

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 14, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Bruce Kimmel, Chair; John Igneri, Travis Simms, John Kydes, Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco, Nick Sacchinelli

OTHERS: Mayor Harry Rilling; Robert Barron, Finance Director; Michael Stewart, Tax Assessor; Alan Lo, Building and Facilities Manager; Shelly Guyer, Oak Hills Authority Executive Director; Ernest DesRochers, Oak Hills Authority Chairman

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kimmel called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

There was no one from the public who wished to address the Committee at this time.

CONTINUED DISCUSSION ON FISCAL 2016-17 OPERATING BUDGET.

Mr. Barron came forward to speak about the projected 1.4 mill rate increase. He reviewed the figures with the Committee. the Pro Forma budget is in, along with the requests. He said that he was in the process of formulating the recommendation for the BET.

Mr. Kimmel asked how people should view the 3% increase for the Board of Education . Mr. Barron said that the City was aware of an over contribution in the BOE insurance account. He went on to explain how this would impact the general budget.

Mr. Kimmel said that he had requested a copy of the insurance information. He held up a copy of a spreadsheet and requested that copies be sent to all the Council Members. Mr. Barron made a note of this. Mr. Kimmel then asked Mr. Barron to review the figures on the sheet including the insurance fund and the Fund Balance.

Mayor Rilling said that there had been some budget challenges this year and said that there had been some identified problems in the Board of Education's Special Education program . He said that while the City was committee to supporting Dr. Adamowski's vision, it was also important to make sure that the City does not over-tax the residents.

Mr. Barron said that there was a reserve to handle this situation and gave the details of how this would be done. He said that one fundamental budgeting basis is that it is not

acceptable to use one time funding for an ongoing expense. Actuaries will spread a large debt out over a number of years rather than trying to pay a lump sum.

Mr. Kimmel said that he agreed with the Dr. Adamowski's vision and that the City is 100% behind all the goals and objectives for the BOE. He added that there would be a meeting with the BOE on February 7th, which is a regular BOE meeting night. He said that he believed everyone would

Mayor Rilling left the meeting at 7:32 p.m.

APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING.

December 10, 2015.

**** MR. SIMMS MOVED THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 10, 2015**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 10, 2015 AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Claims Committee : Receive the monthly Claims report; review and approve claims as required fro Claims Report dated: January 14, 2016.

Mr. Kimmel said that Ms. Biagiarelli was not present and noted that the Claims report did not appear to have any refunds that needed the Committee's approval.

Narrative on Tax Collections dated January 14, 2016. Receive Report and discuss.

Monthly Tax Collector's Report - Receive Reports and discuss: December 31, 2015.

Mr. Barron said that the City had collected over half of the tax levy. He added that he believed the City was on the road to collecting upwards of 99% of the taxes because of the strong collection performance so far.

Mr. Kimmel asked if there was a tax sale scheduled for this year. He was told that there was one scheduled for July. Mr. Barron said that the tax sale was responsible for bringing in the back taxes. There are some property owners who wait until just before the tax sale to pay their taxes. He gave an overview of the process.

Mr. Kimmel said that this item would be sent to the full Council.

DISCUSSION OF SENIOR TAX RELIEF.

Mr. Stewart came forward and said that the department had not made any changes on the deferral program in some time. When the program was created in 2002, the income level

was set very low. The following year, the State raised the income level. He said that there were only about a dozen people in the tax deferral program.

Mr. Kimmel said that the next step should be to send this item to the Ordinance Committee. A change in the tax credit would trigger changes across the board.

**** MR. KIMMEL MOVED TO SEND THE ITEM TO THE ORDINANCE COMMITTEE.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Kimmel said that when the Council changed the income levels, it allowed people to move from Tier 1 to Tier 2. Mr. Stewart said that there are very few people who get the maximum credit. Most people get between 30% and 40%. Discussion followed.

Mr. Kimmel suggested that the City should work on letting more people know about the program and bring more people into the program. Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco said that last year, a big effort was made let the public know about this program, so she was reluctant to add more to the program that is currently under utilized.

Mr. Sacchinelli asked about the income shifts and how these would impact the taxpayers. Mr. Stewart reviewed the details and explained that the population that qualifies is constantly changing because some people move, others die or still others have changes in their finances.

Mr. Igneri said that last time when the City made the effort to spread the word to the elderly, he thought it was good. Mr. Stewart said that there was a block of text on the front of the bill about this program.

Mr. Simms asked how the City would determine who would be in the program. Mr. Stewart said that once someone enrolls, they only have to re-apply every other year. Mr. Kimmel said that last year, a number of organizations that works with seniors, along with pharmacies and various other groups had been given flyers about the program to distribute.

Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco asked if there was any way that the Tax Assessor could run a report that would identify how many people in Norwalk might be eligible. Mr. Stewart said that he would not have any way to do this. Mr. Barron agreed and said that the City does not know what any individual resident's income is. He added there were 16 more people who joined the program last year. Mr. Stewart said that there had been a number of people who had requested applications for this year.

Mr. Kimmel said that the Committee should think about this and make a final decision in February about which direction they wanted to go.

Mr. Sacchinelli asked if there was a way to determine how many people who applied did not qualify. Mr. Stewart said that often someone will come in to inquire about the program and when they see the income limits, they announce they don't qualify and leave. Mr. Barron said that if the objective of the Committee was to provide relief to the seniors most in need, he did not think it was as much of a risk. Mr. Stewart agreed and stated that since the amount was capped, it was not an unknown risk.

Mr. Kimmel asked for a set of enrollment scenario based on an increase amount that had been discussed. Discussion followed.

**** MR.IGNERI MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO TAKE A VOTE ON THE SENIOR TAX RELIEF.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Kimmel said that the Council wished to increase the income by \$3,000 as discussed earlier.

**** MR.IGNERI MOVED TO ADD \$3,000 TO THE TIER 1 TO INCREASE THE MAXIMUM BENEFIT \$1,390 AND TIER 2 INCOME.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Stewart requested that this be added to the ordinance agenda. Mr. Kimmel said that it would be as part of the normal routine.

RESOLUTION, AUTHORIZING A SPECIAL CAPITAL APPROPRIATION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$756,068 FOR THE NORWALK EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, REPRESENTING THE ANTICIPATED STATE OF CONNECTICUT SHARE FOR THIS PROJECT (ACCOUNT NO. 09165010-5799C0555)

Mr. Lo, the Building and Facilities Manager, came forward to address the Committee. He said that the City part for the project funding was allocated. However, the State's reimbursement does not arrive until after the project is underway or completed. The City does not provide debt service or bond for this. Mr. Barron said that once the bids come in, the City brings the request to Council because the State portion needs to be approved. There will be a special Land Use Meeting next week to discuss the bids. The construction period is about seven to eight months.

Mr. Igneri asked how many classrooms would be involved. Mr. Lo said there would be six classrooms and 8 therapy rooms. The drawings are included in the information packet. Discussion followed.

Mr. Sacchinelli left the meeting at 8:21 p.m.

**** MR. KIMMEL MOVED TO APPROVE THE RESOLUTION.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Receive Oak Hills Authority Monthly Financial Statements for November 30, 2015

Discussion of Oak Hills Authority Capital Expenditure Report.

Mr. Barron came forward and that since the course was in the winter season, there is not much revenue to discuss. Their operating income had a \$15,000 increase over last year. With the change in the restructured debt, the net income was over \$17,000. Mr. Barron said that he was more interesting in the operational expense and the course is in a better position then they were last year. There were over 2,000 rounds in December, which is unheard of.

Mr. Sacchinelli rejoined the meeting at 8:27 p.m.

Mr. Guyer said that last year, the Authority started selling passes early and had a buy four rounds and get a fifth one free.

Mr. Barron then referred to the National Golf Foundation (NGF) Consulting analysis. He said that the study covered four different scenario. The one that covered the debt service to the City would be 36 bays with two levels and lighting. Because of the slope of the land, trees would be removed, and the topography leveled. The biggest driver is the developmental costs. Mr. Barron said that he had spoken to Mr. Singer who was the Director of the Consulting Services. Mr. Singer had expressed concerns to Mr. Barron about whether or not the driving bays would fit.

Mr. Barron then pointed out that he did not receive the Capital request from the Oak Hills Authority until after the deadline and that he did not have the authority add a capital request to the budget. The Mayor would have to do that.

Mr. DesRochers said that he believe that the consultant erred on the conservative side. Regarding the lights, he said that the chief competition has lights now for night time driving. Regarding the survey of the site, there was a disagreement between the original architect that laid out the plans and the consultants. He said that he had been out there with the architect and while it was tight, it would fit.

The Stamford range cost 3.5 million dollars and if he could find someone to do the work for \$900,000, he would sign up in a minute. The park is filled with ledges and uneven ground.

In an effort to accommodate the neighbors, the placement was moved to a location that is 1,000 feet from the nearest residence.

Mr. DesRochers pointed out that the City has put in football fields at a million and a half dollars that are not open to the public. The driving range is a revenue generator and open to the public.

Mr. Simms asked if the previous plan to have the bays heated had changed. Mr. DesRochers said that the lower bays would be heated and open year round. He pointed out that because of where the range would be located, the cart barn has to be moved and there has to be other changes to the holes. The actual cost of the driving range was only 2.4 million. The remaining \$600,000 would be spent on moving the cart barn and dealing with the other issues.

Mr. Simms asked about the lighting. Mr. DesRochers said that the light would be LEDs and pointed downward. Regarding the removal of trees, there will not be as many trees that need to be removed.

Mr. Igneri asked Mr. DesRochers what he thought about the report. Mr. DesRochers said that the City had commissioned the report and he had no input or opportunity to comment.

Mr. DesRochers said that Mr. Guyer had sent a Capital request to Mr. Barron via email before the deadline. Mr. Barron said that he never received the email. Mr. DesRochers said that he would send Mr. Barron a copy of that email with the date stamp.

Mr. DesRochers said that the next step would be having the area surveyed, which the Authority would pay for. The other improvements are moving forward.

Mr. Kimmel asked about if there had been discussions about what the Authority might do if the driving range did not work out. Mr. DesRochers said that the millennials are used to practicing their soccer or baseball, and they would practice golf.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. O'TOOLE- GIANDURCO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

City of Norwalk
Finance/Claims
Regular Meeting
January 14, 2016

