

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 3, 2011**

ATTENDANCE: Fred Wilms, Chair; James Feigenbaum, Jim Clark, Michael Lyons, Michael Koleman, Mayor Richard A. Moccia (8:18 p.m.)

STAFF: Thomas Hamilton, Finance Director; Robert Barron, Budget Director

OTHERS: Stuart Wells, Democratic Registrar of Voters; Walter Ammon, independent consultant for Oak Hills Park Authority; Vinnie Grillo, Oak Hills Park Executive Director; Thomas Aikenhead, Oak Hills Park Authority

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Wilms called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

December 6, 2010

The following corrections were noted:

Page 3, paragraph 1, line 2: please change "rational" to "rationale" (Check spelling)

Page 9, bullet point 2, line 2: please change "which was lover versus" to "which was lower versus"

**** MR. FEIGENBAUM MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 6, 2010 AS CORRECTED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH THREE IN FAVOR (WILMS, FEIGENBAUM, AND LYONS) AND TWO ABSTENTIONS (COLEMAN AND CLARK)**

SPECIAL APPROPRIATIONS AGENDA (SECTION A)

List of Resolutions

Advertised Items

Report on Special Appropriations

Justification/Back up Material

There were no items to discuss.

TRANSFER AGENDA (SECTION B)

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There were no items to discuss.

OTHER BUSINESS (SECTION C)

Financial Update on Oak Hills Park

Mr. Wilms asked about the information regarding the Park and how this process would work. Mr. Hamilton said that he believe it would be best to have a discussion with the Board first and get their support before sending this along to the Finance Committee of the Council.

Mr. Barron then explained that due to a decrease in the number of rounds of golf at the park due to weather conditions and other circumstances beyond anyone's control, the Park Authority had requested some modifications of the three loans that are currently outstanding. He then proceeded to review the details of the new repayment calendar. Discussion followed about the details of those modifications that were being requested.

Concerns were expressed about the use of the escrow account to bring the Authority up to date in terms of loan repayment. Mr. Barron indicated where this was shown on the Capital Project spreadsheet. The Authority has committed to doing the majority of their Capital projects in the spring. By having the debt service payment in September, they will have a better idea as to what their projected revenues will be the following spring.

Mr. Wilms pointed out that while the revenues had declined, it would also be important to factor in the fact that there was also an increase in expenses. Mr. Barron added that there was a period in the summer where the temperatures were over 100 degrees, which kept people away from playing golf.

Mr. Aikenhead, the Park Authority treasurer, explained that the DEP had required the Authority to update pumps and other modifications. He said that the Authority kept a very tight control on expenses. Mr. Wilms said that he had outlined his concerns about the proposal, but also said that he commended the Authority for not asking for a taxpayer bailout. Mr. Aikenhead said that the Authority could prepare a single page list of their proposed budgetary measures. Mr. Hamilton then reviewed some of the steps that the Authority has taken in order to reduce expenses along with some of his suggestions.

Mr. Wilms said he would like to see a summary sheet of all the actions that the Authority has done categorized by dollar amount at next month's meeting because it would be important for the taxpayers to know. Mr. Hamilton said that while there will be a cash impact on the City in the coming year, over the life of the loan, the Authority will be paying more in terms of interest.

Mr. Grillo said that the PGA was aware that the number of golfers is declining. He added that two years ago, there was an extraordinary amount of rain. He added that there is a program underway to reach out to schools and interest young people in golf.

Mr. Clark asked how the projected increase in revenues was going to be generated. Mr. Grillo said that it was projected increase in fees. There is also a very small increase in the number of rounds expected to be played.

Mr. Wilms said that he felt the sense of the Board was that it was good that the escrow account was used to bridge the cash flow, so no taxpayer funds were used. He said that there needs to be an up front committeemen from the authority to replenish the escrow account, increase revenues and reduce expenses.

Mr. Hamilton said that the Mayor had requested a suspension of the rules to discuss a funding increase for the Registrar of Voters.

Mayor Moccia joined the meeting at 8:18 p.m.

**** MR. CLARK MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO ADD AN ITEM REGARDING THE REGISTRAR OF VOTERS REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR PART TIME WORKERS.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Hamilton said that this issue involved a request to revise the part time wage account regarding the canvassing process.

Mr. Wells explained that that the Registrars were required to canvas the area and update addresses to determine which residents had moved from the area. This is also the year that a redistricting will be done. Correctly tracking those who live in apartment buildings is particularly difficult. Mr. Wells reminded everyone that a Presidential Primary is scheduled for February 2012, along with some Senatorial elections. This means that there is the potential for a number of party primaries. Having the canvassing done accurately before the primaries would be critical. He added that the redistricting was a rather new process and no one knew how it was going to work out. Mr. Wells said that Stamford sends everyone a canvas form every year, but that it was very expensive.

Mr. Hamilton suggested that a transfer be done rather than an appropriation. Mr. Hamilton said that a transfer could be done from the Budget Director salary to the Registrars of Voters, since the Budget Director position was vacant for six months. The Mayor said that he felt that when the BET had the details and understood why the funds were needed, it was better for everyone. Mr. Coleman said that he liked the idea of the expenses being submitted in the regular budget process.

**** MR. WILMS MOVED TO APPROVE THE TRANSFER OF \$7,000 FROM THE BUDGET DIRECTOR'S SALARY ACCOUNT TO THE REGISTRAR OF VOTERS PART TIME WAGES ACCOUNT.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Local Elderly Tax Relief Program

Mr. Wilms said that he had requested that this be added to the agenda. He said that the Corporation Counsel had suggested that the BET make a recommendation to the Council. He said that the information in the packet was for background information.

Mr. Hamilton then reviewed the various tax program available, those, which have State reimbursement, and those that do not. He pointed out that virtually everyone that qualifies for the State program qualifies for the City program, but not everyone that qualifies for the City program qualifies for the State Program. Mr. Hamilton then gave a brief overview of the City program tiers, which was outlined in the informational packet.

Mr. Wilms asked about the deferral program. Mr. Hamilton said that he believed there were only five City taxpayers in the program. A taxpayer can only participate in one or the other program. It involves having a lien on the property. The Mayor said that unfortunately, there are people who see the lien and assume the lien is a negative thing, rather than a deferment. Mr. Wilms agreed.

Mr. Hamilton reminded everyone that information regarding the three request made by the BET in October of increasing the local tax credits by 10%; increasing the income threshold by \$5,000 and implementing Enhanced Communications about the programs, was included in the packet.

Additional Information (Section D)

Oak Hills Financial Status – November 2010

Summary of Special Appropriations – FY 2010-11

Summary of Contingency – FY 2010-11

Financial Reports

Year to date Capital Budget Report (FY-2010-11)

Year to date Operating Budget (FY 2010-11)

Board of Education Budget Report (FY 2010-11)

BET/BOE Finance Committee Special Joint Meeting

Tax Collection Report – November 2010

Tax Collector's Narrative – December 2010

Key Revenue Report

Salary Accounts

Fire Overtime

Dispatch Overtime

Police Overtime

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Mr. Wilms requested that Mr. Hamilton review the key revenue drivers. Mr. Hamilton said that the real estate conveyance tax was on budget; Town Clerk recording fees are ahead of budget probably due to a combination of refinancing and sales; but the interest income is still lower than projected. Code Enforcement is difficult to project. Currently it is down 36%. However, Mr. Ireland feels that this will self-correct and Mr. Hamilton reminded everyone that Mr. Ireland has a very good sense of the various projects underway and upcoming projects.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. WILMS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services