

BOARD OF ESTIMATE & TAXATION MEETING ACTIONS

DECEMBER 6, 2004

PRESENT: Mayor, Alex Knopp Tim Buzzee
Gregory Burnett Tanya Court
James Clark Ron Coley

ABSENT: Randall Avery

Also present were: Pam Stark, City Clerk; Thomas Hamilton, Director of Finance; Ann Twomey, Director of Management and Budgets; Lou Ciccarello, Corporation Counsel.

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Mayor Knopp called the meeting to order at 7:40 pm.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

November 1, 2004

**** MR. CLARK MOVED APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED.
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

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SPECIAL APPROPRIATIONS

Section A – Advertised Items

1. RESOLVED, that a sum not to exceed \$50,000 be and the same is hereby transferred from Contingency to the Law Department to pay for Other Professional Services. (Account No. 01-0300-5358).

Mr. Hamilton stated that this is for legal expenses regarding outside cases.

Ms. Twomey explained further that the appropriation is for tax appeals and outside counseling for hearings and the appeal for the hi-voltage transmission line. She said they expect to have to more tax appeals and they are anticipating to hire appraisers, therefore the Finance Department is recommending approval of \$50,000.

**** MS. COURT MOVED APPROVAL OF THE ITEM.
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

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TRANSFER AGENDA

Section B

There were none this evening.

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OTHER BUSINESS

1. Discuss the Registrar of Voters Compliance with the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and connecting to the State system.

Mayor Knopp indicated that the purpose of adding this to the agenda this evening is to bring members of this Board up to date regarding Norwalk not being in compliance with the Statewide voter registration system and other issues regarding the costs of compliance. He added that the outcome of this matter is still pending.

Mr. Hamilton stated that the Registrar of Voters is going to Hartford tomorrow with a programmer from the City's IT department and the indication they have heard now is that the state will perform another conversion of Norwalk's voter file. Earlier on the state had indicated that they would not conduct another conversion but apparently they are now willing to do so; this is a good thing. In terms of the conversion, work will be required of the Registrar of Voters to validate the data after it is converted and to make sure everything is in the system properly; he added that this responsibility rests with the Registrar of Voters. With regard to the document that the State has proposed, it is an agreement containing a consent order that has a variety of requirements and a provision for a fine.

Mayor Knopp added that the City has agreed to send up one of its programmers from the IT department to work with the two registrars and said he hoped the issue can be resolved.

Mr. Ciccarello stated that the document in the packet indicates that the Registrar of Voters has been given an opportunity to sign the consent agreement in which they would agree to pay a \$1,500 fine now and be subject to other fines if they don't comply. If the Registrar does not agree to pay the fine, then the Commission will hold a public hearing where the Registrar will have to present evidence stating why they should not be fined. He said he hoped the meeting tomorrow would be productive and get compliance for the city.

2. Discuss the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding

Mayor Knopp announced that he and a number of other Mayors, Superintendents and members of Civil Rights organizations had formed a new coalition for education funding. The Mayor said from his point of view this is a very positive initiative to figure out the cost of educating all children in Connecticut to meet the high testing requirements of No Child Left Behind and the CAPT test for graduation from high school. He summarized what had happened in the past regarding funding adding that this initiative will determine what is an adequate level of funding. This means they will take the cost to educate a child from a traditional family and from there they will figure out how much more it would cost to educate a child from a (for example) non-English speaking family, a family of poverty and a family with special needs and then to determine what the total amount of funding is. What this coalition is doing is to provide funding for study to be done and the reason for bringing this up tonight is that there is a membership fee of \$15000 based on the population of Norwalk. The Mayor stated that he anticipated coming back to this Board and the Common Council in January to ask for funding.

Mr. Clark noted that he was very encouraged by this saying he considered this to be a fair distribution.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

FY 2005 Board of Estimate Calendar

Mr. Hamilton indicated that the Finance Department have done some additional work in terms of preparing for the budget season. He said included in the back-up material is the draft schedule for up-coming meetings and asked for comments to be submitted as soon as possible so they can get it finalized. He distributed reports entitled Board of Education Budget History, Adjusted Budgets, Current and Projected School Debt, Operating Budget and FY 2005-06 Budget Summary Scenarios.

Mayor Knopp said they have been having a lot of discussions about the process is set up for the budget discussion for the coming fiscal year and one of the problems that occurred in the past is that there was too little communication early on between this Board and the Board of Education about the framework in which the education budget will be carried on. In the past this Board would wait silently to receive the budget from the Board of Education and would be presented with a budget that would often exceed any hope of possibility. The Board of Estimate and Taxation would then reply back and this would lead to a back and forth effort.

One of the issues they have come back to is that there needs to be earlier and better communication between the Board of Estimate and Taxation and the Board of Education to establish parameters of the budget debate early on. With that in mind they thought it would be productive to approach the budget in a different manner with earlier communication and more detail than had occurred in the past. Mayor Knopp said he had asked the Finance Department to go back and review some of the historical and

outstanding issues in the expectation that they can forward this to the Board of Education in their early budget debates. This would help to open the dialogue and to start out on a better foot.

Mr. Hamilton referred to the six tables he had distributed and walked through each in detail.

Mayor Knopp pointed out that the high and low numbers used in the tables, especially with regard to teacher positions. They are not actual predictions they are simply there is show a high and low range.

Mr. Clark thanked Mr. Hamilton for this information.

There was discussion of the numbers in Table 6; Ms. Twomey adjusted the figures and distributed amended reports.

Mayor Knopp stated in terms of the Superintendent's budget, this will be released on December 10, 2004, it is reviewed by the Board of Education on December 14th and 15th and will be voted upon at the Board of Education's meeting on December 21, 2004.

Mr. Burnett asked when the Mayor planned to present this information to the Board of Education.

Mayor Knopp responded by saying that he would send the reports along with a letter before Thursday's public hearing.

Budget Calendar

Mr. Hamilton stated that January 10, 2005 is when the Finance Director is required to present his budget to the Board of Estimate and Taxation; this is considered the official kick off of the budget season. With regard to the Board of Education, they prepare their budget in advance; they have invited members of this Board and members of the Common Council to attend but not to participate in their budget discussion on December 14th and 15th.

After January 10, 2005 meeting, Mr. Hamilton indicated that on January 24, 2005 they start the review the process and the Common Council adopt the initial expenditure cap on January 25, 2005; there is a regular meeting on February 7, 2005 and budget review on February 9th, 14th, 16th, 17th and 22nd, 2005.

Ms. Court asked how the budget workshops worked with regard to how the budgets are presented.

Mr. Hamilton replied that they are working with the departments now going over their goals and objectives. He said that last year the performance measurements aspect had been rolled out on a pilot basis and they are working with all of the department to

incorporate performance measures into the budget documents. Questions can be asked of the departments and that is the point of performance measurement to get the specifics into place.

Mr. Burnett pointed out that the public hearing for the budget is held during president's week and schools are closed and suggested the date of February 23rd, be changed.

Mr. Hamilton stated that they do have a firm date of March 7, 2005 – this is when the Charter requires the Board of Estimate and Taxation to transmit the budget to the Common Council for approval. However, there is some flexibility with the meeting dates and they can be moved around. On March 15, 2005 sets the final cap on the operating budget and with the final cap set it comes back to the Board of Estimate and Taxation to adjust the operating budget to reflect the final cap.

Ms. Court asked if the public could comment on each department.

Mayor Knopp indicated that the public generally comments on the recommendations that they are making at the public hearing held on February; it would not be viable to have a public hearing every night, as it would make the process too long. He mentioned a separate arrangement that has been set up to review grant requests.

Mr. Burnett stated that last year there was some discussion on what this Board referred to a pass through budget; he asked if they were going to be in the same situation this year.

Mr. Hamilton said this budget provides guidance in many ways however; they are still waiting to see what the Board of Education provides. They have done a lot of work that they shared with the Board this evening and that is a departure from the pass-through budget, as it was known last year. He said he did not know if they could give a full recommendation at this point. No matter what they provide there will be a process of additional recommendations as that is just the nature of the beast as they get closer to the end of the end of the budget cycle they get better information about state aid and other revenues.

Mayor Knopp stated that the Charter does not require the Finance Director to submit a budget. He can provide comments and criticisms and what has happened over the years is that the Finance Director's budget had tended to pre-empt a lot of authority of the Board of Estimate and Taxation because then the discussion was only about his budget. He said the submission of the Finance Director's budget is a very important step and useful step but is not something that is customary in legislative practices. The Mayor added that this is one of the reasons behind the Charter Revision and this will give the Finance Director more opportunity to evaluate the information.

Financial Reports – Oak Hills Authority Financial Status

Mayor Knopp asked if was reduced revenue or increased expenditure that account for the problems.

Mr. Hamilton noted that it was attributable to reduced revenue. He referred to the summary sheet noting the budgetary shortfall but this is for the first four months of the year. If there is a nice spring this could take care of itself.

Mr. Buzzee asked how the budget was last year.

Mayor Knopp replied that it was worse due to the wet spring and summer.

Regarding other finance reports, Mr. Hamilton stated that they had distributed a report that highlighted the some of the accounts that they are watching, for example police overtime and projections through the end of the year.

Ms. Twomey referred to the Registrar of Voters noting that they will be coming in for a special appropriation in January as a result of the Presidential Election.

Ms. Court said in terms of the police overtime, she how this was in past years.

Mr. Hamilton stated that it is up at this time and after many discussions with Chief Rilling they are now in a situation where they are paying for officers who are being trained or at the Academy. The overtime is running higher than a normal level because of the number of vacancies. He said they started out with fifteen vacancies and he said that most of them are now filled and in the academy. Last year the number of vacancies was between six and eight.

Mayor Knopp added that if there is a vacancy, overtime is paid out of the salary account but when they are hiring officers they are being paid a city salary so they don't have that vacancy salary to cover the overtime for that position.

Mr. Clark asked if the Chief expected the recent heightened level of security to be maintained.

Mayor Knopp said that is one of the reasons why they are hiring more officers, so they have more police officers on the street.

Mr. Hamilton added that the other angle is that as the combined dispatch operation comes into play this will also free up some more officers as the system has been civilianized so the officers can go out on to the street; this will also provide some relief on the overtime situation. He said that the Chief set the minimum number of officers required out on any given tour or duty based on public safety. That can always be affected and September 11th did change things and this may prompt the Chief to monitor train stations more closely (for example).

Mayor Knopp suggested that they suspend the rules to add an item regarding meeting schedules.

** MR. BURNETT MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO ADD AN ITEM TO THE AGENDA.

** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Mayor Knopp indicated that the agenda is now opened and suggested they schedule a special meeting on January 10, 2005 in lieu of the regular meeting on January 3, 2005.

** MR. BUZZEE MOVED TO HOLD A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION ON JANUARY 10, 2005 IN LIEU OF THE REGULAR MEETING ON JANUARY 3, 2005.

Mayor Knopp stated that the FOI notices would be sent out and wished every a very happy holiday.

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** MR. CLARK MOVED TO ADJOURN.

** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kate Kye
Telesco Secretarial Services

