

**CITY OF NORWALK**  
**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**February 6, 2019**

**PRESENT:** Frances DiMeglio, Chair; David Davidson; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Steve Ferguson; Nora King; Mary Peniston (after the roll call)

**STAFF:** Steve Kleppin; Mike Wrinn

**OTHERS:** Diane Lauricella; Joe Madaffari; Doug Marchetti; Bob Fosina; Dawn DiNoto; Neil Putterman; Ken Hughes; Mike Barbis; Maria Bassett; Jeff Walsh; Christian Miller; Kevin Grady; Matt Bury; Kathryn Sellschop ; Diane Lauricella; Dave Williams; Christian Miller; Jody Sattler; Brian Rugar; Joe Hoffman; Alex Papadopoulos; Joe Dioro; Rich Bonenfant; Elsa Obuchowski; Barbara Meyer-Mitchell; Brad Craighead; Joe Rodriguez; Rob Pennington; Lisa LaRusso and Mary Cambareri; Ally Griffin; Nicholas Brophy; Asia Johnson; Rob Schutze; Heather McHugh; Kirk Wennerstrom; David Young; Bill Holdel; Tom Hamilton

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Mr. Kleppin called the roll.

**III. PUBLIC HEARINGS**

Before the public spoke, Ms. DiMeglio asked if anyone would like to speak with a particular department. If no one did, the department representative was dismissed. She then explained the rules of the public hearing and asked that the speakers keep their remarks to between 3 – 5 minutes.

**a) Capital Budget – 2019-20 to 2023-24**

**1. Public Works (DPW) (Includes WPCA)**

Diane Lauricella, 21 Blue Mountain Rd., began by noting that the department was a large department. She noted that past directors had dismissed her ideas about using sustainable vehicles and not using ones that use fossil fuels. She expressed concern about climate change. Larger trucks could use less fossil fuels. She knew that \$2 million was given to DPW for storm water management due to the recent storms and asked that the Planning Commission put a caveat on the funds that were requested. She suggested that they use more environmental friendly solutions such as white roofs, etc. Sludge management was an economic development issue. She said the smell was not low tide but the smell from the sludge.

Ms. DiMeglio asked Mr. Kleppin to explain the re-organization. Transportation, Mobility and Parking had been broken out of DPW. Ms. King then explained the split and told the public members that there was a new department created which would handle sidewalks, footpaths, etc. Members of the public could speak later.

## 2. Recreation and Parks

Ms. DiMeglio said that she would start with anyone that had children.

Joe Madaffari, 6 Allen Drive spoke in favor of the softball field at Brien McMahon so that it would help the girls' play.

Doug Marchetti, Athletic Director at Norwalk High, spoke in favor of the tennis court project at Norwalk High School. He explained how the courts were water damaged. He even said that they lost a season, 2 years ago, because of the problems. He didn't think it was a safe environment and it might cause injuries. He also was in support of the turf softball fields. There was a discussion of the concrete system for the tennis court. Other schools in the area had this new system and raved about them.

Bob Fosina, 206 Ponus Avenue, spoke in favor of the turf fields at West Rocks School. He gave several reasons for how he felt. He also noted that since there was an initiative to start school earlier, the fields would be used longer. Practice would start later than other fields because of the conditions which were unsafe. He noted that some of the city's teams were in the soccer tournaments because of the new turf fields. They had more practice and playing times.

Dawn DiNoto, of Top SOCCER, spoke in support of the turf fields and brought some of the players up to the podium with her. They thanked the commissioners for their consideration.

Neil Putterman, 3 Valley View Rd., Babe Ruth Softball League, spoke in support of the turf field at Brien McMahon. He read the comments of his colleague, Jody Sattler, who also spoke in support of the field as well. She noted that the girls' games were being cancelled because the fields cannot be used. Mr. Putterman said that some of the fields are not as good as others, because of weeds, the grading of the fields, etc. Although they have hosted some state tournaments, the fields were not up to par and it was embarrassing for the city. He noted that there are 300 girls playing in Norwalk but that they lost some girls to better fields in other towns. He noted that other cities in Fairfield County had good fields, such as Bridgeport, Danbury and Stamford.

Ken Hughes spoke about why a feasibility study was being done. He said that the study would show which field would be the best to use. There was a discussion about the difference between metal cleats or turf cleats and that both would be needed if playing these posts. Mr. Davidson asked Mr. Hughes to provide a timeline placeholder within the next week. He said he would try but it would be difficult to do since he still did not know where the field would be.

Ms. DiMeglio noted that she was pleased to see so many members of the public at this hearing. She also wanted to know if anyone was going to speak on having bathrooms at Nathan Hale and asked people to send letters if they were concerned as well. There was then a discussion about turning a field at Ponus into a turf field. Mr. Barbis said that since this was a state project, they do not pay for that. There was then a discussion about staffing the bathrooms by the Recreation and Parks Dept. and leaving them clean.

Maria Bassett, Norwalk Youth Hockey League, explained that they started in 2012 and have grown. She spoke in support of the turf fields and that they played at Nathan Hale. She asked that the fields need to be lined for field hockey and lacrosse. She said they had to turn some girls away. She said that they could not practice on grass fields.

Jeff Walsh, 130 Rowayton Avenue, spoke in support of the turf fields at Brien McMahon.

Christian Miller, a senior at Norwalk High School, who spoke in favor of the tennis courts at Norwalk High School. He noted that it was not just students that used the courts but lessons were given there as well as other residents playing on it.

Kevin Grady, the boys' tennis director at Norwalk High School, spoke in favor of the tennis courts at Norwalk High. He agreed with others who supported the tennis courts.

Matt Bury, said that he had moved from Denver two years ago. He said that his son played for the soccer program. He asked that all the Norwalk soccer players in the room stand up and there were quite a few children who did. He spoke in favor of more fields that if there were more fields, then more children could play. He then read a letter into the record. He also noted that more kids are playing soccer but there not enough facilities for them to play on.

Kathryn Sellschop, 5 Farm Creek Road, spoke in support of the turf fields at Brien McMahon and that there should be equity between the girls and boys sports programs. She thought that they should look carefully at budgets to make sure that it happens for women.

Diane Lauricella agreed with the prior speaker about equity in sports. She then suggested a soccer field or ball field at Cranbury or Taylor Farms. She then said that the All Saints field was going to be sold. She thought the city should have a first right of refusal. She then questioned the health benefits of playing on an artificial turf field which she believed could cause cancer. She said that Westport was looking into using different types of turf fields.

Dave Williams, President of Babe Ruth Baseball, spoke in support of Nathan Hale fields. He thanked everyone for the great job that had been done. He also said that he would do showcases for recruiting for colleges. He noted that teams were now going to tournaments. He spoke in support of the turf fields. He then said that they practice with turf shoes or play in metal. Mr. Hughes also agreed with that. There was a discussion about the Nathan Hale

bathrooms and parking. There was also a discussion about the parking at West Rocks. Ms. King said she was thrilled that there were so many people supporting the ball fields.

Christian Miller spoke in support for the fields at Broad River. He thought that the city was doing a great job with the fields but that the Little League was also providing fences, etc. He asked that any help that the city could provide in the Capital Budget was needed.

Jody Sattler, 17 Highland Avenue, noted that she worked for softball league for 8 years. She said that she makes sure that games happen including ones for lacrosse, field hockey, etc. She said it is hard for her daughter to watch her brother play on a turf field in the rain when she could not. It is not an equal situation. If the fields were turf they could play more.

Brian Rugar, 29 Granite Drive, a girls' softball coach, spoke in support of the turf fields and that it was important for girls' softball. He also noted that the fields would help the cheer squads which went to National Championships in Orlando.

Joe Hoffman, 151 Grumman Ave., asked for a round of applause for the Planning Commissioners for listening to everyone. He noted that some of his neighbors had moved to other surrounding towns. He said he loved Norwalk because it is a mixture of city and suburbs. He supported the fields to keep kids off the electronics and get them playing. He thought that parents would appreciate that, if they could facilitate that.

Alex Papadopoulos said he had been born and raised in Norwalk. He asked if other organizations paid for using the fields. He also wanted to know if they could rent fields to generate revenue. Mr. Hughes explained how the rental of the facilities worked and that they rented them to non-profits. The schools had priority, however

Joe Dioro, 11 Lancaster Drive, explained how he grew up in Norwalk and thanked all of the commissioners for their time. He said when he was growing up and liked playing in other towns because of how nice the fields. He said that he wanted the Planning Commissioners should know that the community wanted nice fields because it was important to property values. He said that there should be basic improvements on the fields so it was fair and equitable for all.

At about 8:25 p.m. the commissioners took a break and then returned 10 minutes later.

4. Library – Rich Bonenfant asked about funding that was set aside for purchasing the parking lot near the library. Christine Bradley, the director of the library, explained that the Capital Budget request was for the design. The following year would be for the construction if the City decided to exercise its option.

5. Transportation, Mobility and Parking – Elsa Obuchowski, East Avenue, had questions about an intersection and crosswalk at Route 1 and East Avenue which she thought was very dangerous. She thought this would be a good spot for a crosswalk.

Rich Bonenfant, 17 Park Hill Ave., noted that the project was not scheduled for funding for 2 years. He noted that no one knew about this project and that it should be studied more. He wondered if congestion would get worse. He thought that more study should be done because he did not think the neighbors knew about it. He was against a crosswalk.

Barbara Meyer-Mitchell, 10 Allen Road, who serves for Norwalk ACTs spoke about walkability and bike ability in Norwalk. She said that there was no access for children to walk especially in the winter. She also discussed the fact that there are areas in the city that are not walkable. She noted that there could be a greenway to connect areas of the city. Mr. Mushak noted that the original footpaths were put in to enable kids to walk to school but they have not been updated since the 1970s when they were first installed

Brad Craighead, 85 East Avenue, gave out 5 handouts to the commissioners provided by Norwalk Green. They are trying to raise awareness about how unsafe the area is. He suggested that there should be study of the corridor from Rt. 1 to Exit 16. He showed them an aerial map of West Avenue which should have many crosswalks but only 2 crosswalks on East Avenue. He then showed them a spreadsheet with the number of buildings and single homes around the green. He said the area was densely populated. There was a discussion about how long it would take to have a study done. Mr. Craighead said that the Green divides the area. He also noted that there are a lot of people in the area because of the offices as well. Mr. Mushak suggested that he reach out to Rich Bonenfant and work with him.

3. Board of Education – Mr. Barbis introduced groups that would support their Capital Budget funding request.

Joe Rodriguez, principal of Rowayton School, which was built 80 years ago. There is a strong sense of community in the school. He advocated for the removal of asbestos in hallways, kindergarten classes, etc. He did not think that doing the work piecemeal was cost effective. He asked for funding to remove all of it over the summer. He noted that the children are experiencing health issues because the carpeting is old. It is hard to keep it clean. Sometimes families that are looking to move to Rowayton will visit the school but this could affect their decision to move to the area.

Rob Pennington, assistant principal at Rowayton School, also spoke in support of the Capital Budget funding for the asbestos removal in the school. He noted that they had done some projects on their own without Capital Budget support.

Lisa LaRusso and Mary Cambareri, two kindergarten teachers at Rowayton School, spoke together in support of the asbestos removal. Ms. LaRusso said that the carpets had been placed in the classrooms when she started 31 years ago. Ms. Cambareri noted that the carpeting covered broken tiles with asbestos. The children were sitting on the floors. It was noted that several teachers in the school have died of lung cancer. Kids are more exposed to the floor dust. Many of the teachers feel sick while at school and then better when they go home. The carpet would be removed but since it is not over the tiles that are covering asbestos, it would not be covered under the state grant.

Ally Griffin, 24 Valley Road, PTA president, said she was representing the parents who signed a petition about the asbestos removal. They were concerned about how unsafe the duct tape on the floors were. There was a discussion about tapping into an emergency fund. The plan is to do the project over the summer while the children were out of school. There was also a question about how much more money would be needed to get this done. Mr. Hamilton said that if they had to use the emergency funds that they would.

Nicholas Brophy, principal of Jefferson Science Magnet School, spoke in support for the additional Capital Budget funding for this school. He noted that the whole school was carpeted. There are portable classes being used. He was also asking for support of the double vestibules for safety and security reasons. The portables are beyond their usable life.

Asia Johnson, a parent of a student at the Jefferson Science Magnet School, described the lack of security. The carpet is old. She then said that the second floor classes were not enclosed but rather they only had soft walls. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor it is the same way. There was also a gym/cafeteria/auditorium on that floor. She then described how to get into the portables especially in very cold weather for both kids and teachers. She said that the teachers helped the kids thrive.

Rob Schutze, 10 Granite Drive, was a parent of a child at Cranbury and West Rocks. He noted that it was 60 years old and that the only renovation was for asbestos abatement. He was asking that the electrical be upgraded for the air conditioning. He said both schools have a leaky roof. He said that he had recently substituted at West Rocks and did not like the food. He hoped they would support the Capital Funding for both of these schools.

Heather McHugh, 82 Newtown Avenue, said she had children at Cranbury. Her children both suffer from asthma. She was in support of the air conditioning for this school. She said that they PTO could not buy air conditioners because the electrical load could not handle it. She also said that the school needed a renovation as well. She thought the air conditioning was a necessity.

Kirk Wennerstrom, 10 Ox Yoke Lane, supported the air conditioning at Cranbury especially since his daughter was attending. He also supported the renovations at West Rock as well.

David Young supported the air conditioning at Cranbury since the children lost days of school because of heat. He also mentioned that the renovation would be pushed out again, when it had been scheduled. He also supported the renovations at West Rock especially since the cafeteria was overcrowded. There was a clarification for the construction start for Cranbury which would start in 2020. There was also a clarification of what had been requested in the larger Board of Education budget that had been approved several years prior. There was also a discussion about the electrical feeds in Fox Run and Cranbury. There have been discussions with Ever Source. There was a discussion with the commissioners and Bill Holdel as to alternatives to adding air conditioning to the Cranbury School. There was a suggestion of generators to the school.

Barbara Myer Mitchell, on the Common Council at large, spoke in support of the Jefferson Science Magnet School. She also spoke about the air conditioning in all of the schools which was particularly difficult in schools that have more than 1 floor. She noted it would be easier to do work for

air conditioning on schools that are being renovated rather than all at once. She then discussed the renovations for cafeterias especially at West Rocks which would include outdoor seating areas. She also asked for funding for the Chrome Books as well as for the Kendall Media Center.

There was a discussion about the kids getting onto the Internet from the Chrome Books. Mr. Hamilton said there was software on there that prevents them from going where they should not go. Ms. King asked for the Board of Education to send Mr. Wrinn a note about this.

#### **IV. ACTION ON CAPITAL BUDGET**

##### **a) Action on Item III a**

Ms. DiMeglio said that comments would be held open until Friday, February 8.

#### **V. POCD REVIEW – (MOVE TO P & Z Conf. Room, # 220, 2nd floor)**

There was a discussion about changing meeting times. The commissioners decided to meet at 6 p.m. on February 19. For the POCD review meeting, they decided to meet on Thursday, February 21 from noon – 2 p.m.

#### **VI. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR**

There were no comments from the Director.

#### **VII. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS**

There was a conversation about the West Avenue/Wall Street Plan and whether there should be a meeting on February 25 especially if the POCD had not been finalized. Mr. Davidson said he had not supported that plan.

#### **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr. Mushak made a Motion to Adjourn.**

**Ms. King seconded.**

**Frances DiMeglio; David Davidson; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Steve Ferguson;**

**Nora King; Mary Peniston voted in favor.**

**No one opposed.**

**No one abstained.**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero