

**CITY OF NORWALK
HEALTH, WELFARE & PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 25, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Faye Bowman, Chair; Eloisa Melendez; Nick Sacchinelli

CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:40 PM. As there wasn't a quorum, the Chair declared that the meeting would be discussion only, with no actionable items.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

No action could be taken on the approval of minutes, as a quorum was not present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Diane Laurisello came forward. She stated that she is an environmental consultant, and is present to speak on the issue of the underground fuel tanks at the older firehouse. Ms. Laurisello stated that she worked for the DEP in the 1980s, and helped to start the UST program. She stated that, in the 1980s, the plan was to assess the tanks and remove those that were beyond their use, as the older tanks are metal, and thus rust and leak. She stated, when in doubt, to remove the tanks, as problems associated with long-term leakage can be more expensive. Ms. Laurisello stated that, while they were discussing the tank issues at the old police station, she is on the record asking whether or not the remaining underground tanks had been assessed. She stated that she had been reassured by the current chief's predecessors that all of the tanks had been handled, leaving her surprised when she saw the amount allotted for the current removal, which exceeds the usual amount, if the tank were uncompromised. Ms. Laurisello asked, going forward, that the public is provided with a list of the remaining tanks still in the ground on any properties owned by the City. She stated that she would be happy to advocate for the removal of any remaining tanks and spearhead the efforts over the next few months, as it would be waste of taxpayer dollars for any more tanks to deteriorate. Ms. Laurisello stated that it would be preferable that the list be prioritized by age and condition, and that there are companies who are happy to assess the tanks.

The Chair asked if anyone else wished to speak. No one came forward.

The Chair closed the public participation portion of the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Norwalk Fire Department

1. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute an Agreement with ETT Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a ETT Environmental Services for the removal of the underground fuel storage tanks at the Fire Support Services facility- 100 Fairfield Avenue (Bid #355) for a sum not to exceed \$34,798.95. Account #091531105777C0541 & #090931105777C0411 & 2. Authorize the Fire Chief, Laurence Reilly, to execute Change Orders on the Agreement with ETT Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a ETT Environmental Services for the removal of the underground fuel storage tanks at the Fire Support Services Facility, 100 Fairfield Avenue, for a sum not to exceed \$2500. Account #09093

The Chair asked if the matter at hand is time sensitive, and Chief Reilly stated that the matter could wait until next month if need be. He further introduced Assistant Chief Todd to the seated Council Members.

The Chair asked Chief Reilly to elaborate on the matter. Chief Reilly stated that they had a capital item that addressed 4 underground storage tanks at the fire maintenance building, located at the old trans-district garage. He stated that the tanks sat there for several years, and that recently they received notice from the DEP that the tanks would need to be removed, lest they receive a citation. Chief Reilly stated that there are two fiberglass tanks- one as a heating oil tank and one as a waste oil tank. He stated that they had money allotted for the expense in the budget from last year, however last fall they discovered, when the chosen contractor produced his insurance certificate, that the amount of insurance was insufficient. The City then moved on to the second in-line contractor, where they discovered the same problem. The 3rd choice company's owner was in the hospital, and the 4th company was too expensive. Gerald Foley rebid the item over the winter, and ETT had the lowest overall bid, once they factored in the price per unit to pump the oil out.

The Chair inquired about the bidder Herbert's Recovery System, and Chief Reilly stated that they still didn't have enough liability insurance, and would actually cost more once the product removal costs were factored in.

Council Member Sacchinelli asked if there is a drop dead date on penalties, and Chief Reilly stated that the DEP will not penalize them so long as there is evidence that they are moving forward with the removal.

The Chair stated that she would inform the Chief, should he need to return so the item can be voted on prior to it being addressed by the full council.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

50 Washington Street

Chief Reilly stated that there had been 2 small fires over the weekend, both of which he discussed with the fire marshal. The first fire occurred when the roofers were sealing the roof using torches and accidentally set the foam insulation on fire. Chief Reilly stated that, while they extinguished it, they were unable to fully put it out and so the fire department was called. The second incident occurred when welders were working in the same area, using similar torches, and another fire was set. Yet again, they were unable to fully extinguish the fire, and the fire department was called. Chief Reilly stated that the fire marshal went to both incidents and talked to people on scene, discussing safety procedures for hot practices. He stated that the fire marshal then went to the site twice, unannounced, during the week, walking the stairwells and checking for issues. Chief Reilly stated that they had previously been to the location and found problems, but after the marshal visited yesterday, he saw they had complied with their corrections, with only a minor problem remaining. Chief Reilly emphasized that there is a good line of communication with the management.

The Chair stated that this is the 3rd incident they've been called to, and expressed her hope that they follow through with the direction of the marshals, as they have been given appropriate warning, and thus any failure to comply from here forward can be termed neglect. The Chair emphasized that their primary concern is safety.

Update on the Status of Head Start

Mary Oster and Cathy DiCesari came forward to discuss the item.

Ms. Oster stated that CDI took the program over from NEON. She stated that Housing assumed responsibility for 2 funding streams in February of 2014, and following a number of incidences towards the end of 2014 through the summer of 2015, the Head Start program received a summary suspension from the Office of Head Start in Boston right around Thanksgiving of 2015. She stated, at this point, CDI came in and took over operations from NEON, making a seamless transition for families and children. Ms. Oster emphasized that this is the primary

daycare for many of their families, and that Housing is still in those buildings. CDI has been running Head Start, while Housing has run the other 2 programs, and they have been working well together, with CDI maintaining an open line of communication between the Childhood Council and Department of Education. On February 12th, the Office of Head Start informed CDI that their contract was terminated. Ms. Oster stated that they are currently in the process of appealing the summary suspension, and that she isn't certain whether they plan to appeal the termination. She stated that they met with CDI and Housing this morning, and that they have a good transition plan in place to ensure the smoothest possible move for children and families. She stated that families likely won't realize there is a changeover, as there is no anticipated interruption in services. Ms. Oster stated that they are discussing the lease with Legal, and on Tuesday the 23rd, the Early Childhood Council convened a meeting with the Mayor, Board of Education, people from Norwalk Public Schools, and other key members. She stated that they are waiting to hear Housing's plan of action, and that a small group will be discussing options if housing does not decide to appeal the termination. Ms. Oster stated that these plans are subject to the Office of Head Start's approval, and that CDI has agreed to stay on as long as needed.

The Chair asked if it is too early to discuss the aforementioned options, and Ms. Oster stated that it is in fact too early to speculate. Ms. DiCesari stated that the focus is currently on making sure the system stays stable, and that there won't be a cliff following CDI's departure. Ms. DiCesari stated that CDI said they've stayed years with programs while waiting to see what Head Start wants to do. Ms. DiCesari stated, in terms of putting out an RP, they will wait until they know what Housing wants to do, as there isn't an official termination, and there doesn't appear to be any imminent plan.

Ms. Oster stated that this could be a great opportunity to plan aspects of the program with the input of the children and families in the community.

Ms. DiCesari stated that it is wonderful to see all of the community involvement and conference. She stated that all of the children's records are in one place, and that CDI will take receipt of all the children's records if necessary. She further stated that each site is mixed, with multiple funding streams, and that she hoped the next organization would continue forward with a clear understanding of the designation of classrooms.

The Chair asked if it was still acceptable for the funding streams to be shared. Ms. Oster stated that the Office of Early Childhood Licensing has visited the locations, and have been very impressed and pleased with the current operations. Ms. DiCesari stated that several local people have visited regularly for monitoring visits, and that they have a consultant coming in from NCC.

The Chair stated that a long-term item of concern may be that trying to replicate the format NEON had will not be functional for another company, and suggested they find a non-profit organization willing to take portions of classrooms. She then asked how many Head Start classrooms they currently have. Ms. Oster stated that Head Start has 140 children, so there are about 10 classrooms.

Ms. DiCesari stated that one of the buildings is required to be an Early Childhood Learning Facility, which becomes a physical issue due to the grant and where the parents are located. She stated they do not want to do anything that may be disruptive to the parents.

The Chair asked if a church with an active 501(c3) could have a Head Start program if they are willing. Ms. DiCesari stated that, while this is possible, she has learned anecdotally that the energy and drive required to be a contractor under Head Start is extremely demanding. Ms. Oster stated that they have well over 500 rules and regulations to be followed, and that the process is rather daunting. She further stated that the organization in question would need to have the proper infrastructure to handle this.

Ms. DiCesari stated that the Superintendent's strategic planning hopes to see more preschools attached to elementary schools, as this has proved to be a very effective model in helping children get acclimated to the elementary school environment early. Ms. Oster stated that this model provides a seamless transition and gets families involved, creating a solid community.

Ms. DiCesari stated that it is difficult for a small, community based organization to take on the challenges of mounting a preschool without a significant parent fee or through compromising the quality of care. Ms. Oster stated that most funding streams in this area are severely underfunded, and that start up money is needed to outfit classrooms and provide supplies.

Ms. DiCesari stated that she works for a nonprofit organization and works with the council in her spare time. She stated that the council is comprised primarily of community partners, such as librarians, and is a composite of the community devoted to the early childhood system.

The Chair asked about the feasibility of fundraising. Ms. DiCesari stated that the financial resources for what they demand of their program is completely out of whack, given that it takes \$15,000 to \$16,000 per child to run a quality program, and their funding is between \$9,000 and \$10,000 per child. The Chair stated that Head Start teachers qualify for partial loan cancellation. Ms. DiCesari stated that she appreciated the committee's interest, and that she would be happy to talk more regarding fundraising at their convenience. Ms. Oster seconded this, and stated that it is incumbent upon their organization, the committee, and the community to ensure children receive a quality education.

Council Member Melendez noted how crucial the preschool years are for childhood development. Ms. Oster stated that she took a prenatal class at the Norwalk Community Health Center, and noted how few people know the importance of reading and talking to babies, toddlers and children, particularly in full sentences.

OLD BUSINESS

No old business was discussed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Ramos
Telesco Secretarial Services