

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 19, 2014**

ATTENDANCE: James Clark, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling; Erik Anderson;
Edwin Camacho; James Feigenbaum; Gregory Burnett

STAFF: Donna King, City Clerk; Thomas Hamilton, Finance Director;
Robert Barron, Director of Management and Budget

**BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
PUBLIC HEARING ON THE FY 2014-2015 OPERATING BUDGET**

Mr. Clark called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m. and Ms. King called the Roll.

Mr. Clark asked those who wished to speak at the Public Hearing to limit their comments to three minutes.

Mayor Rilling welcomed everyone to the Board of Estimate and Taxation Public hearing on the fy 2014-2015 operating budget. He thanked Mr. Hamilton and the Finance staff for putting together a budget for the citizens of Norwalk that will allow taxes to be kept as low as possible. He said that he is cautiously optimistic.

Mayor Rilling thanked the Board of Education and said that they worked extremely well with the Board of Estimate and Taxation. As a result, they felt comfortable in fully funding their request.

Mayor Rilling reviewed highlights of the proposed budget.

Mr. Michael Lyons, Chair Board of Education, thanked Mayor Rilling and Mr. Clark for their cooperation. He said that this budget that started out with \$168 million in requests. That number was reduced through good operations and savings. He said that as a result of changes made to the insurance program the Board of Education was able to fund additional positions and they asked the Board of Estimate and Taxation to reduce their budget.

Mr. Lyons said that he is delighted to work with Superintendent Dr. Rivera and Chief Financial Officer Richard Rudl. He also thanked the Common Council and Mayor Rilling for their support. Mr. Lyons said that with close cooperation they were able to come up with a budget that generated some savings. He thanked Mayor Rilling, the Common Council and the Board of Estimate and Taxation.

Ms. Patsy Brescia, Chair, Lockwood Mathews Mansion Museum Board of Trustees asked for support for an additional \$30,000 to cover the period of time they will be closed for ADA improvements. She said that the improvement project is a joint effort between the City of Norwalk and Lockwood Mathews Mansion Museum.

Ms. Brescia explained that in 1966, there was an effort to do away with Lockwood Mathews Mansion. She said that the Mansion has raised money for improvements to the Mansion and they currently have \$340,000 in funding to contribute to the City for this project. The Phase 2 project was planned to start in January, but a construction delay created an operating problem for them. In addition they have had to cancel fundraising events.

Ms. Brescia said that they are short staffed with one full time person and two part time people. The rest is run by interested Volunteers. She said that she put together a package with letters of support and articles showing the importance of Lockwood Mathews Mansion to the City.

Ms. Mia Constanza Wiggers, Literacy Volunteers, said that she teaches English as a Second Language. She explained that the students come to class and are now able to talk to each other. They meet weekly and develop goals. She said that there is a lot of good stuff going on in the class and the students are making significant progress. She added that it is free for the students.

Ms. Maricarmen Miranda said that she participated in the Literacy Volunteer Program to learn English.

Ms. Kathy Olsten, Coordinator for Literacy Volunteers said that they have served Norwalk for over 38 years and they are at the Library. Ms. Olsten said that they currently have 58 Literacy Volunteers. She gave an overview of their literacy program. She thanked the City of Norwalk for their support.

Ms. Diane Lauricella said that she observed one of the Board of Estimate and Taxation meetings and was impressed that the line items were reviewed; however, she said that she was disappointed that when money was found by Mr. Hamilton, they stopped. She suggested that the \$30,000 being requested by the Lockwood Mathews Mansion Museum could be found.

Ms. Lauricella said that she is honored to be a part of the Mayor's Energy Task Force and said that she hopes that by next year there will be real attempts to look at budgeting models. She suggested that they could look at other ways to look at the budget.

Ms. Lauricella said that some departments are not spending their money wisely and believes that the tax payers are suffering. She said that she was disappointed that there were not a lot of people here and knows that fully funding the Board of Education kept

people away.

Ms. Lauricella said that she would like to see an increase and reasonable enforcement of litter, Zoning and noise laws with education and communication first and then followed up with fines. She said that she would like to see it mandated that all City departments use two sided printing to save money and that any new cars or SUVs purchased by the City has to have certain fuel economy. Ms. Lauricella suggested considering combining the weights and measure person because she feels they are not full time positions.

Ms. Lauricella said that she was happy to see Sunday hours at the Library. Ms. Lauricella suggested cuts in personnel and asked if the citizens are getting the most bang for their buck with the senior staff. She said that there are no reviews of senior staff, but believes that between now and next winter things will change.

Ms. Lauricella said that some feel that it is time to think about the structure of Land Use and suggested changing how Planning and Zoning looks like. She said that she saw 3 - 4 staff at meetings and asked if they are taking vacation days and asked to look at their time charts.

Ms. Lauricella said that there is some waste in Public Works. She said that the citizens are not getting the benefit of \$300,000 for leaf removal. She suggested cutting back their budget and challenging the staff to think outside the box. She also suggested starting a backyard composting program.

Ms. Lauricella said that to be successful, they need to be transparent and this department has a history of surprising people. Ms. Lauricella said that she thinks the Public Works budget should be cut by one half.

Ms. Lauricella said that currently there is an odor problem at the Transfer Station and that has to be resolved because it is hurting redevelopment in that area. She said that the best way to cut the budget is to make them sing for their supper.

Ms. Lauricella asked to hold the IT budget until they are able to give a written plan for the website to make it more user friendly. She said that overall these are reasonable cuts. Ms. Lauricella said that she found it difficult to find the scanned copy of the budget on the City's website.

There were no other members of the public who wished to speak. Mr. Clark asked the Board if they had any questions. There were none.

**** MR. FEIGENBAUM MOVED TO ADJOURN
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services