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**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE
NOVEMBER 12, 2020
BY ZOOM VIRTUAL TELECONFERENCE**

ATTENDANCE: Gregory Burnett, Chair; David Heuvelman; John Kydes;
Diane Revolus; Nicholas Sacchinelli; Thomas Keegan

STAFF: Lisa Biagiarelli, Tax Collector; Chitsamay Lam, Controller;
Henry Dachowitz, Chief Financial Officer; Angela Fogel, Director
of Management and Budgets

OTHERS: Joseph Andrasko, Oak Hills Park Authority; Stuart Wells,
Registrar of Voters

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Burnett called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Mr. Burnett called the Roll as indicated above. A Quorum was present.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public wished to speak this evening.

**** MR. HEUVELMAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE
FOLLOWING FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETINGS: OCTOBER 8, 2020
– REGULAR MEETING AS PRESENTED
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE (MR.
HEUVELMAN; MR. KEEGAN; MR. SACCHINELLI; MS. REVOLUS;
MR. KYDES; MR. BURNETT)**

5. CLAIMS COMMITTEE: RECEIVE THE MONTHLY CLAIMS REPORT; REVIEW AND APPROVE CLAIMS AS REQUIRED FOR CLAIMS REPORT DATED: NOVEMBER 12, 2020

Ms. Biagiarelli reported that no action was required this evening. All of the claims are below the threshold. She noted that the department processed a lot of refunds over the last 30 days.

6. NARRATIVE ON TAX COLLECTIONS DATED NOVEMBER 12, 2020 – RECEIVE REPORT AND DISCUSS.

7. MONTHLY TAX COLLECTOR'S REPORTS DATED OCTOBER 2020 – RECEIVE REPORT AND DISCUSS.

Ms. Biagiarelli reviewed her report and said that by the end of October, they collected \$182.6 million, which is 52.2% of the current adjusted levy. They are 2.17% below last year. She said that residents had until October 1st to pay their taxes. They collected \$8.5 million of the sewer levy which is 50.89%. Ms. Biagiarelli said they will start thinking

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about the second installment for tax payments. She said she expects the bills to go out on time.

Ms. Biagiarelli said they had to close the office suddenly at the end of last week. They heard from the Department of Health that they will be able to re-open to the public on Tuesday. She said she expects to open the window, but they are having staffing issues due to not having enough staff.

Mr. Burnett asked Ms. Biagiarelli the plans for the colder weather. She said the administration is looking at keeping the window open, because there are concerns about bringing people into the building. They are working on a way to keep the window open and have people wait in their cars until they are called. She said they will come up with a system to make it comfortable for the public.

Mr. Burnett asked Ms. Biagiarelli if she is concerned about the 2.17% reduction in collections. Ms. Biagiarelli said she is concerned. She said it had gotten more difficult with the office closing and with the surge. She said they try to work remotely. There are only seven of them and if they are down a few people, it can get tricky. They try to make it as convenient for people as possible.

Ms. Biagiarelli said she did an update at the end of last week and they are at 52.4%, but they are still lagging. She said they will try to come up with ways to mitigate that. Mr. Dachowitz said he has been monitoring the numbers for 35 weeks. They collected \$8.2 million more than last year.

Mr. Dachowitz said the phones in the Tax Office have been re-routed. He said they will get through this and feels that the City is coming through ok. He said it is challenging for the department heads on a day to day basis; people's health is a very high priority.

Mr. Burnett thanked Ms. Biagiarelli for the extra effort and asked her to stay safe.

8. RECEIVE OAK HILLS AUTHORITY MONTHLY FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 2020.

Mr. Andrasko reviewed the September financials. He reported that revenue is up 35% . On a year to date basis, September was a very good month. Overall, they are up 28% on revenue.

October numbers are not finals, but revenues were up 60% due to usage. Mr. Andrasko noted that the weather has been wonderful for golf usage.

Mr. Andrasko said Oak Hills has a line of credit for \$200,00, but they do not intend to draw on it until the spring. They made a re-payment to the City of Norwalk for \$45,000. The audited financial should be ready by the end of November, which will trigger a

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payment of \$15,000 to the City of Norwalk. Mr. Andrasko said they are in a good cash position to keep their commitment to the City.

Mr. Burnett asked Mr. Andrasko for an assessment for the winter. Mr. Andrasko said that even with a few capital expenditures, they do not expect to have to go into the line of credit until March or April. If they have a good March, they may not have to go into the line of credit. Mr. Andrasko attributed the success to the weather. He said that people came back to golf during the pandemic. He noted that this has been a driver throughout the golf industry.

Mr. Kydes asked Mr. Andrasko if Oak Hills has started selling season passes for 2021. Mr. Andrasko said they are doing a holistic review of the season passes and will do a review of how the package will be presented.

9. AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR HARRY W. RILLING TO EXECUTE ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS NECESSARY TO ACCEPT THE CTCL COVID-19 RESPONSE GRANT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$51,714.00.

Mr. Wells explained that he heard about this grant and applied for it. Mr. Burnett said that Mark Zuckerberg allocated \$250 million for election related costs. Norwalk's share is \$51,714.00. Ms. Revolus asked how these funds can be allocated. Mr. Wells said that there were considerable expenses for this election. Ms. Fogel explained that the grant is not for future voting but is related to this election and the complications from mail in voting. Ms. Revolus asked if the funding could be used for educating voters. Mr. Wells said he would be interested in educating voters. Ms. Revolus said she would love to educate voters on local situations. Mr. Wells noted that they are making training videos for Poll workers. Ms. Revolus said she would love to see local constituents educated, for example, by using yard signs to indicate the district. Mr. Wells said that re-districting is coming up and that would be a good time to teach residents.

Mr. Dachowitz explained that during this calendar year, because of Covid, they have been able to petition and receive grants for most of the funding. That funding was used to reimburse the City. He said the City to get the election done smoothly. This grant will offset those additional costs. He said that what Ms. Revolus was referring to would be a long term, on going project. This grant will defray the City's additional cost for this election.

Mr. Heuvelman asked if there is an accounting of the additional costs. Mr. Wells said he has not had a chance to determine the additional costs. Mr. Dachowitz noted that it is an accounting challenge. Some additional expenses may be co-mingled and some are segregated.

Mr. Keegan asked when the Finance Committee and the Common Council will know what it cost for Covid and what was reimbursed. Mr. Dachowitz said that Ms. Fogel is

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the keeper of the books. She has the City and the schools. He said that ballpark the amount is \$8 million. He noted there has been tremendous support for the Board of Education. He said that the State may step in in cases where FEMA declines to reimburse costs. He said that some of the expenses were incurred during the last fiscal year and he expects reimbursements to come through. From a process point of view, Mr. Dachowitz said that the City of Norwalk is as on top of this as anyone.

**** MOTION TO APPROVE AND MOVE THIS TO THE FULL COMMON COUNCIL PASSED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE (MR. HEUVELMAN; MR. KEEGAN; MR. SACCHINELLI; MS. REVOLUS; MR. KYDES; MR. BURNETT)**

10. REVIEW FISCAL YEAR 2021 - 2022 OPERATING AND CAPITAL BUDGET CALENDAR.

Mr. Burnett asked Mr. Dachowitz to highlight any key items related to the fiscal year 2021-2020 calendars. Ms. Fogel shared her screen showing the operating budget calendar. Mr. Dachowitz explained that they are well underway with meeting with individual departments. He reviewed the dates and said that the Common Council sets the operating budget on February 23rd and the Board of Estimate and Taxation sets the budget and tax levy at the beginning of May. Mr. Burnett noted that these dates are assuming the Governor does not extend the date. Mr. Dachowitz said it is important to get the tax bills out in a timely manner

Ms. Fogel shared her screen showing the capital budget calendar. Mr. Dachowitz reviewed the dates noted that on March 15th the Planning Commission will transmit its recommended budget to the Board of Estimate and Taxation. In April, the Common Council may approve, reject or reduce any item in the capital budget.

Mr. Dachowitz said they need to look at these projects a great deal. He said they may have to look at costs, timing, projects and the bond rating. He said that last year, Covid hit in March and they started working remotely. They had time to revise the operating budget to be sure the City was protected. He noted there was a lot of uncertainty. He said that he hoped there would be a decline in Covid cases, but the increase in cases and the recession causes him concern. Mr. Dachowitz said they received government funding and interest rates have been reduced, but a lot of that funding has been spent and it is uncertain if there will be relief.

Mr. Dachowitz said they have to be fiscally prudent. He said that he will take a fiscally conservative approach because he wants the City to be protected during these uncertainties. He said that Norwalk has done well to date and he wants that to continue.

Mr. Burnett thanked Mr. Dachowitz and Ms. Fogel.

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11. **ADJOURNMENT.**

**** MR. KEEGAN MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY BY A SHOW OF HANDS**

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services