

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
AND SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 23, 2017**

ATTENDANCE: Bruce Kimmel, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling; John Igneri; John Kydes, Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco; Nicholas Sacchinelli; Douglas Hempstead (7:10 p.m.)

STAFF: Robert Barron, Finance Director

OTHERS: Richard Bonenfant; Thomas Livingston; Michelle Maggio; Eloisa Melendez; Steve Serasis

PUBLIC HEARING

PUBLIC HEARING ON FISCAL YEAR 2017-2018 OPERATING BUDGET CAP

Mr. Kimmel opened the public hearing at 7:06 p.m. He thanked everyone for attending and introduced the Mayor and Common Council members. He asked each speaker to keep their comments to three minutes to allow everyone an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Kimmel said that tonight's focus is on the operating budget and not school construction. He asked for a productive discussion and said that the Common Council's role is limited on how much money is spent; they do not have line item authority.

Mr. Hempstead joined the meeting at 7:10 p.m.

Mr. Kimmel explained that crafting the budgets is a process that begins in the fall and ends in the spring. He asked everyone to be mindful that the charter allows the Board of Estimate and Taxation to come back to the Common Council if it feels it needs more money to meet the departmental requests.

Mayor Rilling thanked Mr. Kimmel for holding the public hearing. He noted there will be another on March 22nd. This is a work in progress and meetings will be held with all the departments, including the Board of Education. Mayor Rilling said that they do not know what the Governor's final budget will reflect. Ninety percent of the budget comes from personal property tax and tax reform is needed to take the burden off the taxpayers' shoulders.

The new developments will increase the grand list. Mayor Rilling said that he is committed to providing all of the children with the best possible education and will work to craft a budget that is fair and responsible.

Mr. Barron gave a summary of the budget and said that there are two more steps to go. He summarized the high impact budgets and said that the City is responsible for determining what is a reasonable tax burden on the residents.

Mr. Kimmel said that he will call those who wish to speak about departments other than the Board of Education first.

City Departments:

Ms. Debora Goldstein, asked for outcome based budgeting.

Ms. Diane Lauricella, said that tax reform is needed. She suggested having a robust agenda for the Personnel Committee. She said that there are viable industrial zones and that the City needs to try harder to get clean industry. Ms. Lauricella said that the City has to look at electricity, fuel, gas and heating issues and include people like herself in those discussions in order to save taxpayer money.

Board of Education:

Ms. Meghan Hopkins, Columbus Magnet parent, asked the City to find a way to support the Superintendent's budget as proposed. She said that the quality of the school system benefits all the residents.

Risa Taub, Columbus Magnet student said that all Norwalk kids should have a chance to learn. She asked the Committee to support the Superintendent's budget.

Ms. Irene Surapine, President, BMHS class of 2017 said that the lack of funding will impact the students. She said that since enrollment has increased, some students have three study halls, because the elected classes are completely full. She asked the Committee to support the Superintendent's budget.

Mr. Patrick Begos, Co-Chair, BMHS Governance Committee talked about the increase enrollment and how students who are English Language learners need a tremendous amount of support. He said that the budget request addresses the problems that need to be addressed.

Mr. Jim MacDonald spoke in support of the IB program at BMHS; it urges students to become lifetime learners.

Ms. Suzanne Koroshetz asked for support of the Superintendent's budget and to support all of Norwalk's kids to the fullest.

Mr. Drew Todd, Wolfpit School, PTO asked for full support of the Board of Education's budget. He noted that half the cost was for health insurance for employees. He asked if the problem could be solved creatively and that the balance of the request go directly to education.

Ms. Barbara Myer-Mitchell asked for support of the Superintendent's budget and said that it is necessary. She suggested mitigating the budget by restructuring the medical insurance. She said that Norwalk needs to be competitive with the surrounding towns in terms of what we spend on our students.

Ms. Becky Aurilio, Cranbury School, said that eliminating the first grade aids this year was devastating.

Ms. Joanna Cooper said that this is the best Board of Education and Superintendent Norwalk has ever had and asked the City to support their budget.

Mr. Drew Patrick, expressed his support of the Board of Education's budget. He said that the community gains from this plan and urged everyone to reflect on the progress that has been made over the last four years.

Mr. Michael Lyons, Chair, Board of Education said that they are working to solve the insurance problem and feels it will be solved in early July. He said that they have done a good job in keeping costs in control and noted that Special Education costs are flat. He said that this is not a business as usual budget and now is the time to do this.

Ms. Lisa Thomson said that she fully supports the Board of Education budget. She said that Norwalk is growing and she supports the development.

Mr. Eric Niederer spoke in support of the Board of Education's budget and said that the Norwalk Public Schools is the heart of the community. It is the greatest asset in the City and all of the children are entitled to a great education.

Mr. Medard Thomas, Principal, Columbus Magnet School said that he has first hand knowledge of the schools. He said that the teachers are dedicated. People do not move to Norwalk because of the schools. He implored the Committee to pass the operating budget. He said that now is the time to be bold for our children and people will want to move to Norwalk for the schools.

Mr. Matt Yost invited everyone to visit the Jefferson Magnet School. He said that in 2014 they were a Blue Ribbon recipient and asked that all schools in Norwalk become Blue Ribbon recipients.

Ms. Jody Sattler asked for full support of the Superintendent's budget. She said that if they had more funding, the schools would not be in such disrepair.

Mr. Mark Bonasera requested full funding of the Superintendent's budget. He said that he and his wife were very impressed with the teachers.

Mr. Bryan Meek, Chair, Finance Committee, Board of Education spoke about the high cost of transportation and said that schools need to be put in strategic locations so kids can spend more time in classrooms and playgrounds and not on buses.

Mr. Ben Soreff, parent of Jefferson Magnet School student spoke about how the school is overcrowded and his son goes to art class once every six days. He urged support of the budget that addresses overcrowding.

Ms. Susanne Bryer said that she came here to listen. He said that he daughter attends Brookside School and is in a class of 15; that is not fair to the other children.

A student said that he heard that his program may be taken away and was very sad. He asked that his program not be taken away.

Mr. John Mosby said that he worked in the schools and asked to save the schools and look at the insurance costs. He said that people have to communicate, work together and listen to the Minority community; a lot of money is being wasted. He said that this Board better do right by the community.

Mr. Alex Papadapolous asked if there are ways to trim the costs.

Mr. Ernest Dumas spoke in support of "Fix it First" and said that all of the schools need to be fixed. He said that he stands outside of Columbus Magnet School to keep the drug dealers away. He said that he lives in South Norwalk and is all about the children.

Mr. Greg Sands, teacher, said that Norwalk is special because it is so inclusive.

Ms. Kristen Goldstein, Principal, Cranbury School said that her family chose Norwalk because they love so many things about it. She said that there is only so much teachers can do with their resources. She asked the Committee to imagine their children going to school and asked what is it they want to give up if the budget is cut.

Mr. Jimmy Napoli said that he was attracted to Norwalk because of the diversity. He said that Norwalk now has a strong Superintendent who has a vision and a functioning Board of Education.

Ms. Sacha Carr said that her family is new to Norwalk and hopes the insurance issue will be resolved.

Ms. Jennifer Devins said that she lives in Norwalk, but teaches in New Canaan; however, she chose to send her children to school in Norwalk because she loves the diversity that Norwalk offers. She said she had an amazing experience at Marvin School and the schools need funding to continue to grow.

Mr. Kimmel asked three times if anyone else wished to speak. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing at 8:59 p.m.

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Mr. Kimmel called the special meeting of the Finance/Claims Committee to order at 9:08 p.m.

**** MR. KIMMEL MOVED TO SEND THE FOLLOWING ITEM TO THE
FEBRUARY 28, 2017 MEETING OF THE FULL COMMON COUNCIL**

**2. RESOLUTION APPROPRIATING \$200,000 FOR THE PURPOSE OF A
PARKING CAPACITY STUDY**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**1. FISCAL YEAR 2017-2018 OPERATING BUDGET AND CAP REVIEW
AND DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Mr. Kimmel explained that everyone had their backup and recommendations from Mr. Barron. He said that he was proposing an amendment to transfer \$1 million from the fund balance to make the total transfer from the fund balance \$3 million. Mr. Kimmel said that will leave the fund balance at an amount that is close to the median.

Mr. Kimmel asked that that money be earmarked for the Board of Education. He said there are on-going discussion about going on the State's plan for insurance which will save the Board of Education another \$5 million.

Mr. Kimmel said that moving the \$1 million means that mill rate as proposed by Mr. Barron will stay the same.

**** MR. KIMMEL MOVED TO AMEND THE PROPOSED BUDGET BY
TRANSFERRING \$1 MILLION FROM THE FUND BALANCE TO THE
BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY BY A SHOW OF HANDS**

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

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services