

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
&
SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 18, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Bruce Kimmel, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling; Douglas Hempstead; John Igneri;
John Kydes; Shannon O'Toole Giandurco

STAFF: Robert Barron, Director of Finance

OTHERS: Richard Bonenfant; Eloisa Melendez, Common Council Members

PUBLIC HEARING

PUBLIC HEARING ON FISCAL YEAR 2016-2017 OPERATING BUDGET CAP

Mr. Kimmel opened the Public Hearing at 7:06 p.m. He explained that he wanted to clear up two misconceptions about the budget. He said that this public hearing was for the operating budget; the capital budget extends over a number of months. Mr. Kimmel described the process. He noted that there is a little anxiety over what will be and what will not be funded.

Mr. Kimmel said that the second misconception was the role the Common Council in the budget; because the Board of Education is such a large part of the budget, the Common Council looks at it. Once the Common Council sets a cap, the operating budget goes to the Board of Estimate and Taxation. The Board of Estimate and Taxation will hold a series of workshops with each City department. They have line item authority over the budget, except for the Board of Education. The Common Council cannot recommend a certain amount for a certain department.

Mayor Rilling said that the budget process is not a static process; it is a dynamic process and is not an exact science. He said that the easy thing to do would be to give all departments everything they want, but that would not be the responsible thing to do. He said that during the budget process, if a department feels they need more money in a line item, then they can ask for a transfer or a special appropriation.

Mayor Rilling said that there is a lot of attention on the Board of Education budget, at one time they were \$600,000 apart. He said that he met with Dr. Adamowski and told him that the City would put back \$300,000. He said that he feels that they can work together to find opportunities to find the other \$300,000. Mayor Rilling said that he needs to be sure they get the best bang for the buck.

Mr. Barron explained that they are at step two of the budget process with his recommendation that he made last week. He described the five steps of the process and said that through those steps he will try to balance the needs of the departments with the needs of the taxpayers.

Mr. Barron said that the State of Connecticut re-values their properties once every five years. In the intervening years, the mill rate will change the tax bill. He said that if all of the requests were approved, the tax levy would go up 3.5%. His recommended budget has a mill rate increase of 0.5%. He said that a \$300,000 delta on a recommended budget is very close.

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

Mr. Merlan Meyer-Mitchell, Allen Road said that he was here to express concern about setting a cap that is too small. He said that it sounds like there are good communications with Dr. Adamowski.

Ms. Aimee Ableman, Hunt Street said that she has children in the school system and they have excellent teachers; they do more with less. She said that they are fortunate that the Board of Education secured Dr. Adamowski and it seems that Norwalk is asking him to lead and improve schools on a lot less. Ms. Ableman said that it was insulting to ask for cuts; it is troubling that the City is not supporting education.

Mr. Bryan Meek, Cranbury Woods Road, member of the Board of Education said that a 3.9% increase is less than 14 of the past budgets. He said that he recognized that Mr. Barron was able to identify potential cost savings and that they were greater than anticipated which allowed them to build up a large insurance reserve. Mr. Meek said that he understands the pressure on the City to keep taxes low. He said that the Board of Education requests that their original budget be approved and that the \$600,000 that was eliminated be restored to the budget.

Mr. Jeffrey Spahr, Stonybrook Road said that the Board of Education has been driving with a check Special Education light on for a long time. He said that no parent wants their child outplaced; the parent's life would be better to keep their child in the district. He said that they may need to spend more to benefit the students in the long term.

Ms. Lori Keegan, Barjune Road said that she has a daughter in the school system who is shy, quiet and anxious. She said that because of the actions of her teacher, she came home full of confidence. She asked that no cuts be made to the team orientation.

Ms. Diane Lauricella, Blue Mountain Ridge Road asked that the cap not be raised at this time. She said that she believes that the funds can be to give more to the Board of Education and reduce the burden on the taxpayers. She asked why department heads are allowed to keep piling on the numbers they had before. She suggested a

zero based budget. Ms. Lauricella said the Common Council can influence the line by line items. She said that it is time for the Personnel chair to look at the return on investments. She said that schools need to cut their operating costs.

Mr. Joe Fitzgerald, France Street said that he is a fifth grader and was in public school, but now attends private school. He asked for help in Special Education to in-place more kids.

Ms. Joanna Cooper, Shadow Lane asked that political influence be used to keep taxes down and fully fund the Board of Education. She said that it is not an option to not fund Special Education. She urged support of Dr. Adamowski and said that he has a huge job to fix the system. She said that to not fully fund education will be paid for in other ways in society; there is nothing more important than education and giving everyone equal footing. Ms. Cooper said that schools are at capacity and that Special Education is a mess.

Ms. Jodi Neaderland, Watson Court said that the new Superintendent has a great track record and it would be a shame not to fund his initiatives. She said that she does not want to lose another leader.

Mr. Dan Grundman, Adams Lane said that there has been no increase in Social Security in 2016. He proposed that every department justify every penny requested. He said that with the massive reduction in fuel costs, certain contracts should be re-negotiated and the City should look in the low prices for future use. He said that the proposed budget is an increase of over \$10 million. He proposed taking a half penny out of every dollar in the budget.

Mr. Grundman said that regarding artificial turf, there is no shortage of attorneys looking for class action suits and suggested contacting Simply Safe for inexpensive security systems. Mr. Grundman added that those departments that need help, can use interns.

Mr. Drew Todd, Friendly Road listed fundraising events run by parents for the schools. He said that it is time to support education. He said that others can cry that taxes are too high, but they are not and the City provides great services. He said that it is time for the City to raise the cap and support the Board of Education.

Mr. Kimmel asked if anyone else wished to speak, hearing none, the public hearing was closed at 8:01 p.m.

SPECIAL MEETING

Mr. Kimmel called the special meeting of the Finance/Claims Committee to order at 8:01 p.m.

1. FISCAL YEAR 2016-2017 OPERATING BUDGET AND CAP REVIEW AND DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Mr. Kimmel thanked Mr. Meek, Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Barron, Mayor Rilling and members of the Common Council. He said that what was not mentioned, that apart from the operating budget, is a request from the Board of Education for \$1.2 million for Special Education restructuring.

**** MR. KIMMEL MOVED 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 LIMITATION ON LOCALLY FUNDED 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 TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2016 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN \$316,339,469. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF \$337,095,669 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF \$20,756,200.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2016-17 BUDGET GUIDE, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Mr. Kimmel said that this is still a \$600,000 difference and he would like to meet them half way.

**** MR. KIMMEL MOVED THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENT TO THE RESOLUTION:**

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMITATION ON LOCALLY FUNDED 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 TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2016 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN \$316,639,469. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF \$337,395,669 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF \$20,756,200.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2016-17 BUDGET GUIDE, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Mr. Kimmel explained that this amendment increases the spending cap by \$300,000. He said that they are committed to working with the Board of Education to find funding.

Mr. Kimmel said that Mr. Simms, a member of the Committee tried to make this evening's meeting, but was stuck in New York. He said that Mr. Sacchinelli, also a member of the Committee had a family emergency and had to go to Florida.

Mr. Igneri said that he supported Mr. Kimmel's amended resolution and is confident that everyone will work to find the additional \$300,000.

**** THE AMENDMENT TO THE RESOLUTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**** THE RESOLUTION AS AMENDED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AND MOVED TO THE FULL COMMON COUNCIL**

Mr. Hempstead said that he apologizes for his misstatement about the Assistant to the Mayor not being funded for 20 years. He said that he does not feel that he is micromanaging if he makes suggestions.

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO AMEND THE RESOLUTION AS FOLLOWS:**

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMITATION ON LOCALLY FUNDED 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 TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2016 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN \$316,939,469. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF \$337,695,669 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF \$20,756,200.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2016-17 BUDGET GUIDE, BE FORWARDED BY THE CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION.

Mr. Hempstead said that the cap is an outer number and the Board of Education can spend under the cap; it is important to spend more money to right a situation.

Mr. Kimmel spoke against Mr. Hempstead's amendment. He said that when they increased the amount by \$300,000, they had to look at how it would impact all taxing districts. He said that he

is confident that the Board of Estimate and Taxation will work with the Board of Education to find enough money to cover whatever deficits there may be; the goal is to minimize the impact on taxpayers.

Mr. Kimmel said that he feels that \$300,000 is a fair compromise and does not feel that they should go above that. He said that this increase would raise the average tax increase \$7.00 or \$8.00. He said that there are departments in the City that have bare bones budgets and they need to be sure that they can provide services.

Mr. Kydes said that he has children in the school system and said that he will not support this amendment.

Ms. O'Toole Giandurco said that for an additional \$7.00 this is not a lot to ask for.

Mr. Kimmel said that while everyone supports the Board of Education and they will guarantee the money to implement Special Education programs, anything can happen between now and July 1st. He said that the goal is to have a balanced budget, while trying to fund the Board of Education.

**** MOTION FAILED WITH TWO (2) IN FAVOR (MR. HEMPSTEAD AND MS. O'TOOLE GIANDURCO) AND THREE (3) OPPOSED (MR. IGNERI; MR. KIMMEL AND MR. KYDES)**

Mr. Bonenfant said that he is not on the Committee and neither is Ms. Melendez, but this Common Council has always supported the Board of Education. He said that they are looking at \$176 million for the Board of Education budget, but that does not include what is spent on facilities, text books, technology, fields and playgrounds.

Mr. Kimmel thanked Mr. Bonenfant and Ms. Melendez for attending this evening's meeting.

Mayor Rilling said that he appreciated people coming out and said that they have his total commitment to be sure not to short change children and not take funding from places that would increase taxes.

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

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services