

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JUNE 10, 2021**

ATTENDANCE: Greg Burnett, Chair; David Heuvelman, Tom Keegan,
Diana Revolus, Nick Sacchinelli.

OTHERS: Chitsamay Lam, Comptroller; Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector;
Betsy Bain, Rowayton Hilltop Houses; Anthony R. Carr, Chief of
Operations and Public Works; Atty. Darin Callahan, Michael DePalma,
Oak Hills Authority; Mr. William Ford, the Tax Assessor, Atty. Matt
Sapienza, Corporation Counsel, Ms. Betsy Bain, Rowayton Hill Top
Homes Board president; and Ms. Vanessa Valadare, Principal Engineer

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.
The public was able to listen to this meeting by calling a conference line.

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Burnett called the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Burnett called the roll. A quorum was present.

**** MR. HEUVELMAN MOVED TO ADD AN ITEM REGARDING EXECUTIVE
SESSION TO DISCUSS THE LEGAL OPINION OF ASSISTANT CORPORATION
COUNSEL DARIN L. CALLAHAN DATED JUNE 10, 2021 CONCERNING OAK HILLS
PARK VENDORS PURSUANT TO CONN. GEN STAT. SECTIONS 1-200(6) AND 1-
210(B)(10)
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Burnett said that there were no written emails received.

Mr. Burnett recognized Ms. Betsy Bain, the current president of the Board of Directors of Rowayton Hill Top Homes. Ms. Bain said that there was an item regarding a tax abatement renewal for the Hill Top Homes and she was present to answer questions.

**APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING FINANCE
COMMITTEE MEETINGS:**

• May 13, 2021

**** MR. KEEGAN MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE MAY 13, 2021.**

The following corrections were noted:

Page 2, under Monthly Tax Collector's Report, paragraph 1, please change the following from "Lien Variance Certificates" to "Lien Continuance Certificates".

Page 2, under Monthly Tax Collector's Report, paragraph 2, please change the following from "She explained that the sale" to "She explained that the tax sale"

Page 2, under Monthly Tax Collector's Report, paragraph 4, line 2 please change the following From "the tax lien sale." to "the tax sale."

Page 2, under Monthly Tax Collector's Report, paragraph 4, line 2 please change the following from " on lien sales because" to " on tax sales because"

Page 2, under Monthly Tax Collector's Report, paragraph 6, line 2 please change the following from "in touch with State OPM Office" to "in touch with the State Office of Policy Management."

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF MAY 13, 2021 AS CORRECTED PASSED WITH FOUR (4) IN FAVOR (BURNETT. HEUVELMAN, KEEGAN, REVOLUS) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (SACCHINELLI).**

Claims Committee: receive the monthly Claims Report; review and approve claims as required for Claims Report dated: June 10, 2021

Narrative on Tax Collections dated June 7, 2021 – Receive Report and discuss.

Monthly Tax Collector's Reports dated May 2021 – Receive Report and discuss.

Ms. Biagiarelli presented her report. She said that the Claims report was for information only as they were all under \$10,000.

She then reviewed the remaining reports and noted there was one more month to go before the close of the fiscal year.

Regarding the tax sale, there were 137 properties were paid in full. The complete list of properties that will be included will be issued soon.

The tax bills will be mailed the week of June 21st. This allows the residents to budget and plan. There is no COVID extension this year and the last day to pay will be August 2nd. There are a number of bank branches that will accept payments or residents can pay online or in person.

Mr. Burnett asked Ms. Biagiarelli how she felt that they would finish the year. Ms. Biagiarelli said that they were in a very good position and had been able to maintain the collection rate. She mentioned the new three year cycle for motor vehicle registration, which will impact the timing of vehicle taxes collection. Discussion followed about delinquency measures.

Receive Oak Hills Authority monthly Financial Statements for April 2021.

Mr. DePalma reported that the number of golf rounds are up and the Authority has had a very good year. He displayed a spreadsheet onscreen.

Mr. DePalma then gave a brief update on the restaurant. The restaurant work has been delayed due to supply shortages. The Halfway House is open and they are averaging \$700/day. The Authority receives 10% and this will be paid out quarterly.

Now, therefore, be it resolved, by the Common Council of the City of Norwalk:

- a. **1. That pursuant to the Norwalk City Code Chapter 58, the Mayor is hereby authorized, directed, and empowered in the name of and in behalf of t the City of Norwalk to execute the attached Tax Abatement Agreement, and any amendments or revisions thereto, provided such amendments or revisions are not of a substantive nature. In general, the Tax Abatement Agreement is designed to abate the municipal real estate taxes of the ROWAYTON SENIOR HOUSING COPORATION for a period of up to 40 years, except that there will be a payment in lieu of taxes as more detailed in the Agreement.**
- b. **2. The Mayor is further authorized to provide such information or execute such other documents in connection with this tax abatement to or with such agencies of the federal or state government as may assist the ROWAYTON SENIOR HOUSING COPORATION in meeting its commitment to make payments in lieu of taxes to the City.**

**** MR. SACCHINELLI MOVED THE ITEM.**

Mr. William Ford, the Tax Assessor, and Atty. Matt Sapienza from Corporation Counsel were present on the call. Mr. Ford said that this was an affordable housing complex for seniors in the area and this is an on-going abatement. This is simply a request to continue the abatement, and it is revenue neutral for the City. Att. Sapienza noted that the abatement was originally enacted in the 1980's for a period of 40 years and it now up for renewal.

Mr. Sacchinelli asked how many other senior Centers have similar abatements. Mr. Ford said that there were 6 senior residences and they have abatements. Discussion followed about the original agreements.

Ms. Bain said that it was a 24 unit facility devoted to low and very low income residents. She said that they were required to offer any open units to very low income residents.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Burnett announced that this item will be placed on the Common Council agenda on June 22nd.

From Board of Estimate and Taxation Special Capital Appropriation Request:

a. RESOLUTION: Approve a special capital appropriation in an amount not to exceed \$180,000 for capital project account number 09206030-5777-C06331, West Rocks Soccer Complex to be used for additional Drainage improvements and tree planting.

b. RESOLUTION: Authorize the issuance of \$180,000 General Obligations bonds of the City to meet the appropriations for project 09206030-5777-C06331, West Rocks Soccer Complex.

**** MR. KEEGAN MOVED THE ITEMS.**

Mr. Anthony Carr, and Ms. Vanessa Valadares were on the call. Mr. Carr explained that the downstream neighbor, Sunrise Condominium, had requested a modification regarding the stormwater discharge. To be good stewards, the City has rerouted the stormwater to another catch basin.

They have also requested some tree planting on the property line because Sunrise is down slope from the soccer field.

Mr. Carr said that there was another stormwater pipe that was uncovered which handled the stormwater from West Rock and this has been re-routed. An underground plastic chamber filled with stone captures the water from this pipe and allows it to discharge back into the ground. This was discovered during the work for the condominiums.

Mr. Heuvelman asked what the status was on the entire project. Mr. Carr said that they had to reschedule the completion date back a few weeks. The ribbon cutting should be done later this month. The excavating only involved soil. Ms. Valadares said that they will go back in the fall to add more screening.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

This item will be included on the June 22nd Full Council Meeting agenda.

**** MR. HEUVELMAN MOVED TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS THE LEGAL OPINION OF ASSISTANT CORPORATION COUNSEL DARIN L. CALLAHAN DATED JUNE 10, 2021 CONCERNING OAK HILLS PARK VENDORS PURSUANT TO CONN. GEN STAT. SECTIONS 1-200(6) AND 1-210(B)(10).'**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The Council Members, Atty. Callahan, entered Executive Session at 7:42 p.m. The Finance Committee came out of executive session at 7:57 PM. During the Executive Session no votes or actions were taken.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Burnett announced that the meeting was adjourned at 7:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF EDUCATION FINANCE COMMITTEE AND
CITY OF NORWALK FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
JOINT MEETING
JUNE 10, 2021**

ATTENDANCE: City Finance/Claims Committee:
Greg Burnett, Chair; David Heuvelman, Tom Keegan,
Diana Revolus, Nick Sacchinelli.

Board of Education School Facilities/Planning:
Diana Caprio, Chair; Suzanne Brown Koroshetz, Colin Hosten

OTHERS: Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Norwalk Public Schools Superintendent;
Chitsamay Lam, Comptroller; Thomas Hamilton, BOE Comptroller;
Dr. Richard Lemons, Connecticut Center for School Change.

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Burnett called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Burnett introduced the members of the Finance/Claims Committee. Dr Estrella introduced the members of the Board of Education

Objective of quarterly Joint Finance Committee Meetings

Dr. Estrella said that it would be important to discuss the framework and the facilities study that has taken place this year. This will help focus the future goals for the next 10 years. It will also help maintaining and developing the classroom environment. The expectations for the students are very different today and this will impact the design of the classroom.

Having a robust facilities plan will keep the District on track and provide the right environment for the students. The school design must take into the diversity of the district.

Review of Norwalk Public School Strategic Plan Framework

Dr. Estrella said that the Strategic Plan was something that was created by many different stake holders.

Dr. Lemons then displayed a PowerPoint presentation focused on the Strategic Plan Overview for the joint committee. He explained that the Connecticut Center for School Change was requested by the BOE to come to the District to facilitate creation of the Strategic Plan. He spoke about the fact that they did not want to implement change without understanding the causes behind those changes. They went out several times to engage the stake holders to formulate a needs assessment. The Strategic Framework was created from that needs assessment including the core values, the vision and the mission. This resulted in improving the framework and broad goal areas. During the next few weeks, the BOE staff will be working on focus areas, actions and targets. This will be an on-going task that will be required an annual review.

Dr. Lemons then displayed a slide listing all the various tasks and meetings that were held by the BOE Task Force along with a listing of all the key participants.

The ultimate goal is Future Ready for ALL: the Norwalk Public Schools 2021-2026 Strategic Plan. He then reviewed the Mission statement, the Vision statement and the Strategic Priorities.

He noted that the District was already working on a number of these goals and objectives were already underway.

Mr. Burnett asked about what metrics would be used to determine success as it relates to the statement “All students will graduate ready for success.” Dr. Estrella said that the Task Force was working on this because success will be articulated differently depending on the student. They are working on those parameters. Discussion followed about what the metrics might be because those metrics will have a budgetary impact as well.

Dr. Estrella then spoke about the utilization of the capital funds and future projects such as central air conditioning. There were six buildings that had to implement early releases because the buildings were too hot. There have been many conversations about HVAC systems and air quality. There are many buildings that need HVAC upgrades.

The discussion then moved to the Facilities Plan. In the past, there has been a focus on bricks and mortar. The DLR Group focuses on educational adequacy and is grounded in having investments. The buildings need to enable education. Over 7,000 students and 700 teachers were engaged in the process. Some of the change factors that were considered included PreK must be equitable and accessible for everyone and High School scheduling and curriculum policies were critical.

The next slide focused on the Engagement Indicators including safety and security, stimulations, innovative environments, operational costs that are adaptable, visually and acoustically comfortable, high energy efficiency, and healthy learning environment.

It was noted that the furniture was also important in that there were some studies noting that those who sit and don't move experience their brain shutting down whereas wiggling about keeps the student engaged.

While Norwalk does a good job in keeping the buildings maintained, but there are suggestions about the window treatments, visibility, safety, indoor air quality and improved lighting.

A discussion followed about the indoor air quality and how it will be assessed in light of the COVID pandemic. Short term solutions such as window air conditions are not efficient, so a long term investment is needed. There is a section in the report regarding indoor air quality and includes Connecticut State requirements that are being developed.

The reports on the physical building status were the next topic. The Schools are well maintained and clean. However, the report focused on capital investment maintenance, such as old fixtures in the bathrooms. There is a list of deferred maintenance such as ADA compliance and equipment that was beyond its life expectation. A slide showing the Accessibility and Building Code Compliance issues was displayed.

Regarding the indoor air quality, a decade ago, there was no requirement for fresh outdoor air and now the standards have improved. The first year will focus on critical maintenance and critical multiple school projects. This list included the schools that would need major renovations. There was also a list of multi-school projects for the first year, including lighting upgrade. The staff continued to narrate the framework for the next 20 years. The 20 year plan includes 75% of deferred maintenance. Deferring capital maintenance will always have major costs.

Ms. Pam said that she would like to applaud the City and the Board for working on this ambitious plan.

Mr. Hosten said that it would be helpful to have this plan available so that when the projects come forward, there is some context. Mr. Hamilton noted that this was one of the most detailed building assessments he had seen. This is providing detailed projects and their costs to work with. Mr. Lo and Mr. Giuliano have received copies of this report.

Mr. Burnett asked what the total cost would be. Mr. Hamilton said that the recommendation would be about \$25 million dollars per year for the on-going years. He said that this would be equal to one school renovation a year.

Ms. Rachel said that there were many districts that were experiencing the same issues because the buildings were constructed between the 1950's and the 1970's and now need capital investments. Mr. Hosten pointed out that this was not a result of neglect, but simply of the

buildings aging. It will be important to think about this as a system wide approach rather than an ad hoc approach.

Mr. Burnett asked if the figures were set towards a pristine state or just a functional state. Ms. Rachel said that the Tier 1 schools were experiencing issues due to either non-functional systems or non-existing systems, such as AC systems. The focus was on functional conditions rather than pristine conditions. This will also have an impact on student engagement.

Dr. Estrella thanked everyone for their time and attention.

Mr. Burnett asked how the strategic plan would integrate into the current work. He wished to know if the work was falling in line with the plan. Dr. Estrella said that it would be a matter of refining and restructuring the previous work in order to strength what is already there. There will be some adaptation of the expectations such as literacy and insuring the students are reading by Grade 3. This will result in the students remaining on track so they can be successful.

Mr. Hosten said that this would not be starting off all over again, but more as a process of continuing improvement. Dr. Estrella said that they had engaged with the Connecticut Center for School Change to work on improving the previous plan and a continuation of that plan.

Ms. Revulus said that this was very good, but wished to know about the sustainability of the brick and mortar education. Dr. Estrella said that they had considered establishing a virtual environment for those students that thrive in that environment. She added that the need to understand what the work force will need to look like in the years ahead. They need to design the classrooms to prepare students for the work force years ahead.

[Loss of audio]

Most of the students appear to learn best in a classroom environment, but there are others who do best in the virtual environment. The District needs to provide that for those students. Dr. Estrella said that they were waiting for Senate Bill #2 to pass in order to provide more funding. The previous COVID funding will end this year. She added that there had been many parents who had advocated for outdoor spaces for the student to have classes.

Mr. Burnett thanked everyone for their time and the information. Mr. Hosten also thanked everyone and said that he was looking forward to more of these meetings in the future.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

City of Norwalk
Board of Education Finance Committee and
City of Norwalk Finance/Claims Committee
Joint Meeting
June 10, 2021