

**CITY OF NORWALK  
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
FEBRUARY 15, 2018**

ATTENDANCE: Gregory Burnett, Chair; Douglas Hempstead; John Kydes;  
Nicholas Sacchinelli; Faye Bowman (7:10 p.m.);  
Travis Simms (7:19 p.m.)

STAFF: Robert Barron, Director of Finance;  
Lunda Asmani, Management and Budgets;  
Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector

OTHERS: Jerry Crowley; Bill Walters; Jane Walters; Patricia Williams;  
Raeann Bromark; Elsa Peterson Obuchowski,  
Oak Hills Park Authority

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Burnett called the special meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Mr. Burnett called the Roll and announced a quorum was present.

**3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

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

Mr. Charles Brennan, President of the Mens' Association at Oak Hills said that he heard rumors that the City was going to take over Oak Hills golf course. He said that since the Authority took over, it is one of the best golf courses in Fairfield County. The only thing dragging it down is the restaurant debt. Mr. Brennan said that it is a white elephant and not what the golf course needs. He said it sits empty most of the time.

Mr. Richard Delallo, a Norwalk resident for 67 years said he was there when the golf course first opened. He said it was beautiful and people came from all over. Then it started to go downhill and it seemed like no money was going into it.

Ms. Bowman joined the meeting at 7:10 p.m.

Mr. Delallo said he heard the golf course may go back to the City and that is a bad idea. He said there are seasonal workers and they would have to be unionized. He said it would not be a good idea to remove the Authority.

Mr. Bob Patticini said he has been playing golf at Oak Hills since 1971 when he got out of the Service. For many years, Parks and Recreation controlled the golf course and it was in bad shape; money going out, but none coming in. In 1998 the Oak Hills Park Authority was established. The restaurant is beautiful, but it is for a private golf course, not a public golf course. He said he has seen changes made by the Authority and noted there is good management there now. Mr. Patticini said Oak Hills rivals private golf courses. He said he hopes the Common Council keeps in mind that the Authority should stay and build a better golf course.

Ms. Elsa Peterson Obuchowski said that she comes from a culture of people who like parks and Oak Hills provides that. She said there is more to Oak Hills Park than just the golf course. She said it is beautiful and the teaching staff is very helpful. She said he has learned a lot since being on the Authority.

No other members of the public wished to speak.

**4. APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETINGS:**

January 11, 2018

- \*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 11, 2018 MEETING**
- \*\* MOTION PASSED WITH THREE (3) ABSTENTIONS (MS. BOWMAN; MR. KYDES AND MR. SACCHINELLI)**

January 30, 2018

The following correction was made to page 1: started should read "stated".

- \*\* MR. SACCHINELLI MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 30, 2018 AS CORRECTED**
- \*\* MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MS. BOWMAN)**

**5. CLAIMS COMMITTEE: RECEIVE THE MONTHLY CLAIMS REPORT; REVIEW AND APPROVE CLAIMS AS REQUIRED FOR CLAIMS REPORT DATED: FEBRUARY 15, 2018**

Ms. Biagiarelli reported that they had in excess of the \$10,000 limit.

Mr. Simms joined the meeting at 7:19 p.m.

Ms. Biagiarelli explained that there were more overpayments by taxpayers during this cycle. Taxpayers paid in December so they could take advantage of the tax deduction and their bank could not reverse the escrow payment. She said her office sent back hundreds of checks, because they were not entitled to keep those payments.

Ms. Bowman asked if people are aware of the refund. Ms. Biagiarelli said they were, because they had to apply for the refund. Mr. Simms asked what would happen if people refused the refund and wanted the money applied to a future bill. Ms. Biagiarelli explained that in almost all cases, the escrow agent wants their money back.

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO RECEIVE THE CLAIMS REPORT  
DATED FEBRUARY 15, 2018  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**6. NARRATIVE ON TAX COLLECTIONS DATED FEBRUARY 15, 2018-  
RECEIVE REPORT AND DISCUSS.**

**7. MONTHLY TAX COLLECTOR'S REPORTS - RECEIVE REPORTS AND  
DISCUSS: JANUARY 31, 2018**

Ms. Biagiarelli presented her report, but noted that she would not know where they stand until the next meeting because a lot of payments came in and are not yet reflected.

The Tax Collector's office is preparing to send demand notices by the week of March 1<sup>st</sup>. In addition, they are working on the July 23, 2018 Tax Sale. As of today, they already collected \$850,000 from properties that would have been in the Tax Sale. The Tax Sale is done to keep the collection rate up and the mill rate down, which represents tax relief to all taxpayers.

**8. RECEIVE OAK HILLS AUTHORITY MONTHLY FINANCIAL  
STATEMENTS FOR DECEMBER 2017**

**9. MEET WITH OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY MEMBERS**

Members of the Oak Hills Park Authority introduced themselves. Mr. Crowley reviewed the status of their grant and said they hope to have in excess of \$25,000 to put into the relocation of the Pro Shop into the restaurant. They sent out an RFP in November and got three back; however, they all withdrew. He said they are in limbo now because of the eviction process and because they have not taken rent from the restaurant for the last four months.

Mr. Crowley said the debt service is killing them. He said they have no money to fix things that are broken; he noted that these things were probably broken 20 years ago.

Mr. Hempstead said he never heard anything about doing away with the Authority. Mr. Walters said that was mentioned by a golfer. Mr. Hempstead said the lease with the City was up last year and asked what is going on. Mr. Walters said every operator wants to get a sit-down bar, a mobile beverage cart and outdoor music. He said they are also asking to buildup their operating and capital reserves to fix what is broken.

Mr. Crowley said they had to shut down part of the golf course last fall when they made improvements.

Mr. Hempstead said he heard this asked before and asked about the holdup. Mr. Crowley said they met with the Mayor a number of times and the Corporation Counsel. He said they explained what they want, but did not get feedback. The Mayor wants Ms. L. King to be the liaison.

Mr. Simms asked about the cart usage. He was told they are at best at break even and they have discussed getting out of the lease.

Mr. Kydes said he was in full support of changing the lease to all for a sit-down bar.

Mr. Walters noted that they may lose three tournaments because they can't serve breakfast or lunch to the participants. Mr. Crowley said a restaurant was built to round out the golfing experience. The Authority never made any money on the restaurant. Mr. Kydes asked if the Authority approached the current tenant of the restaurant about changing the use of the restaurant. Mr. Crowley said the operators want to keep it more of a catering venue and not a family style restaurant.

Mr. Simms asked about the status of the driving range. Mr. Walters said it was approved as part of the master plan, but it can't be funded because of the debt service. Mr. Simms noted that the restaurant is a beautiful establishment but it needs to be made viable.

Mr. Burnett said an open dialogue will be maintained with the Oak Hills Park Authority.

**10. RECEIVE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION APPROPRIATIONS  
DATED FEBRUARY 12, 2018**

**\*\* MR. SACCHINELLI MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING  
RESOLUTION:**

**RESOLUTION: APPROVE A SPECIAL APPROPRIATION IN THE  
AMOUNT OF \$20,350 TO ACCOUNT 013410-5731 (CARS AND VANS)**

**FOR THE PURCHASE OF NEW FORD ESCAPE VEHICLE FOR  
BUILDING INSPECTION FROM CONTINGENCY FUNDS**

Mr. Lunda explained the item.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MR. KYDES MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:**

**11. RESOLUTION: APPROVE A SPECIAL CAPITAL APPROPRIATION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$66,000 TO INCREASE THE AVAILABLE FUNDS FOR THE PURCHASE OF A NEW FIRE ENGINE AND RELATED ACCESSORIES (0917-3110-577C0437). THE FUNDS WILL BE DRAWN FROM THE BALANCE IN THE CAPITAL FUND.**

Fire Chief Gatto explained the item.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:**

**12. RESOLUTION: APPROVE A SPECIAL CAPITAL APPROPRIATION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$167,080 TO INCREASE THE AVAILABLE FUNDS FOR THE ROOF REPLACEMENT AT THE FIRE STATION LOCATED AT 100 FAIRFIELD AVENUE (0918-3 I 10-577-C0443). THE FUNDS WILL BE DRAWN FROM THE BALANCE IN THE CAPITAL FUND.**

Fire Chief Gatto explained the item. He said the roof is over 30 years old and leaks. They ended up with seven bids and this was the lowest bidder. Mr. Barron added that they are a proven vendor who worked on the City Hall roof. Chief Gatto said there are no other plans other than to fix the roof. He said they have two full time and one part time mechanic there.

Mr. Simms asked how much was budgeted to fix the building. Chief Gatto said that he puts \$35,000 into the budget every year. He noted they have to buy a new sewer pump and that is going to cost \$15,000.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MR. SIMMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:**

**14. RESOLUTION: APPROVE A SPECIAL CAPITAL APPROPRIATION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$13,462 TO INCREASE THE FIRE DEPARTMENT'S FORD EXPLORER EMERGENCY VEHICLES PURCHASE (0918-3110-5777 C0486). THE FUNDS WILL BE DRAWN FROM THE BALANCE IN THE CAPITAL FUND.**

Chief Gatto explained that they went out to bid and only received one back.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:**

**13. RESOLUTION, AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS TO SECURE THE REPAYMENT OF A LOAN IN THE AMOUNT OF THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS (\$300,000) FROM THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE SIXTH TAXING DISTRICT FOR THE PURPOSE OF PAYING CAPITAL EXPENSES RELATED TO THE RENOVATION OF THE DISTRICT'S COMMUNITY CENTER FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017-2018.**

Mr. Barron explained that this was a capital project to improve the Rowayton Community Center. He said they asked for the same amount a few years ago to do their roof.

Mr. Simms asked if it is a general practice for a taxing district to ask the City for a loan. Mr. Barron said the taxing district does not have access to the capital markers the way the City does. The City does this on their behalf and it does not cost the City anything. In response to Mr. Hempstead's question, Mr. Barron said the money comes in as earmarked for debt service.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**15. DISCUSSION ON THE OPERATING BUDGET WITH CITY FINANCE DEPARTMENT**

Mr. Barron reviewed various hypothetical tax increases by district. In response to Mr. Burnett's question, Mr. Barron said he will send everyone a copy of the last three-four

years mill rates. He said that historically, they have had low year over year mill rate increases. Mr. Burnett commented that if they consider fully funding the Board of Education they would be looking at an increase of 5.5%, which is totally out of line with what they have been doing.

Mr. Barron explained that the charge for the Common Council is to set a cap for what the tax payers can afford.

Ms. Bowman said the Register of Voters line jumped out at her. Mr. Barron said they know a primary will take place. She noted that the Police and Fire had a sizable increase. Ms. Bowman said that the Board of Education is proposing to stay flat in the base. She said they can't because of contractual increases.

Mr. Burnett asked Mr. Barron if there was wiggle room in the fund balance before the percentage would reduce to a point where it could impact the City's AAA bond. Mr. Barron said it is not just a percentage amount. He said that even with the apartments and commercial units, the grand list is still flat. Mr. Barron said he will provide further information to the Committee members.

Mr. Kydes said if they fully fund the Board of Education this year they said they will come back next year with the same request and it is a re-valuation year. Mr. Barron said that each year he does a multi-year forecast. He said the assumptions can grow the budget anywhere from 3 – 4 1/2% for the out years. He noted the City committed to a lot of spending.

Mr. Kydes left the meeting at 9:13 p.m.

Mr. Barron said that \$85 million has been appropriated for the first two schools. They will be ready in three years. Ms. Bowman said it is never too late to recognize that once the schools are built, they will have to staff them. She asked who is going to staff the two additional schools. She said the Board of Education is going to come back with a huge ask. Mr. Barron said this body appropriates the capital budget.

Mr. Hempstead said he believed the plan was to get rid of the portable classrooms at Jefferson, so there will still be the same number of teachers there. Ms. Bowman said that the way the City is heading, there will be no break for the taxpayers.

Mr. Burnett announced a public hearing on the operating budget next Thursday followed by a special meeting.

16. **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* MR. SACCHINELLI MOVED TO ADJOURN  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi  
Telesco Secretarial Services