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**CITY OF NORWALK  
MARCH 24, 2021  
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION  
PUBLIC HEARING  
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

ATTENDANCE: Edwin Camacho, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling; Ed Abrams;  
Sheri Brown; James Frayer; Troy Jellerette; Artie Kassimis

STAFF: Henry Dachowitz, Chief Financial Officer; Donna King, City  
Clerk

Mr. Camacho called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Ms. King called the Roll as indicated above.

**BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION PUBLIC HEARING ON THE FY  
2021-22 OPERATING BUDGET**

The Chair will entertain discussion from the public on the amount proposed for the Fiscal Year 2021-22:

**PUBLIC HEARING**

Mr. Camacho explained that this public hearing is in connection with the Operating budget.

Board of Estimate and Taxation  
Public Hearing  
March 24, 2021  
Page 1  
Via Teleconference

Mayor Rilling thanked the members of the Board of Estimate and Taxation for putting together a budget that will serve the citizens of Norwalk well. He said this has been a very difficult year and he recently asked all department heads to reduce their already lean budget by ½ of 1%, which resulted in a savings of over \$600,000. Mayor Rilling said he also recommended, at the last Board of Estimate and Taxation meeting that they reduce the contingency by \$500,000 and moving the savings to the Board of Education for the time being.

Mayor Rilling reported that the American Rescue Plan has been approved and Norwalk stands to receive \$44 - \$39 million on the City side and the Board of Education will be receiving a similar amount. The unknown is what restrictions will be placed on that money. He said that on the City side, the money cannot be used to reduce the tax base. On the Norwalk Public Schools side, the money can be used in a variety of ways, including avoiding layoffs and to reduce class size.

Mayor Rilling said he was optimistic that the money coming in will keep the City's tax rate flat and fund the Board of Education. Half of the money will come this year and the rest will come next year. He added that he hopes to have information by May 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Mayor Rilling thanked the Finance Department, all of the department heads and especially the Board of Estimate and Taxation. He said that he recognizes that property tax is the worst form of taxation and makes this very challenging and painful.

Ms. King read the following letters into the Record:

Board of Estimation and Taxation Committee Members,

Thank you for taking the time to listen. As a Norwalk resident and Norwalk Public School Employee ask you to fully fund the Board of Education. Doing so has a direct impact on the social emotional and academic progress of the children of our great city. I am also, the very proud parent of a first grader in NPS, this is likely, my most important job. The story of starting Kindergarten begins like most; being excited and nervous for the first giant step in a journey of lifelong learning for your child. It is quite an important one as I am sure you can agree. We wanted our son to be happy and at a place that would foster his development and champion his success. Every student, no matter what edge of town they hail from and what great Norwalk School they chose to attend, deserves the chance to receive a top-notch education: We are, after all CT's #1 city school district for 3 years running, which came from hard work AND financial investment. All of our city school's need the entirety of their existing resources to continue to provide this level of education to our students.

As a social worker and educator, it is always *astounding* to me that we look to cut resources that enhance life experiences, sharpen skills and afford our greatest asset (our children), the opportunity to grow. It is exactly these resources and supports we found at

Board of Estimate and Taxation

Public Hearing

March 24, 2021

Page 2

Via Teleconference

Tracey Magnet. Tracey is a community of educators that not just speaks, but believes that the development of a child's character is something really special. Tracey Magnet School embeds character education into its everyday way of life; it is communication amongst students and staff and it is a modality for problem solving the most difficult tasks. Character Education programming also affords hands on service learning projects that integrate academic skills and character development through the robust community partnerships that exist within Norwalk. If funding is not given at the full ask, these experiences at Tracey and all of our other great schools, are likely to not occur as effectively as they are now. We also know that resources are often in the form of people; it is the adults in the building that bring life to the supplies, resources, projects and community connections that students across the city are lucky enough to interact with every day.

I would be remiss if I did not say that my post within the Norwalk Public Schools is at Tracey Magnet School. As we learned more about Tracey Magnet's character education programming, experienced a warm welcome and sensed a strong inclusive and diverse culture at the school; it was clear this was the school community that we wanted for our child (and someday soon, his younger sister). As Kindergarten came closer, there was a job opportunity at Tracey that centered around what we found most impressive about the school; working with teachers and staff to ensure that character development is at the forefront of the Tracey student's academic experience. People often say to me how nice it is that my son comes to work with me, and I respond, "No, I go to school with him."

Failure to fully fund the Norwalk Public Schools budget will not only have a direct impact on the progress and phenomenal culture created at Tracey, but within the school walls of our other great schools. In a school year where we are looking at growing student need due to a global pandemic, I sure hope we can remember what is at stake and is important when it comes to the education and success of our children.

Best,  
Kristen Penta  
March 24, 2021

Dear Board of Estimate and Taxation Members and Staff,

I would like to express my concern of the proposed 2021-2022 budget for the City of Norwalk. As a resident of Norwalk for the last 19 years, I find it unacceptable that the BET has decided it was in the best interest of the City and it's taxpayers to limit the BOE to a 2% increase this year. I have read the arguments about why the decision is being made but I don't buy it. The BOE needs a 4.6% increase just to keep current service levels, and I support that. Forcing the schools to make cuts, that will hurt children, is normally unacceptable, however, after what the kids in our schools have dealt with for the past year, it is downright offensive. The pandemic has affected our children in ways we have yet to understand, both mentally and academically and the adults in the room have decided

Board of Estimate and Taxation  
Public Hearing  
March 24, 2021  
Page 3  
Via Teleconference

to double down on these negative impacts and force the schools to make cut to athletics and music. That doesn't sit right with me.

While I appreciate the shrewdness of the BET, this isn't the year to do it on the backs of the children. Raise my taxes because the fall out of not supporting our young people will cost us far more than the \$39 per year you are saving everyone by forcing these cuts.

Lastly, I will leave you with this. It is insulting to me when the city side of the budget is increasing at a greater percentage than the BOE, yet the City is trying to take a victory lap about how they are keeping my taxes down. Time and again the leaders of this City have failed our children during this pandemic, elections have consequences and people whose children have been hurt by short sighted decisions have long memories.

Sincerely,

Edward Philipp

***Public participation comments are not verbatim and represent a summarization of statements unless otherwise noted.***

Mr. Justin Matley spoke in support of the Board of Education's budget request, specifically the music program. He noted that funding the Board of Education is an investment.

Ms. April spoke in support of the Board of Education's budget request and to keep band in the schools. She asked her daughter to speak in support of band in the schools and asked her to play Happy Birthday on the flute.

Ms. Mandy Singh spoke in support of the Board of Education's budget request, specifically for band.

Mr. Jason Penta read a statement in support of the Board of Education's budget request.

Ms. Theresa Rangle, Principal Tracey Magnet School spoke in support of the Board of Education's budget request. She said that last summer everyone watched as a man was killed and all stood up in solidarity. A good education is a powerful mechanism to end oppression.

Ms. Carrie Maiya spoke in support of the Board of Education's budget request and said she wants a well rounded education for all the children. She said they can't close the gap without support for the Board of Education.

Ms. Stephanie Towers spoke in support of the Board of Education's budget request. She said that the impact from Covid is untold and they do not know what the needs are for the incoming children. There is a trend in Norwalk with increased housing, they will see an influx of families. This is an opportunity for Norwalk to be the place to move to. She said great gains were made leading up to Covid and asked to pick up where they left off and do great things.

Mr. Dan Walsh spoke in support of the Board of Education's budget request specifically music and sports, noting the opportunities he had through these programs. He said teachers have been heroes.

Ms. Heidi Alterman spoke in support of the Board of Education's budget request and said that Mr. Heuvelman brought forth a motion asking the City to give the Board of Education a 2.5% increase; however, she said she believed that it takes 2.7% to meet contractual obligations. She asked to revisit the 2.5% increase. She said she understands things are tough. She said that under Dr. Estrella, the City is going to benefit. She asked when they would look at other means of funding and added that she would love for someone to look at Mr. Heuvelman's proposal.

Mr. Tyler Fairbaun spoke in support of the Board of Education's budget request and noted that he is a Grant Writer. Grants are very competitive with a lot of restrictions. This year has been very hard for everyone and to get to this point and discuss what might get cut is shameful and needlessly cruel. He asked the Board to think about the kids and reconsider taking something away from them.

Ms. Diane Lauricella asked the Board of Estimate to look at her comments over the last few years. She asked them to go back and find more opportunities for savings and revenue. She asked that the taxes be kept flat and noted that Milford did it. Ms. Lauricella said she agreed that the Board of Education deserves more funding for programs, but they have had years of additional funding. She said she would like to hear some more discussion about the 6% vs. the 2%. She said this is misleading.

Ms. Lauricella said there is a way to fund the Board of Education by seeking public and private partnerships for music and sports and increase in enforcement fines. She suggested that the grants program become full time and move to the Finance Department. She suggested looking at the line items and scrub the Norwalk Public Schools budget by having a robust clean energy program. She said there is no recycling program in the schools. They need to look at the line items; Public Work's recycling program loses money from material being thrown in the trash. Ms. Lauricella suggested saving in

Board of Estimate and Taxation

Public Hearing

March 24, 2021

Page 5

Via Teleconference

electricity in all City buildings. She said these savings could better fund the Board of Education.

No other members of the public wished to speak, and the public hearing was closed at 7:27 p.m.

Mr. Camacho thanked the members of the public who took the time to comment on the budget.

**\*\* MR. FRAYER MOVED TO ADJOURN  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi  
Telesco Secretarial Services