

Common Council Actions

FEBRUARY 28, 2006

CITY OF NORWALK 8:00 P.M. EST COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Mayor Moccia called the meeting to order at 8:12 p.m. He led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance. He asked for a moment of silence in honor of the memory of Mr. Richard Buonerba.

I. ROLL CALL

Ms. Roman read the roll call. There were 14 members present.

William Krummel Jeannette Olmstead-Sawyer
Michael Coffey Phyllis Bolden
Gwen Briggs Douglas Sutton
Herbert Grant Carvin Hilliard
Fred Bondi Joanne Romano
Richard McQuaid Nicholas Kydes
Doug Hempstead Kelly Straniti

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Marilyn Robinson addressed Mayor Moccia and the Common Council members. She spoke this evening as Chairperson of the Norwalk Historical Commission regarding the important issue of appointments to the Historical Commission. She has been Chairperson of the Commission for two years, and it is a hardworking and committed Commission. There is one monthly meeting. They have many committee meetings during the week, and some are Saturday mornings. They have concerns about the commissioners that are going to be appointed to their commission, for their commitment to all of the important things that they do, and additionally that they have the time to commit to as many meetings as they have. They have had some difficulty with the staff, so she divided the commission into committees. Every commissioner is a chairperson of a committee so that they can get their work done. When Mayor Moccia was first elected, she spoke with him and had offered to resign if the commission in any way, because she is a well-known Democrat, was going to have any political problems and not be looked at as a commission that operates purely for the goals of the commission. She was assured that that was not the case, and Mayor Moccia did not want her resignation. He was committed to the goals of the committee. She had also spoken to Mr. Coffey about that. She said she was blindsided by the last commissioner that was appointed to the commission, because she had talked to both Mayor Moccia and Mr. Coffey, and she didn't think that names could make it to the appointment list unless the commission had some input into it or interviews and/or discussions could take place. She called and/or emailed every council member letting them know that she was concerned about the last appointment, and she

wanted it referred back to committee to let the commission have some conversation about it. That was not done. Now there is another person on the list. One person is a Democrat and one is a Republican. She doesn't understand why they have to be judged in that way. These commissioners don't get paid, they work hard for the community, and they have to be judged in that way, as opposed to being the kind of person that is committed to all the goals of the commission. She is asking to return the name to committee so the commissioners can investigate and talk to the person. The only thing she knows about Ms. Martino is that she used to be a member of the Historical Society and that she is the corresponding secretary for the Republican Town Committee. She is also asking them to talk to each of the commissions before someone puts a name to be appointed when the commission hasn't had a chance to interview them or give their own name. She thanked everyone for their patience.

Ms. Gail Wall said she is also an Historic Commissioner, as well as President of the Norwalk Historical Society, and on the board of the Norwalk Preservation Trust. She is involved in other community organizations. For those who know her, they know that she doesn't vote Republican or Democrat. She would vote for or support the person that is the best person for the job. She has been on the Historic Commission for almost two years. She was appointed unanimously by the previous Common Council. She is a Republican, and that was a majority Democratic Common Council. She was very honored to have been appointed. She feels that she has served the Commission, the Historical Society, and the community in a very positive fashion, and she would like to continue her service. She agrees with Ms. Robinson, who is a Democrat, that their goal is a common goal and that the commission has been very productive in the last three years. She feels it is important that all commissions in Norwalk have a session with the commissions, Common Council, and the Mayor's office when candidates come before them to fill vacancies. It is important for the working commissions to have the ability to know the people that are coming on board to work with them. She also would like to see more than Caucasians serving on many of our commissions and organizations. As President of the Norwalk Historical Society, she said they are looking for people in their community who are of color or Latino that are interested in serving with them and sharing common goals. She said she didn't feel the appointment of Ms. Martino is a political move, but she does feel it's important for everyone to work together, be productive, move forward, share goals, and speak more openly and honestly in reaching that common goal.

Mr. Larry Rossi said he feels very strongly about urging the Common Council not to send back to Committee the firemen's contract. It is time to move on. They are very fortunate in Norwalk to have such dedicated men. They don't just put out fires. He has seen that firsthand as a former Fire Commissioner for four years. They also go out on medical calls. He said he had personally responded to some of those calls, and he has seen what they can do. They deserve the contract. Please vote for it.

Police Chief Harry Rilling said at the beginning of February, he and Mayor Moccia spent two days in Washington, DC. They had some very productive meetings with the people who actually make the decisions on which grants to fund and which grants not to fund. They went to try and get information on some grants that might have been stalled and to

get reconsideration with them. Unequivocally and without solicitation, each person they spoke to made it clear to them, that in order to remain competitive in the grants process, a city the size of Norwalk needs to have one person focused on that endeavor. They made it clear that the grants person needs to research, needs to go out and actively solicit grants, and needs to call people that make the decisions and know what they are looking for in the application. He was here tonight in strong support of the grant coordinator position, and he urged everyone to consider that request favorably. He would also like to echo the comments of Mr. Rossi. He expressed his strong support of the fantastic fire department.

Mr. Ken Hall, a citizen of Norwalk, an employee of the Norwalk Fire Department, and Union President of the Norwalk Fire Department, said it's been a long four years for the fire department. He felt they had been treated with disregard in many ways. When he took the oath to become a fireman, it required him to lay down his life to save lives. He has never regretted that decision, and his co-workers didn't either. The Police Department has received their contract, and they have the DROP plan. They were deserving of their contract, and so are the firemen. He said the Fire Department is not asking for special treatment; they are just asking for fairness. He said the department met on January 13, 2006 to discuss negotiations. He called the committee together, and they said a prayer that they would come up with a solution that would not hurt the city and one that the Fire Department can live with. He felt that they had done that. Now it might be sent back to the Personnel Committee. There was another meeting last Wednesday, and he thought that the Council members were afforded an opportunity to be there. Now that they didn't make it to the meeting, should the firemen be penalized. He feels no. He is asking that they don't send it back to the Personnel Committee. Vote in favor of it. Let's get this behind us and move on. He didn't vote because it was a Democrat or Republican. He voted on the integrity of the person. That's what they must do.

Fire Commissioner Carol Andreoli said she would first like to address the appointment of Ms. Kathryn Martino to the Historical Commission. She has known her for six years, and she is a very hard-working and dedicated person who would certainly be an asset on that board. She said she was sure that not every member of that board had been personally interviewed, and they are all getting a chance to prove themselves. She would like the Council to give Ms. Martino a chance to prove herself, as she would be an enormous asset to the board.

In addition to that, she said she was also here to address the fire department contract. These have been four very long and very difficult years of negotiations. The Norwalk firefighters did not have a raise during that period, but that did not deter them from doing their job with dedication and professionalism. In the past four years, Norwalk firefighters have responded to a total of 28,865 calls, of which 134 were major fires. Several members of the department have suffered personal injury in the line of duty. Some were serious injuries, such as compound leg fractures and 2nd and 3rd degree burns, to name just a few. Firefighters sacrifice so much. While citizens are partaking in family events, members of the department are on duty protecting them. Little thought is given to the amount of sacrifice that these men and their families make to keep everyone safe. She believes it is time to give them the respect that they deserve and to ratify this contract.

She asked them not to send it back to Committee. It is time to move forward. It's a good contract, and it's fair to both the City and the Fire Department. Please vote favorably so that Chief McCarthy and the department can move on to other pressing issues that face this group of men.

Mr. Peter Brown, a member of the Norwalk Fire Department and Vice President of the Norwalk Firefighters Association, said he was fortunate to serve on the department's negotiating committee for the past four years. He can say without exaggeration that he and other members of the committee put thousands of hours of man-time into the contract. There were many ups and downs during the four years, but he feels that they came up a fair deal for both the firemen and the city. He said that if they feel it really isn't a fair deal, then vote no. But if they see it as the fair deal that it is, he asked them to vote yes. He asked them to vote on it today, to not send it back to committee and have the firemen wait another two weeks for the raises and benefits they deserve. Please take action now.

Fire Chief Denis McCarthy said news of the Norwalk Fire Department contract negotiations has dominated the news and letters to the editors in past years. None of the thousands of words printed in the paper reflect the true nature of the Norwalk Fire Department and the men that serve this community. It is the hope of this administration and the membership of the department that never again should equitable treatment of our public servants take such a conflicted path. The negotiation process was derailed repeatedly over the last four years for a variety of reasons, including some he introduced in the later stages of deliberation. Everyone involved struggled to find the right mix of give and take to create a package that would fairly compensate dedicated municipal employees. We also sought to provide management the appropriate latitude to continue to serve the evolving demands of public safety in a post 9/11 environment that would be responsible to the taxpayers of the city. Now that this process is completed, he wholeheartedly supports the product of those efforts. He wants to credit the members of the department for their dedication to the mission of the department and the citizens they serve. Never in this process of protracted struggle did the members of the department lose sight of their primary mission, to save lives and protect property. The officers and the firefighters on a daily basis overcame their disappointment in the lack of progress in contract negotiations and served with distinction each and every time the bell rang. Every member helped to the highest tradition of the fire service and was able to forego his own dissatisfaction and perform all that was expected of a Norwalk firefighter. If that was the end of the story, they would be left with the notion that firefighters came to work every day and did what they were expected to do. But what the general public may not know is that the firefighters came to work every day, sometimes working 38 and 48 hours in a row, nights, weekends, and holidays. During those shifts they participated in projects and programs well above and beyond their job descriptions. These additional services are not included in their compensation and are performed because they are dedicated to this department and to the community. As Chief, he has been impressed from his first day how willing members of the department have been to take on responsibilities outside of their daily routines. Additionally, firefighters sought out opportunities to serve humanitarian causes in the community and in the neighborhoods in which they live. The

firefighters are fire safety educators, community volunteers, mentors, foster parents, fundraisers for local charities, blood donors, and they are giving by nature. Growth and change in this department have not and will not be without bumps and controversies. The true change agents of that process are the officers and firefighters themselves. For this and all that they do, you should be very proud of the men of your Fire Department. The Norwalk Fire Department, for the past four years without a contract, has served with pride and distinction. It is with all due respect that I implore you to settle these protracted negotiations and approve the contract with Local 830 tonight. The city and the firefighters of your department deserve nothing less.

Ms. Diane Lauricella spoke of two personnel matters at hand. The first is her support for the approval of the grants coordinator position to a full-time position, which she thinks could only serve each of the department heads, staff, council members, and the citizens of Norwalk. As a board member on several non-profit boards over the years, she has been fortunate enough to have worked with some professional grants coordinators. It is an art and a science. It is very important that they have someone to focus on this. With department heads already short-staffed, it is impossible, unfair and unprofessional to ask them to continue to do much of the grant work. They need a professional to get the highest quality grants and the most amount of money for each grant.

She additionally wanted to ask everyone to give consideration to not sending the firemen's contract back to committee. There has been a long time in passing. She has worked with, volunteered for, and talked with many of the fine people in the fire department in her professional role as a hazardous materials specialist. She concurs with Fire Chief McCarthy, Police Chief Rilling, and Ms. Andreoli that they should move forward. They will find the fire service will continue and improve their servitude to all of them.

Mayor Moccia closed the public participation.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting – February 14, 2006

**** MR. BONDI MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 14, 2006 AS CORRECTED.**

The correction to the minutes of February 14, 2006 is as follows:

On page 2, 8th paragraph down, the sentence reading “Mr. Krummel said that he has a general remark precipitating Mr. Kurtzman’s appointment, and he is strongly opposed to it.” should be changed to:

“Mr. Krummel was strongly supporting that the nomination procedure include a review with the commission’s concerns”.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

IV. MAYOR

A. RESIGNATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

Resignations.

Reappointments: Michael Mocciae – Recreation and Parks Director

Mayor Moccia said that he is very happy to recommend the reappointment of Mr. Mocciae as the Recreation and Parks Director. He said that Mr. Mocciae has always been cooperative and has always tried to do what is best for the city. He is a Department Head that reflects well on the city and on the services he performs for the citizens.

**** MR. BONDI MOVED THE REAPPOINTMENT OF MICHAEL MOCCIAE AS RECREATION AND PARKS DIRECTOR.**

Mr. Bondi said he had worked with Mr. Mocciae for 20 years. He has always been a professional and has always done a great job. In the past 5 years since Mr. Bondi has chaired the Recreation and Parks Committee, he and Mr. Mocciae have worked together to improve the park areas in the community to make them what they are today. They can be very proud of their parks, beaches and ballfields, and that is a great tribute to Mr. Mocciae. He wholeheartedly recommends this reappointment.

Mr. McQuaid said Mr. Mocciae is one of the best Department Heads Norwalk has ever had. He is one of the hardest working individuals on nights, weekends, and at various events. He is always willing to help. Any event that he is involved with, he always try to make it better. He is a great leader, and he wholeheartedly recommends this reappointment.

Ms. Bolden said she enjoys working with Mr. Mocciae. He is very thorough, accommodating, fair and has a great personality, and he takes what he does to heart. She enjoys being on the Recreation and Parks Committee and is happy that he is going to be reappointed.

Mr. Hilliard said he served on the Recreation and Parks Committee for a few years, and he thinks Mr. Mocciae has done a good job. He is also what he considers to be an ambassador for the city. He works with the public and the citizens very well, he respects them, and he would like to see more of that at City Hall.

Mr. Kydes said that Mr. Mocciae brings passion to his job. His accomplishments have been many. He has the same type of passion when it comes to the soccer fields. He is in favor of the reappointment.

Mr. Hempstead said he has also had the pleasure of working with Mr. Mocciae over the past 20 years. He has always appreciated his hard work and being an innovator and a risk-taker. As the Recreation and Parks Director, you need to be try things that may not work or try things to make them better. Mr. Mocciae is a forward thinker. This is a great reappointment, and while it should have happened a year ago, he is glad to see it will be around for a while.

Ms. Straniti said she has had the pleasure of working with Mr. Mocciae with the Broad River ballfield. It is a difficult area because a portion of it runs along a State highway. He went in to see what needed to be done, and he figured out the footpath and the safety for people to walk along. He has done a lot for the field. She said this is a good reappointment.

Mr. Grant said he agrees with ninety percent of the things that have been said about Mr. Mocciae, but he would like to put it in three words: extreme professionalism, integrity, and dignity. That speaks highly of what he does, how he does it, and the way he carries his duties forward.

Ms. Olmstead-Sawyer said she endorses the reappointment. She thinks of all the wonderful things that are happening in the city, and you see his stamp in everything. She set a challenge for him, and if everyone can somehow figure out a way to get down to Ryan Park, and be included in the many activities that are going on, you can see what he has done. She urged him to keep up the good work.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mayor Moccia congratulated Mr. Mocciae and administered the oath to him. Mr. Mocciae thanked everyone for all their kind words. He said his job is to make Norwalk a better place, and that is what they try to do and will continue to do.

Mayor Moccia said that due to some concerns, he is withdrawing the name of Simon Sumberg to Special Corporation Counsel. He is also withdrawing the name of Kathryn Martino to the Historical Commission.

Appointments: Robert Maslan – Assistant Corporation Counsel

**** MR. MCQUAID MOVED THE APPOINTMENT OF ROBERT MASLAN TO ASSISTANT CORPORATION COUNSEL.**

Mr. McQuaid said he has had the privilege and the pleasure to know Mr. Maslan for close to 10 years. He is a true professional. He is a good, all-around person to have working for the city. He is easy to work with and is a good listener.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Appointments: Andrew Mattiello – Fair Rent Commission (Alternate)

**** MR. KYDES MOVED THE APPOINTMENT OF ANDREW MATTIELLO TO THE FAIR RENT COMMISSION (ALTERNATE).**

Mr. Kydes said that Mr. Mattiello is one of the up and coming, young, hard-working and dedicated Norwalk men. He has also worked hard on his potential election to Common Council. He is an open and committed individual. He works diligently. Mr. Kydes said he wholeheartedly recommends this appointment.

Mr. Hempstead said it is nice to see the youth of the community getting involved. Mr. Mattiello is 22 years old. It is nice to see a young person wanting to give up their time.

Ms. Romano said she had the pleasure of working with Mr. Mattiello on many things, and she has never seen a kid this young get involved so quickly. He has not missed one council meeting since he got elected. She sees him at City Hall just about every day. She recommends this appointment.

Mr. McQuaid wanted to echo the comments of his fellow councilmen. His situation was similar to Mr. Mattiello's, as he was about the same age when he sat in Council chambers waiting for his first appointment, and it was to the Fair Rent Commission.

Ms. Straniti also wanted to echo her fellow councilmen's comments, and she was very excited about Mr. Mattiello being appointed to the Fair Rent Commission. She was happy to see more young people getting involved. She had worked with Mr. Mattiello on a debate, and he is a dedicated hard-worker that will be an asset to the commission.

Mayor Moccia said his first appointment was to the Fair Rent Commission.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mayor Moccia