CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE & TAXATION
SPECIAL MEETING
MARCH 20, 2025

ATTENDANCE: Ed Abrams, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling; Kendrick Constant, Troy Jellerette, Anne Yang; Atty. E. Camacho (6:36 p.m.)

OTHERS: Jared Schmitt, CFO; Tom Ellis, Finance; AnaVivian Estrella, Human Services Director; Esther Marillo, Chris MacDonnell, Sherelle Harris, Library Director; Ken Hughes, Recreation and Parks; Robert Stowers, Recreation and Parks Director; Chris MacDonnell, Harbor Commission; Alan Kibbe, Harbor Commission; Jalen Sead, Fair Housing; Matt Pentz, Transit District; Dr. A. Estrella, Superintendent of Schools; Robert Pennington, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Sandra Faioes, Deputy Superintendent of Schools; Lunda Asmani, BOE CFO; Ralph Valenzisi, Technology Director; Allison Breedy-Johnson, Mary-Anne Sheppard

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Abrams called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

He noted that there would not be any Public Comment during this meeting but added that there would be a Public Hearing on March 26th.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Marillo called the roll. A quorum was present.

III. BOARD OF ESTIMATE & TAXATION - BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

Mr. Abrams asked Mayor Rilling if he wished to make any opening comments.

Mayor Rilling said that this has been a difficult year and it will be more difficult as they consider the fact that grants may be cut at the national level. The City side of the budget is at 2.5% and the Board of Education is currently at 4%. Educating the youth of the City is important. The BOE originally came in at 11% and it was reduced to 9%. He said that he had spoken with Dr. Estrella and others on the Board who were performing their due diligence to reduce the budget as much as they could. Going lower than 4% would not be responsible at this time. There was uncertainty about the grants and pass through funding that may not be given to the City. The City has already lost about $1.4 million in grant and the administration is concerned about a significant grant that is in question. He encouraged the Board to look favorable on the BOE budget even though it is a lot less than they asked for.

He thanked the BET for their hard work and diligence. The City will move forward as best as they possibly can.

Atty. Camacho joined the meeting at 6:36 p.m.

- **Deliberation - Open Items**

Recreation and Parks – Mr. Ellis said he sent out a list of 7 open items that the Board was considering changing. However, at the last minute, Recreation and Parks was looking to expand the use of an existing account called "Learn and Play. He said that Ken Hughes and Robert Stowers were present.

Mr. Stowers greeted the Board and gave a brief overview of the Learn and Play account, which has been used in the past for the summer youth camps and other Parks programs that generate revenue. The cost of the programs is deducted from this account.

He spoke about the new reservation system and explained that the new system has to be monitored. The staff member who is responsible for training the staff is part time.

Mr. Stowers said that he was proposing that this particular account be used to hold funds from the general fund for recreation programs and moving a portion of the recreation expenses to personnel. This would allow the department to hire the staff member who is very valuable to the department as a full time employee. He then reviewed the revenue increases since 2022. He said that this would be a neutral transfer.

Atty. Camacho asked what would happen with the revenue at the end of the year. He wished to know if that funding would be deposited into the Fund Balance. Mr. Schmitt clarified the details and said that it would be important to have all the details about where the revenue was coming from and also noted that it would have a cap. If the revenue reached a certain level, the excess would go back into the General Fund. They will have to monitor the fund.

Mayor Rilling asked how the transfer of funds into Personnel would affect the cap. Mr. Stowers said that his budget would not increase at all. Mr. Schmitt said that there would be an increase when the staff member goes from part time to full time, but he also noted that there would be other line items that would be decreasing what would be taken from the General Fund. Discussion followed about the details of the account.

Mr. Abrams said that he would like Mr. Stowers work with Mr. Schmitt to get everything documented before March 26th, so Mr. Schmitt and Mr. Ellis can recommend this or suggest that they not move forward with this.

Community Services – Mr. Ellis said that they should discuss the three family coordinators that had previously been discussed. He noted that Ms. D'Amore from the Health Department and Ms.

Estrella from Human Services were present on the call to answer questions. Mr. Daniels had sent out an email to the Board last week about these positions.

Mayor Rilling said that these were critical positions and had been funding in the past through grant funding. Last year, the City asked the Ritter Foundation and the other foundation if they would be willing to continue funding these positions. The grant foundations agreed to one more year, but now it is time for the City to fund these positions. He said that Ms. Estrella will be giving the Board the details.

Ms. Estrella said that these staff members had assisted over 1,000 Norwalk households. This is fiscally responsible for the City to step up in ways that they haven't been able to do in the past. If the City continues to work on public/private partnerships, the City must keep its promises. The program won an award this year because of its level of success in assisting residents. She said that she was willing to answer any questions. Mr. Daniels email highlights how important this program is.

Mr. Abrams explained that the question that the BET had was whether there were other grant sources that the BET had. He asked if there was a simple yes or no answer. Ms. Estrella said that Mr. Daniels had spoken with the local non-profit directors, but they are looking to the City for support. With all the Federal uncertainties, they were not able to commit to this program. Usually non-profits are able to receive between 30 to 60% of their funding through Federal or State grants. They don't have the capacity to fund the City in return. The city is providing a bridge to services that are already underfunded.

Ms. Yang asked what the amount of funding from the philanthropic groups each year. Ms. Estrella said that she was not working with the City in the original years and would let Ms. Yang know. She added that originally, they had five navigators but later reduced the number down to three. During the last two years, Ms. Estrella said that the funding last year was $250,000 and thought the previous years was at least $250,000 if not $300,000. The request from the Department is for $165,000. Discussion followed.

Ms. Yang asked for the actual dollar for the cost of the three employees. Mr. Schmitt said that the employees would have benefits and reviewed the percentages with Ms. Yang. Discussion followed.

Mr. Abrams said that they had asked Human Services to look for alternative grant funding and there does not appear to be anything available. He noted that these increases were included in the 2.5% budget increase.

Library – Mr. Ellis said that there had been some discussion about the Part Time salaries and to increase them to market rates. He noted that Ms. Harris had provided backup information. Mr. Abrams said that Ms. Harris was on the call.

Ms. Harris greeted the Board Members and gave a brief overview of the reasons why they need the increase. She pointed out that the Library is open between 7 and 10 hours a day all seven days of the week. She said that she had recalculated the numbers. The part time staff have not had an increase in over 10 years and the librarians have not had an increase even longer. She then reviewed the details of this. Neighboring towns are paying librarian assistants with no degrees more money than Norwalk is paying their Librarians with degrees. The part time librarians do not get benefits where the neighboring towns do receive some benefits.

Ms. Harris thanked the staff for working with her. She presented two scenarios that would allow the staff and the custodians to receive some type of increase. She added that they had been working on restarting the Passport program where residents can come to the Library to submit passport requests. The revenue for that program goes to the City, not the Library.

Mr. Schmitt said that he could not support the request for $50,000 and would be working with Ms. Harris to identify some reasonable increases for the positions. Because the information arrived so late in the process, he needs to do more research. The department is recommending that they stay at 671.

Mr. Abrams said that he tended to agree with Mr. Schmitt on this. Ms. Yang said that she was sympathetic to the situation. Ms. Harris said that the staff works very hard and repeated that the library is open seven days a week between 7 and 10 hours.

Mr. Abrams then asked Mr. Ellis for the information on how many requests there were for additional staff and how many the Finance Department was recommending. There were request for 13 additional staff members with a dollar amount of $946,000 and the Finance Department was supporting six of those positions which will cost $409,000. Some of those are part time positions. There were five additional police officers requested and the recommendation is not to add them at this time. The requested Recycling Coordinator position is recommended, but Mr. Ellis explained that the position will be funded with the NIP bottle money they receive from the State. He said that the City will receive those payments twice a year and they will average about $35,000 each.

Mayor Rilling said that he was somewhat disappointed to see the requests for 13 additional staff members despite his earlier request to limit hires to absolutely essential positions. He said that even if a position is vacant, the City is not looking to fill it. Both the City and State are uncertain about the financial status during the next few years.

Harbor Commission – Mr. Ellis said that Mr. Chris MacDonnell and Mr. Alan Kibbe were present on the call. Mr. Ellis said that he had spoken with Mr. MacDonnell about the revenues. Mr. Kibbe said that Mr. MacDonnell handles all the grant applications for the Commission. Mr. Kibbe said that since they raised their fees in order to lower their grant request. There was a question about why the revenue decreased. Mr. MacDonnell said that they were requesting $10,000 instead of $20,000, which is why the revenue line decreased. He explained that the 23/24 fiscal numbers were skewed because most of the revenue comes from both individual and club managed fields mooring fees. He gave the details. The 2023 fees came in after July 1st. Mr. Kibbe explained that they work on a January/December calendar year rather than July/June calendar. Discussion followed about the details.

Mr. MacDonnell and Mr. Kibbe both said that the Commission is working on becoming more self- sufficient. Currently, they are at approximately 80% self-sufficient.

Ms. Yang asked for a five year run on the revenue. Mr. MacDonnell said that 2023 was the first year that they raised the fees. It was agreed that Mr. MacDonnell would present three years' worth of figures based on the January to December calendar year.

Atty. Camacho asked what the $15,000 that the City gave them last year do for them and what would the $10,000 grant this year do. Mr. MacDonnell said they pay the Harbor Master about $12,000 a year, and also pay for the Water Quality interns a stipend and some additional expenses. They are also investing in the transient moorings and they did some maintenance on the Harbor Master's boat last year. The Commission also pays for the occasional abandoned vessel which has to be hauled out and broken down. This can cost between $5,000 and $6,000. The Planning Consultant costs $20,000 and he guides the Commission through the DEEP process.

Atty. Camacho asked what would happen if the Commission did not get their grant funding. Mr. MacDonnell said that probably they would not be able to do the transient mooring because the other items are all basically fixed expenses.

Ms. Yang asked whether the Harbor Commission line item listed as the Health Department was for the City Health Department or the State Health Department. Mr. Kibbe explained that this was because the interns gather water samples. Mr. MacDonnell said that the Harbor Commission runs the program but the Norwalk Health Department contributes $3,000 as does the Shellfish Commission to offset what is being billed to them directly.

Mr. Jellerette asked if the yacht clubs were delinquent in paying the mooring fees. Mr. MacDonnell said that it was just a timing issue.

Fair Housing – Mr. Ellis said that they were still working on the line item details. He explained that there was a $10,000 expense item listed on the wrong line. They have to correct it and send it back to the Board.

Mr. Jalen Sead greeted the Board Members and explained that they did not have a staff member at this time. He said that sometime in the past they had been requested to combine a number of items into one line that included contract services, office expenses, seminars and equipment because they are such a small department. Mr. Ellis said that as long as they had back up for that money, they were good.

Transit District – Mr. Ellis spoke about the previous night's lengthy discussions. One item was the interest costs on a line of credit they carry. The Finance Department will be working with them in the coming days to reduce those costs.

Mr. Pentz said that they had an $18 million dollar budget. They generate revenue but they also receive money from the State. There are non-reimbursable expenses, one of which is the cost of the interest on the line of credit. When the District submits invoices to the State, there is usually a month long lag before they are paid. Those operating expenses are part of the reason they have the line of credit. Interest rates have increased. There is also a major capital renovation underway. While this practice is nothing new, the interest expense is growing. He said that he would be working with Mr. Ellis on this problem. Mr. Pentz said that he had spoken with the State about the payment lag and they have improved slightly. Once the construction project is completed, there should not be as many lags in the reimbursement process.

Mr. Jellerette said that the amount has been consistent for a number of years and asked whether there would be a way that the City could lend the money to the Transit District for their working capital. Right now, it is Prime plus a quarter, which is 7.9%. Mr. Schmitt said that the Finance Department will look into this to see if there are other options.

Mr. Abrams thanked Mr. Schmitt, Mr. Pentz and Mr. Ellis for their time.

Mr. Abrams said that the last open item was the City head count history, which was sent out earlier in the day. He asked if there were any additional questions from the Board. There were no more questions at this time.

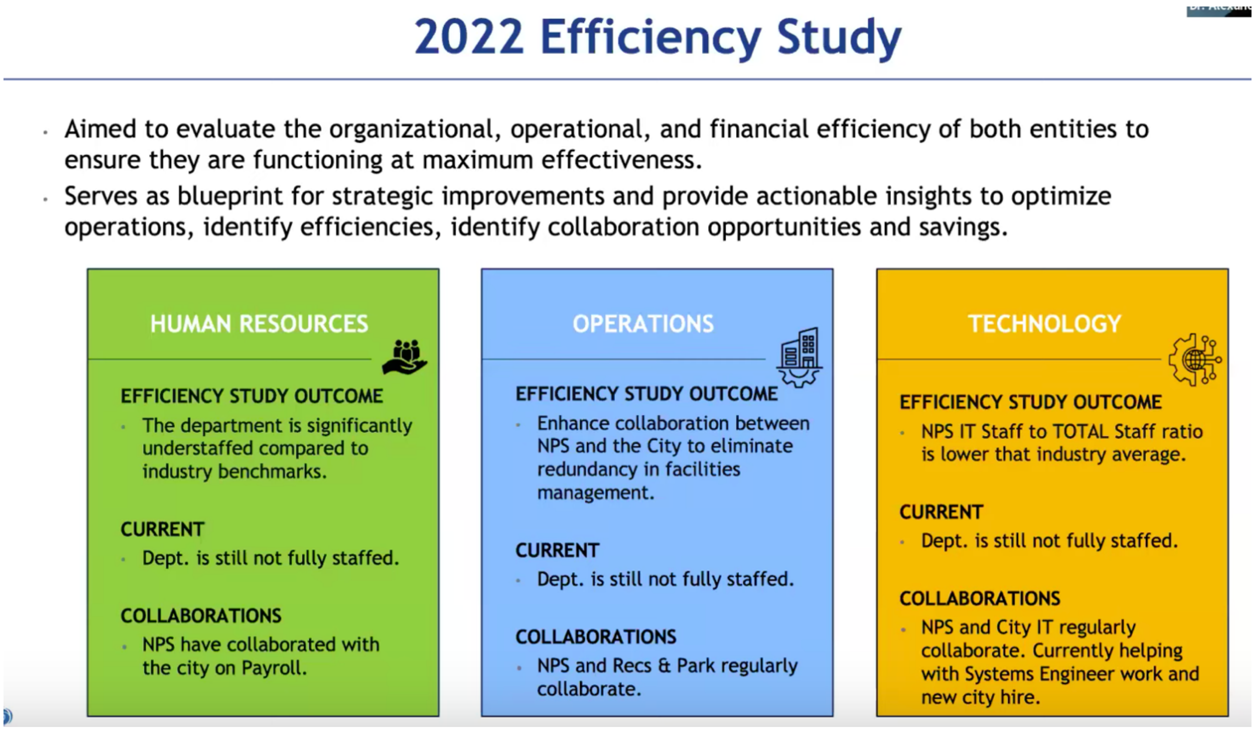
- **Board of Education**

Dr. Estrella greeted the Board Members. She then narrated a PowerPoint presentation. She said that they all share a deep commitment to Norwalk's future. She said that she was present to ask for sustained funding for the children. Norwalk has been recognized by a number of organizations that include the recognition of the excellence of Norwalk schools. She noted that the District was facing a critical fiscal challenges that will have an immediate and significant impact on the students, staff and programs. Inflation affects everything while the needs continue to grow. These are not optional expenses, they are essential to providing safe, effective and high quality schools where every student has the opportunity to grow. She recognizes the Mayor's priority to safe guard and protect taxpayers' dollars.

Norwalk Public Schools has operated with discipline and responsibility by streamlining operations, partnering with the City to reduce redundancies and identifying efficiencies. Yet the gap between the rising costs and the budget increases continues to grow each year.
She asked if the City was prepared to risk the progress they have made for savings or if they are ready to invest wisely now for the long term well-being of Norwalk. Quality schools are not an expense, they are a foundation. The schools have shown real growth, including an increased graduation rate and a drop in depression and suicide ideation. This momentum should not be

reversed. She urged the Board to support the BOE request because it will prepare future generations to meet the challenges of life.

She then said that the team would like to walk the Board through the District needs.



Mr. Asmani noted that they work closely with the HR team and he went on to give examples of how the staff assist one another to cover vacancies.

Ms. Faioes then greeted the Board and gave an overview of her department's work and noted that they work with the Recreation and Parks. She noted that the efficiency study indicated that the BOE should expand their staff to address the needs across all three of the categories.

Dr. Estrella said that the Technology Department has built an efficient system, the efficiency study indicated that the BOE should expand their staff to address the needs in this area.

The BOE has been working to insure that the students have the tools to meet their goals throughout their K-12 years in the schools, including providing social/emotional support that have occurred due to the pandemic. Student have experienced a great deal of stress during that time. These tools include: Social and Emotional Supports (SEL); Choice Pathways, and Music/Arts programs.

Dr. Estrella explained that the SEL component includes counselors in all elementary schools; SEL services in all middle schools and SEL services and clinicians from partners in all high schools. The District has seen a distinct drop in suicidal ideation and a corresponding increase in students having a sense of belonging since 2021. She noted that they had already lost SEL support at the middle and high schools because those positions were paid through grants. The program gains are now at risk.

Dr. Estrella then went to speak about the Choice Pathways which allows the student to choose whether they wish to enter college or the daily work world. There have been investments in the teachers training for the IB pathway and investments in the teacher training, materials and planning for the Marine Science pathway. The IB program is in Naramake and feeds into Nathan Hale and Roton and ultimately to Brien McMahon and CGS.

In the area of Marine Science, it only was available at the high school level but now they start exposing their students in kindergarten with the Maritime Center. These programs provide experiences for the students to choose a career path.

The Norwalk Schools Music and Art program are well known. The District has made a $600,000 investment in new instruments, and all the elementary schools offer Band now. The Performing Arts program that includes dance and theater. This program is unique to Norwalk and residents take a great deal of pride in. She spoke about the various ranks that the high school bands have achieved. This is due to the continuum that starts in kindergarten and continues through elementary school, middle school and high school.

Dr. Estrella then reviewed the Performance index for the various Connecticut cities.

District Performance Index (DPI) for Connecticut Cities*

Outperformed peer City school districts in the **District Performance Index (DPI)** English Language Arts (ELA), Math & Science

English Language Arts DPI

City	2023	2024
State	*63.9*	*63.9*
Norwalk	**59.4**	**59.5**
Stamford	58.5	57.9
Danbury	57.8	55.4
New Haven	50.8	50.9
Waterbury	50.7	51.9
Bridgeport	49.5	49.0
Hartford	47.4	47.1
New Britain	46.4	46.6

Math DPI

City	2023	2024
State	*59.7*	*60.2*
Norwalk	**55.4**	**56.8**
Stamford	54.4	54.3
Danbury	52.9	51.8
Waterbury	43.8	44.7
New Haven	43.0	43.7
Bridgeport	41.8	43.0
Hartford	41.8	42.8
New Britain	39.9	40.9

Science DPI

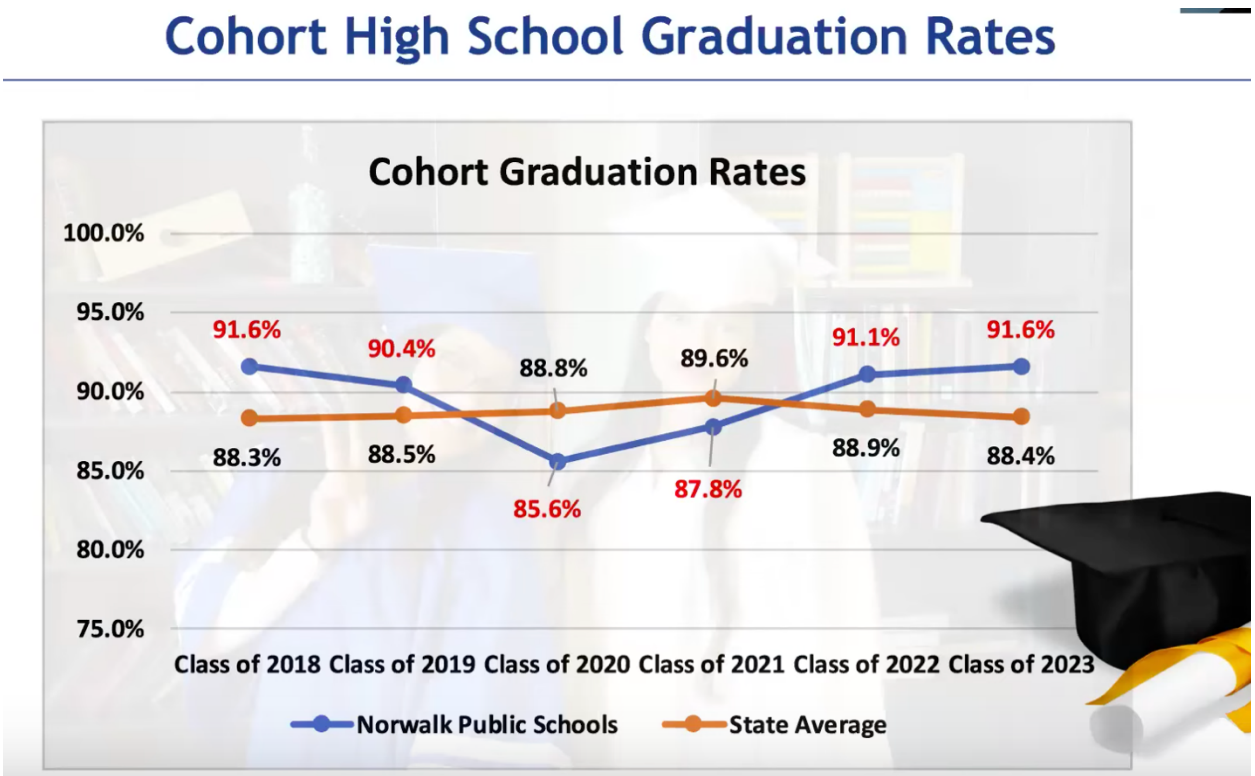
City	2023	2024
State	*61.6*	*61.8*
Norwalk	**56.7**	**55.1**
Stamford	56.0	56.1
Danbury	54.7	53.3
New Haven	46.6	47.6
Waterbury	46.6	46.8
Hartford	45.5	45.7
Bridgeport	45.4	46.4
New Britain	43.1	43.5

Population over 70,000

Dr. Estrella noted that Norwalk has maintained this performance pattern over the last three years.

Over the past years, there has been a long term pattern of chronic absenteeism. The District has focused on this and chronic absenteeism has reached the lowest level since 2020-21. There has been a 9% decline from the peak in 2021-22 from 26.8% to 17.3%. This has result in the District having a lower chronic absenteeism rate than the State average. This decline cannot happen without a focus on student mental health.

Dr. Estrella also reviewed the figures for the recent increase in graduation rates. When she arrived in the District, the graduation rate was declining. The graduation rate has been increasing



and if this year's forecast is accurate, they will have a graduation rate of 92%.

Mr. Asmani then greeted the Board members and reviewed the financial aspect of the Board. He said that there was a QR code to the 78 page BOE budget online. He then gave a brief overview of the process and noted that the slide showed the District's status last year. He noted that the District was working to obtain the 4% increase that the Mayor has decreed.

Mr. Asmani then spoke about the issue of health insurance and stated that the renewal projection is at 9.9%. Fairfield County has experienced a State regional adjustment of 1% which results in a total of 10.9% He noted that the other counties – Hartford, Litchfield, Middlesex, New Haven, New London, Tolland and Windham had experience decreases in their regional adjustments.

He reviewed the details of the changes in the CIGNA plan, which is for the teachers, and some of the teachers opted for the high deductible plan. Last year, the CIGNA plan increased by 15%.

The key budget drivers are contractual wage increases (2.8%); employee health insurance (2.5%) and the grants shifting to the local budgets (1.0%). He noted that the District has lost a number of grants that were not included in the budget.

Mr. Asmani then spoke about the phasing out of City ARPA grant funding, specialized needs, and transportation costs. The State has noted that the specialized needs expenses is a state wide issue.

He said that the South Norwalk School will be opening up and they have been adding a grade each year. This will incur additional expenses including three additional teachers and three additional para staff along with utilities, custodial staff and maintenance. The food services fund will also increase as costs increases.

Mr. Asmani then displayed the General Fund Tentative Approved Budget and reviewed the details of the various category line items listed on pages 35 thru 38.

FY25-26 BOE General Fund Tentative Approved

	2021-22 ACTUAL	2022-23 ACTUAL	2023-24 ACTUAL	2024-25 APPROVED	2025-26 TENT. APPROV.	FY25-FY26 VARIANCE AMOUNT	%
GENERAL FUND SUMMARY							
City General Fund Contribution	208,913,949	217,822,848	226,572,584	233,360,344	255,955,975	22,595,631	9.7%
Total General Fund Revenue	**208,913,949**	**217,822,848**	**226,572,584**	**233,360,344**	**255,955,975**	**22,595,631**	**9.7%**
Salaries	126,320,819	128,799,077	140,581,320	153,632,229	160,485,877	6,853,648	4.5%
Benefits	35,549,178	38,935,755	34,927,104	35,389,758	41,466,596	6,076,838	17.2%
Professional & Technical Services	7,768,305	9,012,912	7,921,625	8,398,772	9,990,297	1,591,524	18.9%
Property Services	7,544,751	8,453,945	9,407,164	10,276,850	11,262,062	985,212	9.6%
Other Services	18,127,718	21,981,528	23,934,852	24,272,811	26,982,006	2,709,194	11.2%
Supplies & Materials	10,153,615	7,948,114	7,551,854	8,964,290	10,562,296	1,598,006	17.8%
Equipment	3,134,427	2,497,842	1,912,990	1,619,491	2,117,555	498,064	30.8%
Other Objects	172,949	193,676	135,675	173,277	185,040	11,764	6.8%
Transfers	-	-	200,000	500,000	1,200,000	700,000	140.0%
Adjustments	142,187	-	-	(9,867,134)	(8,295,753)	1,571,381	-15.9%
Total General Fund Expenditures	**208,913,949**	**217,822,848**	**226,572,584**	**233,360,344**	**255,955,975**	**22,595,631**	**9.7%**

Mr. Asmani then spoke about the grant funding and noted that like the City, the Board was wondering what will happen with the grant funding. The next slide listed a number of grants that the District received previously. He said that they anticipate receiving approximately $890,000 for the District. The Governor and General Assembly are looking to change the ECS funding for 2027. The summary of these grants and a break-down of the funding is included in the budget book.

One of the questions that the BET asked was for more information on what the District was doing regarding the budget gap between 9.7% and the required 4% gap. Mr. Asmani said that they have been working with the schools to address the $13,261,217 dollar differential in order to reconcile the budget. These changes also include how the staffing is assigned. The majority of the distribution is in elementary schools.

Fourteen positions have been eliminated at Central office. An additional 79 elementary school positions have been reduced. The middle schools will have a reduction of 21 full time employees. At the high schools, a total of 20 full time positions will be eliminated.

In summary, 121 positions will be eliminated. These reductions total approximately $11,400,000. This is not only challenging for Central Office, but also for the schools.

Mr. Asmani thanked the Board for their time.

Dr. Estrella summarized the District's current status as 5.6% over the prior year, and these reductions affect real people, programs and services. Without funding, class size increases and student support diminishes. The District was requesting that the Board consider an additional Fund Balance draw down.

Many programs are being dismantled. These funding reductions will also start impacting the numerous programs that has brought the District this far.

Dr. Estrella thanked the Mayor for supporting the District last year. Mr. Abrams thanked the District for their thoughtful presentation.

Mayor Rilling said that over the past few years, he has seen significant improvement in the District. He has visited every single school at least once, if not several times, each year. It is challenging to find extra funding. He said that the City has to be careful of drawing down the Fund Balance so they don't end up draining the account to the point where they are outside of the rating agency guidelines. He said that he would continue to work with Senator Duff and will sit down with Dr. Estrella and the staff to look for a solution. He thanked the District staff for the wonderful presentation and acknowledged that they were working on a shoe string. He said that his administration had given $78 million dollars in increases to the BOE during his administration. The students are the most important priority in the City. When the students thrive and succeed, so does the City.

Ms. Yang said that the presentation was helpful and asked about the guaranteed transportation figures in relation to the School Choices program. Dr. Estrella said that Wolfpit was a magnet arts school and the students come from all over the city. There are a number of magnet schools in the city. The District provides transportation for the families so the students can take advantage of the programs regardless of where they live.

Ms. Faioes said that the cost has been progressive over the last three years and noted that there was a presentation that broke down for the full Board's approval. The current costs was $700,000 and by next year, it will be about $900,000. Ms. Yang wished to know how long the

District had been offering guaranteed transportation. Ms. Faioes reviewed the history of the guarantee transportation which predated the administration.

Ms. Yang wished to know if the Choice programs would continue if the guaranteed transportation was not available. She also wished to know why they were not utilizing public transportation.

Ms. Faioes explained that previously, parents had been asking for intra-district transfers but these were all parents who could provide transportation. Other parents were interested but due to work schedules, the students couldn't access the programs at other schools. She gave the details. Dr. Estrella said that not everyone has the luxury of private transportation and some of the schools are not accessible by public transportation routes.

Ms. Faioes said that the District was required by law to provide students with transportation if they live within certain parameters, such as residing more than 2 miles from their school. Even with a robust public bus system, the District would still be required to provide transportation for the minors. Students can choose to use the public transportation, but the District has an obligation to provide transportation. There is a requirement regarding when the students are allowed to walk to and from school and up to that threshold, the District is required to provide transportation.

Ms. Yang then asked about the costs for the new South Norwalk School that were listed on page 67 of the budget. She wished to have some clarification on the need to have 43 staff members at a school that only has K-3 grades. Mr. Asmani then reviewed the figures with her and noted that this was the beginning of bringing the building online.

Ms. Yang asked about the $500,000 for IB training. Ms. Faioes explained that the amount was spread over a three year period and that there was a great deal of training necessary when starting up this type of program. This year's projected cost would be under $100,000.

Atty. Camacho left the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

Ms. Yang asked about the combined purchasing between the City and the District. Mr. Asmani said that they work closely with the City and collaborate on the same purchasing platform. Mr. Schmitt confirmed this and said that they collaborate as much as possible.

Ms. Yang said that the City had ARPA funding for the last five years. She wished to know how many of the COVID era funded jobs would continue. Mr. Asmani said that two budget cycles there were a number of discussions about the ESSER funds that would be expiring. Some of the positions that were ESSER funded were phased out but another group continued on because of conditions that developed during COVID and the District had the opportunity to address them along with other pre-COVID issues. Discussion followed about the details.

Mr. Constant said that there was an increase in MLL and Special Needs. He wished to know if there was a way to speed up the students to help them acclimate into the general student population. Dr. Estrella explained that it often depended on when the student entered the system. Those in early childhood programs that help with providing a strong entry into kindergarten. If the student comes in at a later time, they have interventionist and special education teachers supporting those students. The graduation rates for MLL students and Special Education students have increased. Ms. Faioes noted that most of their incoming students are not at the pre-school level. Mr. Pennington added that the District partners with afterschool programs to provide additional support.

Mr. Jellerette reminded everyone that the BOE was the biggest portion of the budget. The following line contains the debt service of $42 million dollars that was generated by Cranbury, Norwalk High School and the new South Norwalk School in addition to the renovations that other schools have received. While they would love to give as much as they could, there are also guard rails in place because the BET is the fiduciary body responsible to the City.

Mr. Jellerette asked what the current student count was. Earlier in the year, it was projected to be 11,415 as of October 2025. Ms. Faioes said that the current enrollment was 11,720 students. Ms. Faioes said that while they upload the data to the State in October, they keep a rolling count of the student body.

Mr. Jellerette asked about the AIT vs. P-Tech. He asked if there were still three buses going to Stamford for P-Tech. Ms. Faioes said that there were still some students commuting to Stamford but they were down to one bus. Dr. Estrella said that AIT and P-Tech are very different, one is focused on eventual college while the other is more practical.

Mr. Jellerette asked if the anticipated $890,000 was included in the 4%. Mr. Asmani said that it was not. He explained that they expected to receive that money from the State for this fiscal year and it should arrive before June 30th. The Board has been considering whether they should ask for a Special Appropriation but that money from the state may cover the Special Education costs.

Mr. Jellerette asked about a past situation when the City CFO assisted the BOE. Mr. Asmani explained that the City CFO left the City and moved to the BOE. At that time, the CFO covered both the City and the BOE for about three months. Mr. Jellerette said he would like to see more consolidation.

Dr. Estrella explained that the BOE's services and needs are very different from the City's services and needs. Both groups collaborate with payroll and wherever they can. However, with HR, the District has not been able to add a staff member. She reiterated that both the State and Federal government have very different regulations for them.

Mayor Rilling thanked everyone for the questions. He noted that it takes a lot of courage to have an efficiency study from an outside source. NPS immediately agreed to have one. He noted that the study results don't always end up with saving money. This study noted that NPS was understaffed in several areas. Both the City and the District have been working to identify where they could combine efforts. Between both groups there are about 2,000 employees. He encouraged the BET not to reduce the 4% that has been presented and also said that he would work with Dr. Estrella to look for opportunities without increasing the MBR. The students are a priority. He spoke about the creativity he has seen since Dr. Estrella came on board. This is not an easy balance. He believes that they have the talent on both sides to not drop below the 4%.

Dr. Estrella said that this would be her last time presenting to Mayor Rilling and she thanked him for his hard work for the District. They are working on beautifying the school for the students. She said that they can't have beautiful schools without great programs. She noted that the Ponus Ridge work happened due to grant funding. She thanked the Mayor again for his partnership.

Mr. Abrams encouraged the Mayor and Dr. Estrella to continue to work together and to be creative. He reminded everyone that $242 million dollars was not a shoestring budget. It is not insignificant. This is a significant amount of money that the City is investing in schools today. This is 55% of the total City's budget and it goes up to 60% if one adds in the in kind services. The MBR must stay where it is. He encouraged the District to be creative, but said that it would not be right to think that the City of Norwalk was not investing in education.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

**** MAYOR RILLING MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services