

**CITY OF NORWALK  
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE  
NOVEMBER 14, 2019**

ATTENDANCE: Gregory Burnett, Chair; Ernest Dumas; Douglas Hempstead; John Igneri;  
John Kydes; Nicholas Sacchinelli

STAFF: Henry Dachowitz, CFO; Lamont Daniels, Chief of Community Services;  
Mario Coppola, Corporation Counsel; Paul Friia, Tax Accessor's office

OTHERS: Thomas Hamilton, CFO, Board of Education; Helene Becker, ELL;  
Henry McDowell, YMCA; Ed Ruiz, Oak Hills Park Authority

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Burnett called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

Mr. Burnett called the Roll. A quorum was present.

Noting it was his last meeting, Mr. Burnett thanked Mr. Hempstead for his wisdom and insight.  
Mr. Hempstead said it has been his pleasure.

Also noting it was his last meeting, Mr. Burnett thanked Mr. Igneri for all of his support and  
guidance. Mr. Igneri said it was enjoyable.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no members of the public who wished to speak this evening.

**\*\* MR. SACCHINELLI MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO REMOVE THE  
FOLLOWING ITEM FROM THE AGENDA**

**RESOLVED, THAT A SUM NOT TO EXCEED \$5,063 BE AND THE SAME IS  
HEREBY TRANSFERRED FROM INCREASED REVENUES (ACCT#01-30-10-  
4181) FROM THE TOWN OF SCARBOROUGH TO THE POLICE  
DEPARTMENT TO COVER POLICE OVERTIME WORK. (ACCOUNT #01-30-  
35-5120).**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING MEETINGS:**

September 12, 2019 – Regular Meeting

- \*\* MR. IGNERI MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED
- \*\* MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MR. HEMPSTEAD)

**CLAIMS COMMITTEE: RECEIVE THE MONTHLY CLAIMS REPORT; REVIEW AND APPROVE CLAIMS AS REQUIRED FOR CLAIMS REPORT DATED:**

NOVEMBER 14, 2019

- \*\* MR. IGNERI MOVED TO APPROVE THE SPECIAL REQUEST OF \$112,887.57
- \*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

The following two items were for informational purposes.

**NARRATIVE ON TAX COLLECTIONS DATED NOVEMBER 14, 2019 – RECEIVE REPORT AND DISCUSS**

**MONTHLY TAX COLLECTOR'S REPORTS DATED OCTOBER 31, 2019 – RECEIVE REPORT AND DISCUSS**

**RECEIVE OAK HILLS AUTHORITY MONTHLY FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR AUGUST 2019 AND SEPTEMBER 2019**

Mr. Ruiz reviewed the reports included in the meeting packet. The net operating income is \$6,000 higher than budget for the three month period. The audited report is in for partner review.

Mr. Hempstead asked Mr. Ruiz if they have enough reserves to get through the winter. He said they may have to use their line of credit two months later than they did last year.

Mr. Kydes said he understood they retained the same operator for the new season. Mr. Ruiz explained that the lease hasn't been signed yet. The Authority is meeting next week.

Mr. Burnett said that the key point of their last discussion was that Oak Hills Park Authority would be in a position to start paying back the loan in 2020. Mr. Ruiz said they will absolutely be able to start paying back the loan in 2020. They are in the process of creating a number of revenue generating options without increasing fees.

Mr. Burnett asked how last season was. Mr. Ruiz said they had a rough start in the spring, but working together with the food operator seems to be working. There has been positive feedback from guests and the course conditions were outstanding, especially in September.

Mr. Burnett reminded Mr. Ruiz that a representative needs to attend the Committee meeting, in person, every three months to provide an update.

**RECEIVE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION OTHER BUSINESS FROM  
OCTOBER 7, 2019:**

**\*\* MR. IGNERI MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE PURCHASING AGENT TO EXECUTE A CONTRACT TO PAUL FRIIA FOR GENERAL TAX ASSESSOR SERVICES IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$75,000 AT AN HOURLY RATE AND OTHER TERMS SET FORTH IN THE MEMORANDUM OF HENRY DACHOWITZ DATED OCTOBER 2, 2019. FUNDS ARE AVAILABLE IN ACCOUNT 011320-5253**

Mr. Dachowitz explained the request and said that working closely with Mr. Coppola they were able to attract Mr. Friia to work with them on a part time basis to stabilize the office. He has been doing an excellent job leading the office as well as attracting other part timers. They identified several candidates for the Tax Assessor's position and they look promising. In addition, this will probably net a positive amount of funding.

Mr. Dachowitz introduced Mr. Friia who gave an update on the work accomplished since coming on board in September. He said that because of the complexity of the new mall an expert appraiser who appraises malls was brought on staff. They also brought in a person specifically to work with business and personal property.

The main goal is to help the office complete the grand list and address some of the important issues in the office.

Mr. Coppola explained that when the City lost the Tax Assessor shortly before losing the Deputy Tax Assessor, he offered to bring someone in to run the department until they were able to hire a Tax Assessor and Deputy Tax Assessor.

Mr. Friia said they asked the Westport First Selectman to allow him to help on a temporary basis. He is still employed full time by the Town of Westport and comes to Norwalk during his non Westport hours.

Mr. Coppola said that when the Tax Assessor and Deputy Tax Assessor left they had a large number of assessment appeals pending that require a substantial amount of work.

Mr. Friia said Norwalk is lucky to have the growth it has, but it is very complex. They need a full staff if not more than a full staff. A well-run Assessor's office makes money for the City.

In response to Mr. Hempstead's question, Mr. Dachowitz said that he is not a Tax Assessor, but is learning. Norwalk has a lot of challenges and very few Assessors can handle everything. He said his goal was to stabilize the office. He gave Mr. Friia credit for more than stabilizing the office. He thinks they have some good candidates and with the right leadership will have a stabilized office.

Mr. Igneri asked Mr. Dachowitz if he sees them going back to a two-person office or if they will expand the office. Mr. Dachowitz said they definitely need two people at a time. They need the advanced skills they bring to the table. He wants to get a team of two people who work well together and expand those skills.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MR. IGNERI MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE PURCHASING AGENT TO ISSUE A PURCHASE ORDER TO ALI KARIMI FOR GENERAL TAX ASSESSOR SERVICES IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$40,000 AT AN HOURLY RATE AND OTHER TERMS SET FORTH IN THE MEMORANDUM OF HENRY DACHOWITZ DATED OCTOBER 2, 2019. FUNDS ARE AVAILABLE IN ACCOUNT 011320-5253**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH AMERICAN VALUATION GROUP, INC. FOR SPECIAL TAX ASSESSOR SERVICES ON THE MALL IN A SUM NOT TO EXCEED \$60,000. FUNDS ARE AVAILABLE IN ACCOUNT 011320-5253 ACCOUNTING, AUDITING SERVICES. THIS ACCOUNT HAS BUDGETED BALANCE OF \$158,000, NO SPECIAL APPROPRIATION IS REQUIRED**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**RECEIVE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION OTHER BUSINESS FROM  
NOVEMBER 12, 2019:**

**\*\* MR. SACCHINELLI MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH SAFEGROUND ORGANIC ANALYTICS FOR SPECIALTY TAX ASSESSOR SERVICES IN A SUM NOT TO EXCEED \$75,000 AT THE TERMS SET FORTH IN THE MEMORANDUM OF HENRY DACHOWITZ DATED NOVEMBER 4, 2019. FUNDS ARE AVAILABLE IN ACCOUNT #01-1320-5253 ACCOUNTING, AUDITING SERVICES. NO ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATION IS REQUIRED**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**RECEIVE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION SPECIAL APPROPRIATION  
FROM NOVEMBER 12, 2019**

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED THE FOLLOWING:**

**RESOLVED, THAT A SUM NOT TO EXCEED \$1,000,000 BE AND THE SAME IS HEREBY TRANSFERRED FROM FUND BALANCE TO FUND MATCHING FUNDS FOR THE YMCA BUILD-OUT OF THE CITY OWNED PROPERTY LOCATED AT 98 SOUTH MAIN STREET. (ACCOUNT #01-70-29-5A-0620)**

Mr. Coppola explained that this request is for \$1 million in funding toward capital improvements for property at 98 South Main Street. He provided an overview of the history of the property and said that the goal of this administration was to get the building and find a way to provide social services to the community.

An RFP was sent looking for a tenant to provide programs and they had one qualified response and that was from the YMCA. The YMCA is taking on the responsibility and liability to pay for the capital improvement plan. Mr. Coppola reviewed the lease agreement with the YMCA. The \$1 million funding will come from the money received in negotiations with GGP (Brookfield) from the development of the mall.

Mr. McDowell presented renderings of the proposed building. The Board of Directors committed \$1.2 million for the project. The old YMCA building was sold to Norwalk Hospital, but they continued to provide programs for 1,000 children at various locations in Norwalk. He said this will not be a traditional YMCA and will not have a pool or gymnasium. Some of the program they will provide include STEM, Arts, Community Kitchen, Teen Center, Multi-Purpose Room and an Arts and Visual Center.

Mr. Burnett asked when the contract will come back to the Common Council for final approval. Mr. Coppola said they are working out the details and anticipate having it ready in 10 – 20 business days.

Mr. Kydes asked where they were in the construction bidding process. Mr. McDowell said they went to the architectural firm used by the YMCA and they came back with a conceptual budget. He tested it with a construction manager and they were in the ballpark.

Mr. Hempstead asked if the YMCA will pay rent. Mr. Coppola said they are a non profit who will be providing services to the community. The more affluent YMCAs provide funding for communities that need the services, but can't pay for them. The YMCA is exempt from local taxes. The other occupants in the building will contribute toward costs. The City of Norwalk will have no or minimal costs associated with owning the property as the landlord.

Mr. Kydes asked who will organize the utility bills. Mr. Coppola said that since the YMCA will run the building, they will take care of all of the utilities and maintenance costs. The capital improvements will be done by the YMCA and the City will contribute the funding as the work is completed. Mr. Hempstead said he was glad to see this being done.

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENT THAT NO FUNDS SHALL BE ALLOCATED UNTIL THE AGREEMENT IS APPROVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL AND THE YMCA**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* THE RESOLUTION AS AMENDED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

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

**A. RESOLVED, THAT A SUM NOT TO EXCEED \$1,000,000 BE AND THE SAME IS HEREBY TRANSFERRED FROM FUND BALANCE TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO FUND ADDITIONAL ACADEMIC RESOURCES RELATED TO THE RECENT INFLOW OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS. (ACCT. #01-50-50-5050).**

Mr. Hamilton explained that the request originated due to the unforeseen circumstances of a substantial influx of new English Language Learner students who arrived over the summer. He said they are in a situation where all of the ELL services are fully committed and they need additional resources to provide services to the students.

In addition, they need \$400,000 for social services for the students and their families. These services would be provided through a contract with the Mid Fairfield Child Guidance Center. Mr. Hamilton said this is a good example of the City and Board of Education working together.

Mr. Hamilton said that he understands it is the City's intent to make a reduction at the end of the year and they accept that; however, they need the funds now.

Ms. Helene Becker explained that number of ELL students was steady until 2014 when a lot of unaccompanied students started arriving. On October 1, 2019 the number of ELL students was 2,046 as of today, November 14, 2019 the number is 2,111.

Ms. Becker distributed her written report and explained that the students who began arriving in 2014 missed a lot of education in their countries. In 2014 the Board of Education created special courses for these students. A lot of the students came with limited or no education. In addition, they also came with trauma because of the horrific circumstances in their countries. She said she is asking for bilingual Social Workers.

When the courses are full, there is no where for the students to go. All of the classes at both high schools are closed. The tutor rooms are also closed. Ms. Becker said she receives e-mails from school personnel with concerns about the students.

Mr. Kydes asked if there is any indication that the students are here temporarily or long term. Ms. Becker said that the typical profile is that they crossed the border in Texas and then placed in detention centers all over the country. If they come to Norwalk it is because they have a sponsor who is usually a relative.

Ms. Becker said the reason a lot of families come to Norwalk is because there are a lot of service jobs here. These students join their families and for the most part a lot of them stay in Norwalk unless they are deported. She noted a lot of them are Asylum Seekers.

Mr. Hamilton explained that for the last three years, they had an influx of students in the month of January, which indicates the existing numbers will go up.

Mr. Sacchinelli asked what the State of Connecticut provides. Ms. Becker said they get grants from the State; however, they are used quickly.

Mr. Igneri asked about the other students in the schools and if they were being overwhelmed by the increase in ELL students. Ms. Becker said the District is 51% Hispanic. For the most part it works well. The ELL students get along well and the other students are interested in learning Spanish. This is a way for the students to learn about the world.

One issue that came up at the high schools is finding ways to motivate the ELL students to speak English. Mr. Igneri asked about disciplinary issues. Ms. Becker said the ELL students are very appreciative of the education they are getting here and are trying their best. Most of them work a lot of hours after school and are tired. Mr. Igneri said that we have existing students and he does not want them to be overwhelmed or forgotten.

Mr. Sacchinelli asked if there has been any outreach to non-profits to fund programs. Mr. Daniels said the non-profits are stretched as well. Through the new department he is looking at hiring the Mid Fairfield Child Guidance Center to help with treatment for the children and their families.

Mr. Kydes asked how the students are placed in the school. Ms. Becker said they are put in age appropriate grades or one grade below. ELL programs are offered in all the schools. While they do have bi-lingual aids in the classes, they are asking for more, because they do not have enough.

Mr. Kydes noted the test scores in his school has gone down dramatically. He said he wants to be sure all students get the best education possible.

Mr. Burnett asked how the special appropriation of \$1 million will build a certain amount of capacity. He asked if they could quantify how many more students they can address before more money is needed. Ms. Becker said she felt they were still a little short for the best education; however, she said she is confident the amount requested will get them through the school year. She said this request was built for an additional 90 students.

Mr. Hempstead said it seems that the additional cost for each student is \$6,500 for services. He asked what is going on regionally and if this trend is going to climb higher than in the past. Mr. Hamilton said this is a trend.

Mr. Hempstead asked if the Mid Fairfield Child Guidance Center has enough bi-lingual clinicians. Mr. Daniels said they are working on ways to recruit bi-lingual, bi-cultural individuals.

Mr. Hempstead said the State requires maintenance of existing funding. He asked if this increase will be part of the base line ask. Mr. Hamilton said that it would be part of the base line ask.

Mr. Sacchinelli said they obviously want to address the needs of the students. He asked if there is a priority assigned to the older students to keep them out of the system. Mr. Daniels said the school social workers will be assessing the students to get them into more comprehensive services. He said that once they can solidify the funds, they can move quickly.

With the influx of students coming to Norwalk and Stamford, Mr. Igneri asked if there is any attempt by the State to give these cities a higher allocation for these students. Mr. Hamilton said he has not seen an attempt to do so. Mayor Rilling reached out to Congressman Himes and Senator Murphy, but these things take time.

Mr. Sacchinelli asked if the program costs are one-time expenditures. Mr. Hamilton said they are predominately re-occurring expenses.



Ms. Becker explained that a lot of the students have no high school credits when they arrive, so they are placed in ninth grade. They have to be educated until they are 21; however, at 19 they can be sent to adult education.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

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

**B. RESOLVED, THAT A SUM NOT TO EXCEED \$400,000 BE AND THE SAME IS HEREBY TRANSFERRED FROM FUND BALANCE TO THE COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT FOR ADDITIONAL MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CITY STUDENTS. (ACCT. #01-20-10-5298).**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**\*\* MR.IGNERI MOVED THE FOLLOWING ITEM:**

**AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING TO EXECUTE AN AGREEMENT WITH BLUM SHAPIRO TO PROVIDE A ONE-TIME TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT AT A COST OF \$39,000**

Mr. Dachowitz explained they are retaining Blum Shapiro to do a joint cyber assessment.

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi  
Telesco Secretarial Services