financial audit fieldwork took place in July. The Audit Report is in progress.

Ms. Brown noted that a new mower is scheduled for capital expense, and she reviewed the rationale for the purchase that should be settled in November. Mr. Burnett asked about the plan for the winter months, and Ms. Brown outlined there are significant cash reserves, and they do not anticipate issues until they can start up in spring.

Finance

Mr. Dachowitz noted there was no financial update report, and he asked that Mr. Burnett speak about an upcoming meeting. Mr. Burnett reported that next Wednesday, 7:00 p.m. is a joint hybrid meeting with the Finance Committee of the Common Council and Board of Education that will be held at the Brien McMahon CGS. It will be a meeting to provide actuals for 2022-23 and a preview of the upcoming budget cycle. The objective is to have an information session for input from the public for a dialogue on thoughts and concerns on the upcoming 2024-25 budget year calendar for the City and Board of Education.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Telesco Secretarial Services

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