

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION
February 18, 2020**

PRESENT: Frances DiMeglio, Chair; Tammy Langalis; Steven Ferguson; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; John Lesko; Nora King

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Henry M. Dachowitz

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 7:37 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Before the roll call, Mr. Mushak handed out information that Zoning Department staff had prepared for him which was Grand List by Zone.

Mr. Baker called the roll.

III. DISCUSSION AND ACTION ON CAPITAL BUDGET

a) Discussion and action Capital Budget 2020-21 to 2024-25

Henry M. Dachowitz, the Chief Finance Officer, began a presentation to discuss his recommendations with the commissioners. He noted that a few years ago, when the Board of Education wanted to build new schools, borrowing in the city began to increase. He said that the funding for some projects had not been borrowed. He also explained about how the federal government loaned monies. There were spend down rules which he thought the commissioners should be aware of. He then explained how the reimbursement from the state worked. His goal was to borrow as cheaply as possible but also avoid Internal Revenue Services (“IRS”) penalties. There was a discussion about long term financing of long term assets so that they can be used. There was also a discussion about debt service and the Operating Budget. As they borrow more, debt service will go up. The ratings agencies will look at these numbers and will affect the city’s credit rating.

Mr. Dachowitz then discussed his transmittal letter which explains outstanding debt. He noted the additional borrowing that the city could afford to pay over the next several years. He explained the principal and interest payments. There was a discussion about whether the Board of Education operating budget could go down. There was also a discussion about school

enrollment going up. There was then a discussion about how the Board of Education runs in conjunction with the city.

Mr. Dachowitz also discussed about funding for authorized projects that had to still be borrowed as well as IRS rules. He discussed cash flow projections as well as borrowing going forward. He has tried to minimize debt service in future years since it is growing.

Mr. Dachowitz then explained the Capital Budget requests which included Police Department requests and Public Works requests. He also noted that there were ways to stretch dollars especially when there were reimbursements from the state or federal government. He also explained the reimbursement for the Norwalk High School and that some of it could be disallowed. He does not expect a full 80% reimbursement from the state which he noted was true of prior school projects.

There was a further discussion of the Norwalk High School project. It was noted that this project was added to the Capital Budget improperly and did not follow the city charter. There was also a discussion about how Mr. Dachowitz's recommendations were not in line with the requests from the department heads. There was also a discussion about how groups are lobbying for projects in the Capital Budget. Mr. Dachowitz explained his process. He had a limit of capital to spend which meant he had to cut or lower funding for some projects. There was a discussion about how the Purchasing Director would speak with vendors and then would report to Mr. Dachowitz.

There was a discussion about how the instructional technology was zeroed out of the Capital Budget. Mr. Dachowitz noted that Norwalk High School had to be approved and how it was affecting the Capital Budget. There was a discussion about how the credit rating could be affected if the commissioners decided to increase Capital Budget spending. There was also a discussion about the final recommendation which was done by the Common Council.

At this point, the commissioners decided to take a break at 8:40 p.m. and returned at 9 p.m. Ms. Langalis did not return until 9:40 p.m.

The commissioners decided to start their discussions with Norwalk High School and the Board of Education. There was a discussion about the appropriation processes on the federal level. It was also noted that the state would not go through with the project unless the city approved it first. There was a further discussion about the process and that if the Mayor wanted to add it into the budget he could do that at a later time. Some commissioners did not think that the project should be added to the Capital Budget at this time since the Board of Education had not put this item into their Capital Budget request. Mr. Hamilton had said that as well. There was a discussion about whether it was a Board of Education priority. There was also a discussion about Jefferson and Columbus schools. Some commissioners thought it should remain in the budget while others thought that other priority projects should be added back into the Capital Budget.

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The commissioners then decided to continue with the Police Department and what the Finance Department recommended. They decided to add back funding for the firing range which had been removed. They decided to approve the Finance Department recommendation for the communication console for Combined Dispatch.

The commissioners then reviewed the Fire Department requests. They approved the Finance Department recommendations for Battery Powered Extrication Equipment and Mobile Radio Upgrade. They added in the Vehicles Replacement and Fairfield Avenue Construction Match. They also added in SCBA Airpacks, Facepieces, Apparatus Replacement Power Washer, Training Tower and Building Repairs Various Stations and the utility vehicle.

The commissioners then reviewed the Department of Public Works (“DPW”) Capital Budget requests. They approved Bridge Repairs and Structural Inspection & Repair. West Cedar Bridge, Pavement Mgmt Program, Sidewalks & Curbs, Footpath Replacement, General Drainage and Watercourse Maintenance which had been cut in half. They decided to increase it but not by the whole amount. The savings would then be used to fund several other projects that DPW had requested funding for. They also looked at the prior year’s funding. They decided to approve Stormwater Mgmt Plan, Norwalk River Flood Control, Coastal Resiliency and Tree Planting which had been zeroed out by the Finance Department. They also approved East Avenue Reconstruction and TEA21 Local Match which had been funded by the Finance Department. There was a discussion about the Right-of-Way Use Policy Study which they kept out of the Capital Budget as the Finance Department had recommended.

The commissioners also recommended for the DPW that Fleet Replacement and Compactor Replacement be funded. There was a discussion about the Truck Scale Replacement at DPW Operations Center.

The commissioners then reviewed the Recreation & Parks Capital Budget requests which included School & Park Playground and Basketball & Tennis Courts at Brien McMahon. They decided to increase the request although the Finance Director had cut it. They also approved the Athletic Fields. There was a discussion about Cranbury Park and what the repairs were for Gallaher Mansion. They reviewed how the initial funding was spread out over the next few years so they approved the Finance Department’s recommendation. They also recommended less money for Calf Pasture Beach for sand and the skate park. There was a discussion about spending money on sand and whether there were higher priorities for the city. There was then a discussion about the funding for Veterans Memorial Park which had been removed by the Finance Director. They decided to approve the Finance Director recommendation. They approved the funding for the Vehicles and removed the funding request for Irving Freese Park. The commissioners also recommended the funding for West Rocks Soccer Complex. There was a discussion about adding the funding back for Broad River Baseball Complex and the Turf Softball. The commissioners agreed with the Finance Director’s recommendation on Testa Fields and Casagrande Fields at Norwalk High School to remove funding. There was a discussion about whether to reinstate funding for Ben Franklin Gym. They recommended the funding for Backstops and Fencing. There was a discussion about the Paving

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& Sidewalk Project which recommended the department’s request. There was a discussion about the tree planting funding and open space funding which they recommended.

They then discussed City Hall Repairs and Improvements and funded the Finance Director’s recommendation. They also approved the Various City Bldg Repairs but removed the funding for the Police Facilities. They then restored the funding to the Health Department facilities. They approved not funding the Library since there would be a major renovation in a couple of years. For the Public Works Center, they increased the funding since they wanted them to construct a new bathroom. The commissioners discussed the Nathan Ely - Various Repairs. They recommended getting bids instead of doing a study. They also approved the Finance Department’s recommendation for the Various Bldgs-Energy Conservation and Branch Library Capital Budget requests which removed funding. They also approved the funding that the Finance Department had recommended for Norwalk Museum which needed a new roof. There was a discussion about the Electrical Systems Survey which they removed the funding. They also approved the funding for Var Bldgs-Environmental, Ben Franklin-Variou Repairs and Sidewalk & Curb Bldg Mgmt.

The commissioners then discussed Economic and Community development projects. They approved the Small Business/Main St. Program and Library Expansion Architectural.

The commissioners then reviewed the Transportation, Mobility & Parking Capital Budget requests. They approved the requests recommended by the Finance Department for Traffic System Enhancement, West/Belden/Mott Intersection and Transportation Master Plan. There was a discussion about the funding of the Transportation Master Plan. These plans would include engineering plans that would be used to construct as well as request grants. They decided to approve the Department’s request. The next item was the Bell Time Study/Implementation which they approved as the Finance Department had recommended. They also approved the Finance Departments recommendations as follows: Projected Crosswalks, Safe Routes To School, Pavement Markings, Artistic Crosswalk Signs. They also followed the Department’s recommendations on the following: Rowayton Avenue Sidewalk, Hunt Street/Witch Lane Sidewalks, George Ave Sidewalks, Norwalk River Valley Trail. The commissioners decided to fund Pavement Markings for Biking but not the Autonomous Shuttle.

The commissioners funded the Planning and Zoning Capital Budget request for the update of Zoning Regulations.

The commissioners also recommended funding the following: Tourism Branding & Marketing Initiative and Business Outreach & Marketing Strategy. There was a discussion of TIFs and their merits. It was not a study, but rather, setting up a TIF which would last for 20 years. The commissioners decided to remove funding for Business Incentive Economic Analysis and Plan.

The commissioners then reviewed the Historical Commission's requests. Mr. Westmoreland had sent a letter to the commissioners which were his priorities. They funded his requests as follows: ADA Access Mill Hill, Lockwood House ADA Access, Smith Street Buildings L-M Mansion Code & Repairs, Museum Collection Archive/Cataloging.

For the Arts Commission, they decided to remove funding for the MLK Blvd. Art.

For the Parking Authority, they funded as requested the following: Parking Facilities, Residential Parking Permits, and Parking Wayfinding Signage. For Community Services, they funded Health Building Upgrades and for Human Relations and Fair Rent, they funded their Capital Budget request as well.

For the Library, they funded Laptop Dispensers and Norwalk Newspaper Digitization, but they removed funding for the Auditorium Refresh.

Next they continued with the Board of Education, they decided to fund a new Cranbury School. Since Ms. Langalis had not been in the room during the discussion for the new Norwalk High School, they explained it to her. The commissioners then discussed whether to keep this in the Capital Budget requests or not. Some commissioners thought there were other schools in the city that should be prioritized over Norwalk High School. There was a discussion about the construction of Norwalk High School and whether it was necessary. There was also a discussion about the amount of money that was in the Capital Budget funding request for this school. This was the amount the city had to approve in order for the state to fund it. There was a discussion about whether the state would come back with this offer in a few years.

The commissioners then voted whether to keep the line item for the new Norwalk High School project in the Capital Budget. Ms. DiMeglio asked for a roll call, as follows:

Ms. DiMeglio voted yes.

Ms. King voted no.

Mr. Lesko voted yes.

Mr. Ferguson voted no.

Ms. Langalis voted no.

Mr. Baxendale voted yes.

Mr. Mushak voted yes.

The item did not pass and the line item was removed from the Capital Budget.

The Commissioners then discussed the cafeteria/kitchen renovations which they decided as requested by the Board of Education. They would like to have a separate cafeteria from the gymnasium for several schools including Nathan Hale, Silvermine, Naramake. There was also a discussion about separating a middle school cafeteria and gymnasium. The commissioners also approved the Fuel Tank Replacement funding which was required by law to be removed after a certain amount of years.

There was a discussion about accident reports from the Silvermine School as well as a discussion about having better traffic management at the school. There was also a discussion about the number of buses going to the school. The commissioners decided not to fund the driveway at Silvermine School. The commissioners decided to fund the Air Conditioning program and the BOE Asbestos Abatement Program. There was then a discussion about funding some money for furniture in Ponus. They then decided to fund the Curriculum Materials & Textbooks with similar funding as last year. They decided to fund the following: BMHS IAQ Recommendations, Enhancement to School Security, and Capital Repairs & Replacements. They also decided to fund Instructional Technology which the Finance Department had removed funding. There was also a discussion about the Piano Replacement which they funded.

The commissioners followed the Finance Department Capital Budget recommendations for the Redevelopment Agency's requests.

The commissioners followed the Finance Department recommendations for the Information Technology Department and approved the requests.

There was a discussion about the grand total of the Capital Budget funding requests.

At this point, the commissioners took a break at 11:32 pm and then returned at 11:53 pm.

There was a further discussion about the grand total of the Capital Budget funding requests as well as the budget for Norwalk High School.

The final Grand Total recommendation was \$99,733,701 from the Planning Commission. There was a re-tally to confirm that this number was correct.

**** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Planning Commission that the Capital Budget be **APPROVED**, as modified with an amount of \$99,733,701 for fiscal year 2020-2021.

Mr. Ferguson seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; Mike Mushak; Brian Baxendale; Tammy Langalis; John Lesko; Nora King; Steven Ferguson approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

IV. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

There were no comments from the Director.

V. **COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS**

There were no comments from the commissioners.

VI. **ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Langalis made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Lesko seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; Tammy Langalis; Steven Ferguson; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; John Lesko; Nora King voted in favor.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero