

**FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING AND SPECIAL MEETING  
FEBRUARY 17, 2022  
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL TELECONFERENCE**

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ATTENDANCE: Gregory Burnett; David Heuvelman; Thomas Keegan;  
Jenn McMurrer; Nora Niedzielski Eichner; Diana Revolus;  
Mayor Harry Rilling; John Kydes (7:03 p.m.)

STAFF: Henry Dachowitz, Chief Financial Officer; Chitsamay Lam, Controller

OTHERS: Haitian Creole and Spanish Interpreters; Heidi Alterman; Nicol Ayers; Dominique Johnson; Barbara Smyth, Common Council members

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Burnett opened the public hearing at 6:33 p.m.

### **2. ROLL CALL**

Mr. Burnett called the Roll as indicated above. A quorum was present.

### **3. PUBLIC HEARING ON FISCAL YEAR 2022 - 2023 RECOMMENDED OPERATING BUDGET**

Mr. Burnett offered opening remarks. He explained that the public hearing will not address items in the capital budget. The goal is to keep the tax rate as low as possible while maintaining City services. Mr. Burnett explained that they plan to draw down funds from the rainy day fund to provide tax relief; however, it is essential that the draw down has minimal impact on the City's financial posture so they can maintain their AAA bond rating. Mr. Burnett said this is not the end of the process, but is the beginning of the review process.

Mr. Burnett gave an overview of the public hearing procedure. He said that several e-mails were received prior to the meeting and shared with the Common Council members. Ms. Lam will read the e-mails. In addition there will be translators via Zoom.

*Public participation comments are not verbatim and represent a summarization of statements unless otherwise noted.*

Ms. Lam read letters from the following individuals that were submitted in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Alison Noel, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Adriana Hudson, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Amy Strickland, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. April and AJ Winstrom, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Bridget Connelly, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Mr. Gary Wanamaker and Mr. Jason DePalma, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

At this point, Mr. Burnett suggested hearing from people who raised their hands to speak.

Ms. Gloria and Mr. Erik Niederer spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Mr. Kydes joined the meeting at 7:03 p.m.

Mr. Burnett acknowledged members of the Common Council who joined this evening's public hearing.

Ms. Sonia Moralez, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Laura Garcia, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Julie Flemming, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Diane Lauricella, suggested parents study the Board of Education and City budget requests, line by line. She asked that the cap not be raised because there are areas of ineffectiveness in the Board of Education's budget. Ms. Lauricella said she hoped parents would be more demanding with the ECS funding. She outlined areas where savings could be found. She asked that some of the expensive Central office positions be scrubbed and donate that money to fund social and emotional consultants. Ms. Lauricella said there was a need for a permanent sustainability officer and she suggested making the

grants coordinator position full time. Ms. Lauricella offered her assistant to help find important savings.

Rajne did not give last name), spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Diane Carpio, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Jody Sattler, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Astrid offered comments in Spanish.

Ms. Annie offered comments in Spanish.

Ms. Lam resumed reading letters from the following individuals that were submitted in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Mr. Steve Richmond, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget. He also questioned why this public hearing was being held during a school vacation.

Ms. Aria Weisman, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Mr. Edward Dillon, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

He also addressed comments made by Mr. Dachowitz.

Ms. Jennifer Fritz Romano, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Jessica Garnet, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Jessica Hurlehe, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Mr. Burnett resumed hearing from people who raised their hands to speak.

Ms. Cathy Asata, spoke about issues her daughter faces at school and spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Lam resumed reading letters from the following individuals that were submitted in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Mr. Justin Matley, spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

A resident shared concerns about children using the restroom and expressed fear about the multiple threats last fall. They spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Mr. Heuvelman noted that the translator could be heard over the speakers on YouTube.

Mr. Leo Levett spoke in support of the Board of Education's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Maria Iacona Maldonado spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Melissa Dino spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Natalia Cecal spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Mr. Paul Wells asked how it is they have high salaried staff in the Central Office and spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Sarah McGinty spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Tara Ferrara spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Tracy Barkley asked about funding athletics and music in the Norwalk public schools. She also addressed Mr. Dachowitz' comments.

Mr. Tyler Fairbane spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget and asked how many staff were paid through the ESSER funds. He asked the City to support Public Works and Parks and Receptions.

Ms. Nalini Jones spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Mr. Sam Novia spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Michelle Tiani spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Sarah Waters spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Marie Ross and Mr. Mark Bonasera spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget. They also spoke about the poor condition of the restrooms at Roton Middle School.

Ms. Ann Redicci spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Sue Randall spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Kerry Stanaslowsik spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Sarah LeMieux spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Iliana Zuniga spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget and acknowledged comments made by Mr. Dachowitz.

Ms. Ilija Maldovanos spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget and acknowledged comments made by Mr. Dachowitz.

Ms. Dana Malovir spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Mr. Drew Patrick spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget. He acknowledged comments made by Mr. Dachowitz and spoke about the physical state of Roton Middle School.

Ms. Ana Tabachnek spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Jan Jeffries spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

Ms. Janine Randolph spoke in support of the Superintendent's proposed operating budget.

There were no further speakers.

Mr. Burnett asked three times if there were any other people who wished to speak. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing at 9:03 p.m.

**4. ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* MS. MCMURRER MOVED TO ADJOURN  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business and the public hearing closed at 9:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi  
Telesco Secretarial Services

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COMMON COUNCIL FINANCE AND CLAIMS  
COMMITTEE**

ATTENDANCE: Gregory Burnett; David Heuvelman; Thomas Keegan; John Kydes;  
Jenn McMurrer; Nora Niedzielski Eichner; Diana Revolus;  
Mayor Harry Rilling

STAFF: Henry Dachowitz, Chief Financial Officer; Chitsamay Lam,  
Controller

OTHERS: Haitian Creole and Spanish Interpreters; Heidi Alterman;  
Nicol Ayers; Dominique Johnson; Barbara Smyth, Darlene Young,  
Common Council members

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Burnett called the special meeting to order at 9:03 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Mr. Burnett called the Roll as indicated above.

**3. FISCAL YEAR 2022 - 2023 RECOMMENDED OPERATING BUDGET AND  
CAP REVIEW; DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION TO THE COMMON  
COUNCIL.**

Mr. Burnett read the following resolution:

**WHEREAS,**

**SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMIT ON LOCALLY EXPENDITURES DURING THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET.**

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK THAT:**

**THE MAXIMUM LIMIT ON THE TOTAL APPROPRIATION FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2022 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN \$391,732,046.**

**THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF \$414,117,874 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF \$22,385,828.**

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2022-2023 BUDGET GUIDE, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE FULL COMMON COUNCIL MEETING ON FEBRUARY 22, 2022.**

**\*\* MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO APPROVE THE RESOLUTION**

Mr. Burnett said this budget cap will provide the City with a 3.75% increase and the Board of Education with a 4.5% increase.

Mayor Rilling thanked the members of the Common Council and the Board of Education and all those who expressed their concerns. He said he worked with the CFO and his tea to revise the numbers. He added that he met with Dr. Estrella and assured her they would be meeting on a regular basis. This budget is not static and can be adjusted.

Mayor Rilling explained that the charge he gave to the City side was they would not hire any full time employees; however, the 3.75% on the City side would be used to hire a full time person for Parks and Recreation. This person will be responsible for the fields.

Mr. Burnett acknowledge Common Council members who were in attendance.

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Mr. Dachowitz shared his screen and presented the revised operating budget. He explained how the mill rate is calculated for each district.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said she felt the numbers for the Norwalk Public schools is too low. She also asked why the rates went down in the Sixth district. Mr. Dachowitz shared his screen showing that the rates in the Sixth district went up on an average of 3.44%. He said these are revised numbers based on giving the Board of Education 4.5% and the City 3.75%.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said that the majority of people pay their taxes monthly and asked Mr. Dachowitz if he could provide the numbers if they wanted to consider increasing the Board of Education to 5.5% and including the incubator program. Mr. Dachowitz said he could run the model.

Ms. McMurrer asked about the mall and how that helps offset the tax increase. Mr. Dachowitz explained the tax abatement structure. Mayor Rilling added that the abatement was due to the fact that the mall is located in an Enterprise Zone. He said that during the last budget season, the mall did not get any tax abatement. Mr. Dachowitz said there was a deadline to get a Certificate of Occupancy and they did not get it in on time. The City got an unexpected windfall that year.

Ms. Alterman said it is not in her nature to be rude to anyone, and asked Mr. Dachowitz what he has put into practice since that statement was made. Mr. Burnett asked Ms. Alterman to keep her questions related to the motion on the operating budget.

Ms. Alterman said she has not been able to get a solid answer as to when the Rainy Day fund was used and they were penalized for that. She said she understood the plan to use a little of it and asked if they could tap into it temporarily. Mr. Dachowitz said the Rainy Day fund is perceived very favorably by the people who lend the City money. The rating agencies do not look favorably if the funds are used to fill a gap. He said the City was wise in building up a Rainy Day fund, but it is a balancing act. The Mayor and the elected officials have to decide what to do.

Ms. Alterman asked if this was something they could look at temporarily. She said she is an advocate for the Board of Education and Parks and Recreation. She said the only argument she is hearing is that they do not want to raise taxes, but asked if there is an option to use some of the Rainy Day fund. Mr. Dachowitz said every year they can see if the Rainy Day fund has a sufficient balance so they can use some of the funds to bridge the budget.

Ms. Alterman said someone brought to her attention, that in 2016, the Board of Education had to tap into their funds for their insurance. Mr. Dachowitz explained that the City and Board of Education maintain three insurance funds. He said they are self insured, so when the balance goes down because of excessive claims, they will ask for more funding. He said that perhaps the Board of Education had significant claims that depleted the fund balance that year.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner asked if the City was going to be doing a grand list update next year and what that might entail and what is the likely impact. Mr. Dachowitz described the procedure and said expenses will be incurred to get it done. He noted that when the mall came in, people in that district paid less.

Mr. Dachowitz said that Mr. Ford, the Tax Assessor told him that during Covid, most people worked from home and less commercial properties were being leased. Also individual families came into the City and they bid higher on homes. As a result the value of residential properties has gone up, while the value of commercial properties went down. The revaluation is 20 months away.

Ms. Johnson said that with the impending revaluation and the efficiency study could they draw down an additional \$500,000 to address some of the issues being faced by young people. Mr. Dachowitz said that decision is made by the Mayor and Common Council. He said that if you determine that is what you want to do, then that is what will be done.

Ms. Johnson asked Mr. Dachowitz to run a scenario where they draw down an additional \$500,000. She noted that funding educational unfunded mandates is not easy and this weighs heavily on their hearts. Ms. Johnson said she does not want to lose anyone in the City. She thanked Mr. Dachowitz for the information.

Ms. Ayers said they need more than one person in Recreation and Parks. She asked how other departments received other increases. Mr. Dachowitz explained that 96% of the employees are in the union and get increases each year along with steps. He said they go to every department and review every line item. The Mayor reminds him that when they have a new position, it is a burden for 30 years. Mr. Dachowitz said he does the first go round with the Mayor and then they meet with the department head to come up with the CFO and Mayor's budget.

Ms. Alterman asked her colleagues to take into consideration the perspective of the quality of life for all residents.

Ms. Revolus told Mr. Dachowitz that she understood his words. She asked how this will effect our residents who need resources, but can get strangled by these increases. She asked how this looks for non-homeowners. Mr. Dachowitz explained that the tax is

based on real estate. If people rent, the property owner is taxed, if their taxes go up, they may increase their rent to pay for the tax increase. If a person owns a vehicle, their tax will go up and that goes to the City.

Mr. Revolus noted that rents are not low and equal is not equitable. Those increases are not equitable for the community; the children are important, but they need to pay attention to the families. Ms. Revolus told Mr. Dachowitz that she understood what he said at the last meeting. She said she is a parent of a Norwalk public school student and she sees the good and the bad in the schools. She said that the Common Council and the Board of Education need to think about what is equitable for the community and what is sustainable. She thanked Mr. Dachowitz for his work.

Mr. Heuvelman thanked the parents who spoke and sent e-mails. He asked them to hang on to that energy and talk about the ECS funding in Hartford. He thanked Mr. Dachowitz for the information and said it was invaluable. He said he was happy they were able to move the needle up. He mentioned the funding that was approved for the Board of Education over the years and noted it is a substantial amount. Mr. Heuvelman said he felt the 4.5% increase for the Board of Education is where they need to be and he supports the resolution as it stands.

Mr. Keegan said he echoed what Ms. Revolus said. He said they can't look at things through their own lens. They need to look at it as people who can't afford the tax increase. He said that he heard the 3.75% increase does not cover current contractual obligations. He asked Mr. Dachowitz if he could answer if a 3.75% increase would cover the contractual obligations. Mr. Dachowitz said it was hard to answer on behalf of the Board of Education. Mr. Keegan said he did the arithmetic and the 3.75% was going to cover the contractual obligations even with an increase in the health benefit. He thanked Mr. Dachowitz for his explanation tonight.

Ms. Alterman said she would like to look at the Rainy Day fund and for those where an increase is a burden, there is an issue with undertaxed dwellings. She said she would like to advocate for those people.

Ms. Young said she was glad to listen to all the comments. She said they do not know where they are headed and need to be mindful of that. She said they go through this every year, and they are not cavalier about it. Ms. Young said they need to change the process, so it is not so contentious.

Ms. Young said she was glad to see the Mayor raised the cap from where they started, but they do not need to go higher than that. She said she hopes this resolution passes and they can move forward. She thanked Mr. Dachowitz for all the work he does and noted that this is not an easy position. She also thanked the entire staff. She expressed her thanks to

Mayor Rilling for getting something for Parks and Recreation. The goal is to make improvements and enhancements on the City and Board of Education sides and they need to be ok with not getting everything they want.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED BY ROLL CALL VOTE WITH FOUR (4) IN FAVOR (MR. BURNETT; MR. HEUVELMAN; MR. KYDES; MR. KEEGAN) AND THREE (3) ABSTENTIONS (MS. MCMURRER; MS. NIEDZIELSKI EICHNER; MS. REVOLUS)**

Mr. Burnett thanked everyone. He acknowledged Ms. Lam for her outstanding job of reading all those e-mails. He also acknowledged her entire Finance team, Mr. Dachowitz, Ms. Lam and Mr. Ellis.

#### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ADJOURN  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 10:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi  
Telesco Secretarial Services