

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
DECEMBER 9, 2021**

ATTENDANCE: Greg Burnett, Chair; David Heuvelman, Tom Keegan, John Kydes, Diana Revolus; Nora Niedzielski-Eichner (7:07 p.m.)

OTHERS: Chitsamay Lam, Comptroller; Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector; Henry Dachowitz, Finance Director; Sharon Conners, Purchasing Agent; Rita Nigri, Brenda Wilcox-Williams, Chief of Staff and Communications; Michael DePalma, Oak Hills Authority Chair; Lissette Colon, Director of Human Resources; Brian Bidolli, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency

CALL TO ORDER.

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

ROLL CALL.

He announced that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

Mr. Burnett said that there were no emails were received before the meeting. There was no one else from the public present.

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

- **October 14, 2021 – Regular Meeting**

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 14, 2021 REGULAR MEETING.**

Page 1, under **ATTENDANCE**, please change “Nick Tsirindis” to “George Theodoridis”

Page 1, under **STAFF**, please change “Lisa Biagarelli” to “Lisa Biagiarelli”

Page 1, under **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**, please change the following motion from:

**** MOTION TO APPROVE THE CLAIMS AS AMENDED PASSED WITH SIX (6) VIN FAVOR (BURNETT, KEEGAN, HEUVELMAN, SACHINELLI, REVOLUS AND KYDES) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (TSIRINDIS).**

To :

*** MOTION TO APPROVE THE CLAIMS AS AMENDED PASSED WITH SIX (6) IN FAVOR (BURNETT, KEEGAN, HEUVELMAN, SACHINELLI, REVOLUS AND KYDES) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (THEODORIDIS).**

Page 2, under **NARRATIVE FOR TAX COLLECTOR**, please correct all references to “Ms. Biagarelli” to “Ms. Biagiarelli”

Page 2, under **NARRATIVE FOR TAX COLLECTOR**, please change the following from:

Mr. Dachowitz said since March of 2020 he and Ms. Biagarelli have been monitoring cash collections on a weekly basis. He said collections are up 5.2% and added the amount of taxes assessed have been small but the owners will eventually pay their taxes.

To:

Mr. Dachowitz said since March of 2020 he and Ms. Biagarelli have been monitoring cash collections on a weekly basis. The amount of taxes due is small relative to the overall assessed value of properties in Norwalk and that we collect those taxes relatively quickly through the tax sale process.

Council Member Niedzielski-Eichner joined the call at 7:07 p.m.

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 14, 2021 MINUTES AS CORRECTED PASSED WITH FOUR (4) IN FAVOR (HEUVELMAN, KEEGAN, KYDES, REVOLUS) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (NIEDZIELSKI-EICHNER).**

Claims Committee: Receive the monthly Claims Report; review and approve claims as required for Claims Report dated: November 18, 2021 and December 9, 2021.

Ms. Biagiarelli greeted everyone and then gave a summary of the oversight role of the Finance/Claims Committee in relation to the Tax Collector’s Office. She sent out a memo in November giving an outline of her role.

This month packet included claims reports from November and December along with the reports and spreadsheets for the Committee to review.

There was a major refund due to Altice involving four years’ worth of taxes on their vehicles. There were three other refunds which she reviewed with the Committee Members.

City of Norwalk
Finance/Claims Committee
Regular Meeting
December 9, 2021

**** MR. KYDES MOVED TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 18TH CLAIMS REPORT AS PRESENTED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** MR. HEUVELMAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER 9TH CLAIMS REPORT AS PRESENTED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Hevuelman asked what the effect of a major refund like the Altice refund would be on the budget. Mr. Dachowitz gave a brief overview of how the refund is handled and noted that the budget has some funds built in for this type of situation. Ms. Biagiarelli gave a brief overview of the State law involved.

The November 2021 Tax Collector Report was displayed on the screen and Ms. Biagiarelli pointed out the highlights. Tax bills will be sent out next week and due in January. The collections are where they need to be and the office is now fully staffed.

The discussion then moved to the recent increase in COVID cases and what would be done in the event of another lock down. Ms. Biagiarelli explained that her office had remained open throughout the entire first COVID lock down by opening an outside customer window.

Narrative on Tax Collections dated November 18, 2021 and December 9, 2021 – Receive Report and discuss.

Monthly Tax Collector’s Reports dated October 2021 and November 2021– Receive Report and discuss.

Mr. Burnett pointed out that the two items were for discussion only. She was asked about the staffing level in the department. Ms. Biagiarelli said that they had a new cashier that started on December 6th.

Receive Oak Hills Authority monthly Financial Statements for September 2021, October 2021, and Financial Statements with Independent Auditors’ Report for the Year Ended June 30, 2021.

Mr. DePalma, the Oak Hills Authority Chair, greeted the Committee and said that the Authority was well positioned not to have to use their line of credit. A total of \$45,000 has been repaid to the City and another check will be sent out tomorrow. The continuous cart paths project is on schedule. The restaurant is scheduled to open next week-end.

Council Member Kydes asked if the increase in revenue was coming from the season passes. Mr. DePalma said that while it provided off season cash on hand, there were mixed feelings about keeping the program. Golf rounds are up and have been sustained past the first year.

Council Member Revolus asked what the Authority was doing to open up the course to those in the community who would not normally access the area. Mr. DePalma said that he would be meeting with Mr. Alexander about the youth golf program. He added that the Nature portion of the Park needed to be promoted more. Having the meeting space available will also be helpful. Another area that needs to be promoted is the tennis program which is separate from the Authority.

Mr. Hevuelman said that there were no line items in the budget for the Nature Center programs in order to utilize the park. Mr. DePalma said that they were putting the upcoming budget together and he would check with Audrey, who runs the Nature programs for the park.

Mr. DePalma said that the auditor's report did not have any surprises. The cash position is still in the negative due to the restaurant and they are looking forward to changing that in the coming months. Discussion followed on the long term debt for the equipment.

Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute the agreement between the City of Norwalk and the Norwalk Board of Education and the UPSEU Custodians, Maintenance and Security staff to modify the collective bargaining agreement and City of Norwalk Pension Plan with respect to a 2021 Retirement Incentive Offering.

Ms. Wilcox-Williams was present to give an overview on the item. She noted that Ms. Colon, the Human Resources Director was present as a representative for the custodians.

**** MR. HEVUELMAN MOVED THE ITEM.**

Ms. Colon gave a brief summary of the employees that would qualify for the offer and noted that those who took the offer would receive an additional 3 years of service for pension benefits and included some medical and dental benefits. Out of the 38 employees that qualified, only 6 elected to take advantage of the offer, and 5 of those employees decided to continue benefits as retirees.

Mr. Burnett said that Mr. Burney had sent an email in support of this offer. He added that Mr. Hamilton had stated that this would bring \$100,000 per year in savings to the City.

Discussion followed about the details of the offer and benefits. The vacant positions will be filled by the same outside contractor that the City uses for the City buildings.

There were concerns raised about what this would entail; whether a living wage would be paid and whether in the future, the work would be mechanized rather than being done by individuals.

Mr. Hevuelman said that when the outsourcing is being done, the City loses the positions and control to a third party entity.

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH FIVE (5) IN FAVOR (BURNETT, HEVUELMAN, KEEGAN, NIEDZIELSKI-EICHNER, REVOLUS) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (KYDES).**

Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute a contract amendment between City of Norwalk and Advanced Corporate Network, Inc., d/b/a Digital Back Office (“ACN”) to authorize the addition of a new location at 1 Park Street, Norwalk, CT. The parties agree to the addition of One (1) 10 GIGE Managed Optimal Ethernet Services at the following services location Circuit One - City Hall, 125 East Avenue to 1 Park Street with a monthly recurring fee of \$1,536.00 paid for by the Board of Education from expense account# 2ES28400-430-58.

**** MS. NIEDZIELSKI-EICHNER MOVED THE ITEM.**

Mr. Burnett said that this item had been previously tabled three times.

Ms. Revolus said that she felt that the item should continue to be tabled. She was concerned with what was going on in the school system.

Mr. Burnett asked what specific information or clarification Ms. Revolus would like to receive. Ms. Revolus said that it was about her understanding of what the welcoming center was to be. She spoke about the disproportionalities in the schools that exists already which needs to be addressed before adding a new facility. There are many questions that have not been answered. She said that there wasn't a pro-active plan for once a child left the center to insure their welcoming into the school would not be either racist or ineffective. She said that she did not understand why this was not being address right in the schools rather than moving it to another location. There needs to be more conversations about this to deal with the issues.

**** THE MOTION TO TABLE THE ITEM TO THE JANUARY MEETING FAILED WITH THREE (3) IN FAVOR OF THE (KEEGAN, KYDES, REVOLUS) AND THREE (3) AGAINST. (BURNETT, HEVUELMAN, NIEDZIELSKI-EICHNER).**

Mr. Burnett said that as chair, he would cast a tie breaking vote against the tabling.

Mr. Kydes asked about the financial costs, which Mr. Burnett said that the lease would be \$250,000 per year; the initial outfitting cost would be \$250,000, which would result in an initial

outlay of approximately \$500,000. Ms. Wilcox Williams said that the staff for the Family Center would be from the existing staff, so there is no extra staffing costs involved.

There are a number of students already on site and they are using Optimum as an WiFi internet service. Ms. Wilcox Williams said that the program has been on site since the beginning of COVID and they need better service.

Ms. Revolus asked what support would be available for families that received services at the Center and later transferred to another school. Ms. Wilcox Williams said that the services that had been provided were located at City Hall and moved to the Family Center.

Ms. Revolus gave more details about her concerns about the schools providing accountability. Ms. Wilcox Williams said that the Center was more than just a Welcome Center, but also would include language services, transportation services and connect families to the schools. These are District wide services that are being moved to one location.

Ms. Revolus asked what was being done for the students that were already in the District. Ms. Wilcox Williams said that this did not take away from the current, existing students, but enhances them.

Mr. Kydes asked how long the lease term was. Ms. Wilcox Williams said that it was a one year lease. The District has an excellent relationship with the landlord. The District has first rights of renewal for the lease.

**** THE ITEM PASSED WITH FOUR IN FAVOR (BURNETT, NIEDZIELSKI-EICHNER, HEVUELMAN, AND KYDES) AND TWO (2) OPPOSED (REVOLUS, KEEGAN).**

Rescind and New Action for Copier Management Services

- a. RECIND Common Action of May 25th 2021 which authorized the execution of a contract with TGI Office Automation to execute a four (4) year extension on the master agreement.**
- b. Authorize the Mayor to execute Amendment one (1) to the Master Lease Agreement for Office Copiers with TGI Office Automation to execute a four (4) year extension to this master agreement for a total amount not to exceed \$423,166.56.**

**** MR. HEVUELMAN MOVED THE ITEM.**

Ms. Connors, the Purchasing Agent, came forward and presented the contract for extending the contract for the Copier Management Service. The original estimate of approximately \$258,000 did not include the cost per copy.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner asked if they had considered having the cost per copy removed from the contract. Ms. Conners explained that cost per copy was an industry standard.

Mr. Hevuelman asked what the cost of doing things digitally and stated that the cost increase was very large. He asked if there was any way to mitigate this. Ms. Conners reviewed the average monthly volume and daily projections. However, COVID has changed how business is done. When a contract was done previously, the Purchasing Department had to send four complete sets to Corporation Counsel. Now, they send 1 hard copy and 1 digital copy.

Discussion followed about how the individual departments have a line item for copying costs, if departments have their own copying and changing the culture to utilize more digital documentation.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

RESOLUTION: Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to support a Community Challenge Grant application submission, including a local funding letter supporting a fifty percent match, should the funds be awarded, to the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development in support of the South Norwalk Train Station project.

**** MR. KYDES MOVED THE ITEM.**

Mr. Brian Bidolli was present to speak about the work around the South Norwalk Train Station. He gave a brief summary of the study that was done in the area around the train station. An application for the Innovation Corridor Grant is being created.

Mr. Bidolli said that the focus was reinvesting in the community and improve existing housing, along with development opportunities. The infrastructure is critical due to the volume of traffic and a variety of other factors. He listed a number of projects that were underway in the Innovation Corridor. This grant is due in March.

The Community Challenge grant has a focus on improvement of safety along MLK, such as repairing curbing, restriping streets and other infrastructure improvements.

Both grants require 50% matching funds. Mr. Bidolli then spoke about a recent grant award for brown field remediation that could be put towards the matching requirement.

Ms. Revolus asked if the development could be made economically sound for the residents, such as home ownership and business development. Mr. Bidolli said that he had spoken with a Community Developer about this on December 7th. Home ownership is a major piece of the

focus. Making improvements to the existing affordable housing is also important. Discussion followed.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner asked for some clarification on the finances in writing. Mr. Bidolli gave a quick overview of the financial breakouts and said that he would be happy to send the information to the Committee Members. Discussion followed about the details.

Mr. Hevuelman asked if the roadway and sidewalk work was being coordinated with Public Works. Mr. Bidolli said that they were coordinating with Public Works.

The discussion moved to the amount of matching funding and how much would come from the Capital Funds.

Mr. Burnett pointed out that the Grant application was due on January 13th. The Innovation Corridor application was due in March.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner had some concerns about the brown fields grant. Mr. Bidolli said that the grant was offered nationally. It was noted that the grant was restricted to publicly owned land.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT.

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services