

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
July 14, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: Greg Burnett, Chair; Nora Niedzielski-Eichner, David Heuvelman, Tom Keegan, Diana Revolus (7:20 pm), Jenn McMurrer (7:15 pm), Bryan Meek

STAFF: Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector; Henry Dachowitz, Chief Finance Officer, Tom Ellis, Chitsamay Lam, Comptroller

OTHER: Sharon Conners, Purchasing Agent, William Ford, Tax Assessor

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting began at 7:02 pm. There was a quorum present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no participation by members of the public.

APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JUNE 9, 2022, REGULAR MEETING

Chair Burnett read the corrections for the June 9, 2022, Minutes. He stated that the numerous corrections will be typed and attached to minutes of this meeting for updating appropriately.

Chair Burnett asked if there were any additional corrections. Seeing or hearing none, he asked for a motion for approval of the corrected minutes.

**** CHAIR BURNETT MOVED APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF
JUNE 9, 2022, WITH THE NECESSARY CORRECTIONS.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH ONE ABSTENSION, MR. MEEKS.**

A full description of the corrections will be typed and attached to the current minutes.

Chair Burnett proceeded to combine the discussion of the Tax Collector's Report Items number 5, thru 7 to the Committee for

Item 5 -Monthly Claims Report of June 14, 2022

Item 6 -Narrative on Tax Collections dated July 2022

Item 7 -Monthly Tax Collector's Report dated June 2022

and they were presented by Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector

RECEIVE REPORTS AND DISCUSS

Monthly Claims Report Items 5 through 7

Ms. Lisa Biagiarelli stated the report was light this month and was submitted for information only, no vote was needed on this item. She explained the process for Mr. Meek's benefit that as the committee with oversight, items which exceed \$10,000, are brought before this committee for a vote and then sent to the full Council. If the amount is less than \$10,000 no vote is required. She also stated that she comes before this committee each month to present this information to the committee.

She moved on to the Narrative for June 2022. She stated her narrative for June is actually two reports. In the report there was the year ending June 2022 and a preview of the new year of tax collections. She also spoke to the increase in vehicle taxes even though a car is one year older. Some persons taxes went up in light of last years' taxes on the owners' car being older. There are a variety of ways to pay taxes as well, in City Hall, some banks and other entities. She read the numbers that are reflected in the narrative which will accompany these minutes. She also stated the department is short-handed in the department by two positions. Office hours are being maintained during the work week. She closed the narrative report by stating that the collections were high, which this committee was hoping for at fiscal year-end.

Ms. McMurrer arrived at 7:15 p.m.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner asked about the effect between the raised car taxes on the anticipated revenues.

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Ms. Biagiarelli replied by introducing Mr. William Ford, Tax Assessor, whom she felt could give input on the question.

Mr. Ford explained that changes in the assessed value does not increase revenue for the City. The pie has been sliced up for the revenue to come in. There are line items for motor vehicle. The grand list was done before the tax mill rate was developed. The revenue was already known from the vehicles. The mill rate for the motor vehicles remained the same; the mill rate for the real estate and personal property was minutely less.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner understood the explanation from Mr. Ford and thanked him.

Ms. Biagiarelli interjected that she notes on the spreadsheets at the top shows the levy for real estate and motor vehicles. Even though revenue went up due to the motor vehicles, most revenue comes from real estate.

Again Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner said the information would answer questions for individuals to understand the tax for the motor vehicles.

Chair Burnett recognized Mr. Meek.

Mr. Meek asked if there is a report on personal property taxes and taxes reflect how things are doing in the business community.

Ms. Biagiarelli described the time when taxes are assessed and tax due is invoiced to businesses. Business property enforcement is assisted by Health Department holding operating permit, bank accounts may be seized, and business property may be seized and sold. Marshals also work with the tax department in this process. There is a full-time employee as delinquent collector, who works on these initiatives all year round.

Chair Burnett noted that Ms. Diana Revolus joined the meeting at 7:20 p.m.

Chair Burnett stated that a correction to the comment of 99.18% "good" should be "great" as the Tax Collection department exceeded the rate and hit above the 99.8% collection rate over several years. He also invited Ms. Biagiarelli to the next Council meeting on Tuesday, July 26th to present this information to the Council about the 99.8% being exceeded along with any other commentary you may wish to present.

Ms. Biagiarelli thanked Chair Burnett for the invitation and commented she would be delighted to attend the Council session.

Again, Chair Burnett complemented the Tax Department's work on behalf of the City.

Chair Burnett asked whether there were any other comments or questions on Items 5, 6, and 7. There being none, he moved forward to Item 8.

Chair Burnett moved forward to consider Item 8A and 8B which read as follows:

8. a. Authorize the Mayor to execute a three (3) year agreement with TaxServ Capital Services, LLC, for the 4109 – Collection Agency Services.

b. Authorize the Tax Collector or designee to issue two (2) one (1) year contract extensions on the TaxServ Capital Services, LLC contract.

Motion moved by Ms. McMurrer.

Chair Burnett recognized Ms. Biagiarelli.

Ms. Biagiarelli referenced her narrative on this request. This process is being asked for in order to collect pass due vehicle taxes. Taxes are collectable up to 15 years for arrears. There is a list that goes to the State of CT DMV. This is outsourcing as an outside agency to locate people who are tax delinquent. Five companies submitted proposals and two were chosen. The chosen agency is active in other areas of the state. The City will continue to collect taxes, the agent does not collect the money. There is no cost to the City. The 15% recovery is added to what the taxpayer owes. Sharon Conners, Purchasing, was helpful on creating the proposal for submission to the service providers. It is a win-win situation.

Chair Burnett asked for questions or comments, there were none. He asked for a motion on Item 8a and 8b.

**** MS. MCMURRER MOVED TO ACCEPT THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN TAXSERV CAPITAL SERVICES, LLC FOR TAX COLLECTION SERVICES AND TWO (2) ONE (1) YEAR CONTRACT EXTENSIONS ON THE TAXSERV CAPITAL SERVICES, LLC CONTRACT.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

This item will be moved to the full Council on July 26th for full approval.

9. a. Authorize the Mayor to execute a three (3) year agreement with Canon Solutions America, Inc for the 4181-City and BOE Centralized Mailroom Services for a total not to exceed \$243,036.00. Funding available from account 011362-5259

b. Authorized the Purchasing Agent to issues change orders on the contract for a total not to exceed \$24,304.00

c. Authorize the Purchasing Agent or designee to issue two (2) one (1) year contract extensions on the Canon Solutions America, Inc. contract.

Ms. Revolus moved the motion.

Chair Burnett recognized Ms. Connors.

Ms. Connors stated current contract ends at end of June. The Mail Room out-source team does distribution and delivery of all City mail and packages. Canon has proved to be an outstanding partner especially through COVID. They held on to undeliverable mail to keep all things running smoothly. They were essential in mailing out packages for schools when schools were closed during COVID for BOE. They also assisted with the absentee ballots. They are the lower cost service to the BOE. In May, BOE team, Karen and Bill Hodel created a join RFP for submission. They were key in for the last five years. If buildings or schools were closed they held the mail until it could be handed to an individual.

Chair Burnett inquired whether there were any questions. Chair recognized Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner inquired about the new machine purchased whether it will be used by both City and BOE under this team.

Ms. Connors stated that the mailroom service team will be utilizing this new machine. The machine has been delivered and all personnel will be trained on its usage. It was delivered on 7-14-22.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner also inquired whether the team are city employees

Ms. Connors commented that they work on Norwalk site, but they will not be City employees. The team will be trained shortly.

There is oversight by City employees--a manager and three others. There are persons trained on this process so that the mailroom is running for the schools and the City. They keep things running smoothly and seamlessly.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner asked if these persons are covered by the City's Living Wage Law.

Ms. Connors said yes and that was also a part of the RFP document.

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Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner stated she was pleased that they worked so hard during the COVID years. It is good to see a vendor who worked so diligently. She also complimented Ms. Conners in her participation and follow through on this item.

Chair Burnett inquired whether this was a 3-year agreement with a 2-year extension.

Ms. Conners stated that the extension would be exercised if all goes well through year three to be sure they are all on board and continue the association with the mailroom group of Canon Solutions America, Inc.

Chair Burnett asks for any other questions re Item 9. He then asked for a motion on Item 9.

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE THREE (3) YEAR AGREEMENT WITH CANON SOLUTIONS AMERICA, INC. AND THE PURCHASING AGENT OR DESIGNEE TO ISSUE TWO (2) ONE (1) YEAR CONTRACT EXTENSIONS ON THE CANON SOLUTIONS AMERICA, INC. CONTRACT.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

This item will be moved to the full Council on July 26th for full approval.

10. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all documents necessary to execute memorandum of understanding regarding payments in Lieu of Taxes between the City of Norwalk and The Housing Authority of the City of

Ms. Revolus moved the item.

Chair Burnett recognized Mr. Ford who explained the request.

Mr. Ford stated that NHA pays the City of Norwalk Pilot tenants in lieu of taxes. These agreements were made in the 50s as noted on the list submitted. The purpose of this memorandum was to clarify the definition of the rents and what expenses are allowed. Specifically, garbage collection was asked to be an expense on one of their properties to reduce the Pilot payments. The City was looking at the total rents not only that by the tenant or the apartment and any subsidies. After the City, NHA, and Mayor's office along with the legal department came to an agreement has been made and this committee approval is needed.

Chair Burnett asked for questions or comments on this item.

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Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner inquired if the changes are from the prior agreements?

Mr. Ford stated yes, there was not a clear definition of how to calculate the rent. This agreement clarifies the calculations

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner also questioned whether the shift from 80% to 100% is part of the clarification and in addition to adding the tax collection, and they are all in agreement?

Mr. Ford stated yes all are in agreement as the parties have been working on this for some time to come to this conclusion.

Chair Burnett asked whether there were additional comments. There were none. He also thanked Mr. Ford for his part in this effort.

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED to accept the memorandum of understanding between the Norwalk Housing Authority and the City of Norwalk as presented.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

This item will be moved to the full Council on July 26th for full approval.

Chair Burnett moved to the Item 11

11. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute agreement with Quality Data Service. A total amount not to exceed \$125,000 accounts: 011321-5258 TAX ASSESSOR OTHER PROFESSIONAL

**** Ms. Revolus moved the item.**

Mr. Ford stated the City uses two types of software for collections and taxes. He stated it is a small module for the overall system. There are sometime issues such as changes in the state that affect the municipalities. The desire is to move to new software to save time, create efficiencies. It is not user friendly for specific changes. The current package is used in 90% of the State of CT. The current provider discovered there was no text to accompany the changes we need. The office is looking for a sole source provider. Stamford uses the package that we are looking to acquire. The software is still in testing mode.

Chair Burnett asked what is the implementation time for this upgrade to move the current data to the new software?

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JULY 14, 2022**

Page -7-

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Mr. Ford stated the city is planning to move before year-end after tax collections. August 15th first payments will have been received, then November 15th is the second date line when new bills are mailed out is the target.

Ms. McMurrer inquired about state changes being made as part of the input to the system and by whom.

Mr. Ford stated getting them to input our changes into the software, their programming side, not us going in and making changes. They are doing this for all clients at one time including our requests.

Ms. McMurrer asked whether the \$125K is a one-time payment.

Mr. Ford said this is a structured payment including the conversion over years therefore, it is paid overtime.

Chair Burnett recognized Mr. Meek.

Mr. Meek inquired if the name was that of the vendor or the software.

Mr. Ford stated that Quality Data System is the vendor software is called QDS.

What is the quality, is it cloud-based or IT based?

Mr. Ford said City is going with the cloud-based option. The software gives you the option.

Mr. Meek stated that on-line option would be best and most efficient.

Mr. Ford said that is one reason for the choice in that they provide on-line options for both incoming expenses and personal property filings. That goes to the efficiency spoken to earlier.

Ms. Revolus asked, Is it secure based on as all of this information is being put on the system?

Mr. Ford responded affirmatively. He further commented that Henry Dachowitz, CFO, requires that cloud-based systems have an addendum stating that information must be kept secure in all our contracts.

Chair Burnett called for a vote by Council members.

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED THE MOTION FOR APPROVAL TO EXECUTE AGREEMENT WITH QUALITY DATA SERVICE AS SUBMITTED TO THE FULL COUNCIL ON JULY 26, 2022.**

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**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

This item will be moved to the full Council on July 26th for full approval.

Mr. Ford thanked the Tax Collector Department for allowing the Assessor's office to borrow one of their employees and promised to return her to help them with their busy time period. The employee is assisting in the cleanup work that was left due to the vacancy. A public "thank you" to Ms. Biagiarelli.

12. Received Oak Hills Authority Monthly Financial Statements for April 2022; May 2022 and Fiscal Year 23 Budget information.

Postponed until next month when a representative from Oak Hills is present.

13. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all documents necessary to apply for and accept grant fund from the Department of Justice under the FY 2022 Highway Safety Project, in the amount of \$22,350.48.

** Ms. McMurrer moved the motion.

Chief Kulhawik spoke about the proposal to train other police officers who can respond to drug related situations which are not alcohol related. Norwalk fortunately has a drug recognition officer that has been asked to train officers in Norwalk and other communities. There is no cost to Norwalk as it is being paid through a grant from the Department of Justice. This will cover the travel and overtime to train others by Officer Wiluski. This was approved by the Health and Welfare Commission on Tuesday July 12th.

Chair Burnett asked whether we already have the grant and if we do not get the grant would we have to pay for this through our Operating Budget.

Chief Kulhawik stated we have the grant, we just have to accept it.

Chair Burnett called for a motion to move Item 13.

**** MS. MCMURRER MOVED APPROVAL TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS NECESSARY TO ACCEPT THE GRANT FUNDS FROM THE**

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JULY 14, 2022**

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AS SUBMITTED TO THE FULL COUNCIL ON JULY 26, 2022.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

This item will be moved to the full Council on July 26th for full approval.

14. a. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute any and all agreements, documents, instruments and/or amendments as may be necessary to enter into agreement with Recovery Network of Programs Inc., for the sole source contracting for embedded social workers, amount not to exceed \$216,000.00 annually. ARPA Funds, Account 133010- 5796-APD01.

b. Authorize the Chief of Police, Thomas Kulhawik, to execute any and all agreements, documents, instruments and amendments as may be necessary to implement the Recovery Network of Programs, Community Response Initiative within the city of Norwalk.

Ms. McMurrer moved the motion.

Chief Kulhawik stated that this agreement to implement the Recovery Network of Programs Inc. which was approved by Health and Public Safety on Tuesday July 12th has been working on this issue of mental health, for some time in Norwalk, especially for those who have repeat encounters with the Police Department especially since COVID. Stamford embedded a social worker within the police department to assist with mental health issues. The department worked with Mr. Daniels to set up this program. Recovery Network has proven very successful in Stamford. It was decided that the one-year pilot program be paid through the ARPA funds.

Ms. McMurrer complemented the effort of the Police Department and Mr. Daniels in bringing this forward for our Police Department and our community. She thanked Chief Kulhawik on the committee's behalf.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner asked about grant funds after the one-year period. (Due to technology issue, Ms. McMurrer gave further information clarifying what she and Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner have been pursuing.)

Ms. McMurrer commented that there will be effort to pursue grant funds to continue the program after the one-year dollars are used. Mr. Daniels will be collecting data within his department to support the outcome of the project along with Recovery Network and it will be a basis to pursue funds prior to ending of the fund money for this program.

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Chair Burnett commented if any staffing will be required after the ARPA funds are exhausted is a concern. He also inquired whether this person will be an employee of Recovery Network.

Chief Kulhawik stated there will be no cost of staff to us, the person will be an employee of Recovery Network. Office space and equipment has already been established. Once the contract is approved by the Law department, this program will be executed. The overall contract has been forwarded to the Law department for approval.

Ms. McMurrer stated the employee will be imbedded in the Police Department and they will have access to all that is needed to perform this mental health position, technology, office space, and other equipment.

Chief Kulhawik said the grant supplies the technical equipment needed along with space within the department.

**** MS. MCMURRER MOVED THE MOTION TO APPROVAL OF ITEM 14A AND 14B FOR RECOVERY NETWORK OF PROGRAMS INC. AND THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE INITIATIVE WITH THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR THE SOLE SOURCE OF CONTRACTING FOR EMBEDDED SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE CITY OF NORWALK.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

This item will be moved to the full Council on July 26th for full approval.

Chief Kulhawik commended Deputy Chief Walsh who was instrumental in locating Recovery Network and brought it to our attention in Norwalk. Chief Kulhawik commented that he voted for this project even though he is not on this committee.

Ms. Revolus was glad to hear that this program is moving forward which ties to her comments at another meeting for the City of Norwalk earlier where mental health was the subject material.

15. RESOLUTION: requesting for City of Norwalk's Recreation and Parks Department aggregating in the amount of \$2,000,000 from the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) fund. Accounts: 134010-5796-ARP01 PLAYGROUND REPLACEMENTS for \$1,400,000; 134010-5796-ARP02 STAFFING AND

EQUIPMENT for \$380,000 and 134010- 5796-ARP03 PLANNING AND SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION for \$220,000.

Ms. Revolus move the motion.

Chair Burnett commented that this item has been publicly announced prior to this meeting. However, he stated that an ARPA request goes through this committee to show a tract record when the item goes to the Council for approval.

Chair Burnett recognized Mr. Stowers.

Mr. Robert Stowers, Recreation and Parks and Kenneth Hughes, Rec/Parks

Mr. Stowers appreciated the early time given to address this request. Oyster Park replacement of the fence to make the area safe for the public and tourists is one of the priority items. Meadow Street Park POS system replacement is a primary item also. Deferred maintenance will be paid from the funds for these projects which is long overdue. The staff involved will be temporary; no staff cost long-term will be required. The finance system will be upgraded for scheduling, track revenue, account payable and receivables.

Four parks are being considered for playground improvement; Meadow Street Park, Flax Hill, Kendall, and Oyster Park. There will be a person dedicated to the POS system replacement.

A study about fees is being conducted to be more accurate in projecting revenue.

Synthetic fields are going to be upgraded to maintain and get the life use out of them.

A vehicle or two is anticipated.

There will be an accreditation sought for our parks. There will be a lead person to conduct that 2-year project.

The \$2MM will be used to accomplish these items.

Ms. McMurrer commented "thank you" for the improvement of all of our parks visited by both children and adults.

She also asked when work will be started and completed.

Mr. Stowers deferred the response to Mr. Hughes who is the project manager and is working on design for the parks and the approvals will allow for fast tracking on the upgrades.

Mr. Stowers stated this will take about a year. The RFP is going out to research firms before end of August. Teams have been developed to acquire all the information we need for this project. All the departments in the city have helped to get accreditation and complete this two-year project.

Chair Burnett asked will any additional funds beyond the \$2M ARPA dollars be needed?

Mr. Stowers stated only ARPA dollars for the first year and then balance from the Operating budget thereafter.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner thanked Recreation and Parks for all their hard work on these projects.

Ms. Stowers stated he has reached out to the State Representative(s) for additional funds and assistance to improve and use our parks more for our City. He also asked that Mr. Hughes work with Ms. Niedzielski.

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED APPROVAL OF ITEM 15 BE SUBMITTED AS PRESENTED TO THE FULL COUNCIL ON JULY 26TH**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

This item will be moved to the full Council on July 26th for full approval.

ADJOURN

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

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JULY 14, 2022
Page -13-**

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Alvina LR Decker

Telesco Secretarial Services