

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMUNITY SERVICES & PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 17, 2021
7:00PM**

ATTENDANCE: Barbara Smyth, Chair; Greg Burnett, Dominique Johnson, Tom Keegan, Diana Revolus, Kadeem Roberts

STAFF: Lamond Daniel, Chief of Community Services; David Walenczyk, Director of Youth Services; Maria Escalera, Director of Human Services Ray Burney, Personnel Director

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Ms. Smyth called the meeting to order at 7:06p.m. and called role. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Diane Lauricella

Ms. Lauricella said that she was pleased that the City appeared to be moving forward on its equity and justice commitment. She noted a lack of urgency highlighting that George Floyd had died nearly a year ago and that the Norwalk NAACP was having problems, she said it was important to discuss things in a timely fashion. She also noted that there used to be more transparency in the bonus pool decisions for the ordinance list. She said she didn't think it was fair that they would do it in executive session because the public had a right to know since the bonuses came from taxpayer money. She said she believed that there should be a public hearing on ordinance employees.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

January 20, 2021

**Page 1, attendance change Ms. Escalera's name to "Maria"

****MS. JOHNSON MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 20, 2021 AS AMENDED**

****MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

DISCUSSION

a. General Updates, Lamond Daniels, Chief of Community Services

Mr. Daniels said that the city of Norwalk continued to partner with the Connecticut Foodbank Food share, hosting a drive through food distribution every Wednesday from 9-12 at Calf Pasture beach. He said that all residents were welcome, and that today they had served 1300 families on a 28 degree day. He said that the lieutenant governor and the mayor had been there this morning. He said this would continue as long as the need and resources were there.

He said they needed volunteers, and to go on the Connecticut Foodbank website to sign up. He thanked those who had served including Councilman Burnett, and noted they needed 40 volunteers every week.

He said that the city was partnered with the Norwalk Senior Center, and the Senior Coordinating Council to get everyone over 65 vaccinated. He said the latter was working as a call center for seniors to help them log on and get their appointments. He said that the phone number was 203.847.3115, or in Spanish the number was 203.299.1500. He said the Coordinating Council number was 203.434.1876.

Ms. Smyth said that they'd received a brief update on the Justice for All Commission, she said they were very close to having some good news very soon. She noted it was a process and they wanted to do it right.

b. Presentation -Update on the new operations & workflow of Youth Services Dept, David Walenczyk, Director of Youth Services & Maria Escalera, Director of Human Services

Mr. Daniels gave a recap of his 1.5 years in this position which included meeting with over 40 nonprofit leaders, attending staff and board meetings and figuring out the best was for the new department to support them. He said that tonight he would share the outcome of many of those meetings as it related to the Youth Services Program. He said that Mr. Walenczyk had done a great job leading over the years. HE said that he had looked at the department to figure out how best to use the resources and employees and work to improve all outcomes.

Mr. Lamond said they were well positioned to make a significant contribution to assist how residents seek and learn about social services and resources. He said that his goal was to become the "front-door" allowing access to all the resources available in Norwalk.

He said that what informed his decision making on the changes were a thorough review of the city's Youth Services current service delivery model as well as meetings with staff and with local child, youth and family serving agencies and organizations serving Norwalk youth. He said that agency staff was invited to share their perspective and offer feedback about the current Youth Services role in the city.

He said that they'd learned that it was clear that there was a full array of youth mental health services to serve the diverse community, at various pay rates. He said they learned that to foster better collaboration between systems they needed to break down siloes and monitor for gaps and needs in order to provide quick referrals and interventions for successful outcomes.

He said Connecticut law mandated youth services. He said that the legal definition was broad, but that the Youth Services Department was how Norwalk complied. He noted that going forward he wanted to keep this as a city function, moving toward assessing the needs of youth, identifying gaps in services and coordinating care.

Mr. Walenczyk gave the history of the Youth Services Department. He said it had been operating since the early 1970s and had evolved over the years. He said its functions had evolved over the years but had primarily functioned as a coordinating entity for the social and emotional well-being of the city's youth.

He said that a blue ribbon commission formed in 2005 had looked into Youth Services. He said their findings, released in 2006, recommended that the department continue to provide no fee counseling services and to strengthen the Youth Services Advisory board. He said they also recommended giving they youth a greater voice and noted that the department was under resourced.

He said they currently provided counseling for 11-18 year olds, he said the clinicians were master's level MFTs and that they provided counseling at no fee. HE said they got referrals from schools, the youth themselves and the community. He said issues they dealt with typically included parent/child conflict, school performance, truancy and delinquency issues, and substance abuse plus more.

He said the Juvenile Review Board was a Restorative Justice Program. He said they used to have court for minor offenses in Norwalk, but it had moved Bridgeport. He said the idea of the JRB was to keep kids out of juvenile justice system, because that didn't bode well for their future. He said they used diversion, voluntary assessment and addressed their needs. He said there was a community panel that held hearings, but they were rehabilitative over punitive.

He said that other programs included a middle school program, Peer Connection, which normally met one evening a week at city hall but was currently being facilitated virtually. He said that middle school youth development program. Westport and Weston contracted to use Norwalk Juvenile Review Board. He also said that the department participated in activities to support youth in the community such as health fairs and shop with a cop.

Ms. Smyth said that a lot of teachers had been trained in restorative justice and asked if they were getting fewer referrals from the high schools because of that. Mr. Walenczyk said they'd gone down but were just starting to pick up again.

Ms. Escalera said that they would be making changes based on her and Mr. Daniels listening tour. She said they would shift from a long-term counseling model to a collaborative youth development model focused on five pillars. She said the five pillars were Restorative Justice, Information & Referral Services, Community Education, Advocacy & Leadership, and build a collaboration with Parks As Partners. She said they had so many experts, and community partners that they wanted to use the pillars to focus on better supporting Norwalk youth.

She said the Restorative Justice pillar would provide services that helped high risk youth referred by law enforcement, school personnel, community-based organization or their families to prevent future contact with the justice system. She said they would start to build communication earlier, as when a child started to exhibit risky behavior, before they got to the JRB.

On Information & Referral, she said they would use clinicians to preform assessment and intake to expedite linking youth in need to behavioral, mental health and social supports plus information and referrals.

She said that Community Education meant that they would provide services that educate and raise the communities' awareness about issues central to healthy youth development.

She said that Advocacy & Leadership included activities that provided opportunities and amplified the voices of children and youth, and work with organizations, state and local legislators on policies affecting youth and families.

She said that the Parks & Recreation pillar was designed to align key assets to engage youth in positive learning activities to support high-quality programs in building healthy development in young people.

She said that overall, it was about a strong collaborative partnership, ensuring that every young person had access to the resources available to them.

She went through the list of the integrated approach to youth development

Mr. Daniels said that the current changes did not require additional funding, but that they would explore grant opportunities. He said his department would become a significant gatekeeper to all things youth. He said they had strengthened their relationships with NPS, Norwalk ACTS, Youth and Family serving agencies, the community and residents. He said finally they wanted to promote more restorative justice to ensure that when young people were in trouble they would be served

well and connected to needed services.

Mr. Walenczyk said that the state currently provided funding for four JRB programs in the biggest cities, but there was a lot of advocacy work going on to create a funding stream for all JRB around the state.

Mr. Daniels shared the new org chart and told the committee he would share it with them.

Mr. Burnett asked if the pillars Parks, Advocacy & Leadership and Community Education were new, or moving. Mr. Daniels said it was a concerted effort for departments to align on goals, he said there wouldn't be duplications because what they were doing was breaking down silos between departments, aligning on goals, and aligning resources to meet the goal. Ms. Escalera said that the goal was to become the door to resources within the community, she said they wanted to be able to look at the whole family's needs.

Mr. Burnett asked if they saw themselves being housed at the same location as the Norwalk Public School's proposed Welcome Center. Mr. Daniels said he couldn't address that tonight.

Mr. Keegan said that the youth sports leagues were privately run for the most part and asked what the relationship was with them. On the Justice and Equity pillar, he also noted that in Greenwich they had a program where children came into the Police Department and got to know cops on a different level and that it was very successful. He asked if they would consider something like that in Norwalk. Mr. Walenczyk said it would be a good idea to follow up on. He said that in the restorative justice program youth did a lot of community service, sometimes at the police department which gave them an opportunity to meet and interact with police as people.

Ms. Revolus said the police should be leading that charge on getting to know the youth. She asked if there was disproportionality in the students they were serving. She said the youth they saw for behavioral and restorative justice services very much mirrored the percentages within the school system. Mr. Walenczyk said that they'd seen changes over the years, for example the Hispanic community had grown in Norwalk and now they were serving more Hispanic youth. Ms. Revolus said that she had had conversations with families that there had been different responses, e.g., a Black child vaping would get in more trouble than a white child doing the same thing. Mr. Walenczyk said that tomorrow there was a racial and ethnic disparity meeting, he said that since they'd been a service provider, they only saw the students that were referred.

Mr. Roberts said he thought it was wonderful, and that it was a plus being with Parks and Rec. He said that as a youth in Norwalk he found it helpful to be part of teams, and to get to know Mr. Keegan. He said this meant a lot to the youth, he said they need to build relationships with police for youth. Mr. Walenczyk said that he'd had preliminary conversations about getting kids into some of the private leagues, and that they were looking to philanthropy to mitigate cost barriers.

Ms. Smyth said this was a real coordinated effort to help kids who make a bad decision and need a little help. Coordinated effort and focus on restorative justice. She noted that keeping youth out of the juvenile justice system really kept them out of jail.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

****MR. KEEGAN MOVED TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION**

****MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting went into executive session at 8:15pm.

The meeting came out of executive session at 8:16pm, during which time there were no motions and no votes.

ADJOURNMENT

****MS. JOHNSON MOVED TO ADJOURN**

****MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:20pm

Respectfully submitted,
L. Grassilli
Telesco Secretarial Service