

**CITY OF NORWALK  
BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION  
& FINANCE COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING  
MARCH 25, 2009**

**BOARD OF ESTIMATE:** Friedrich Wilms, Chairman; Mayor Richard Moccia; James Clark, James Feigenbaum, Michael Kolman, Michael Lyons, Leo Mellow.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE:** Richard Bonenfant; Amanda Brown; Doug Hempstead; Anna Duleep.

**STAFF:** Mary Roman, City Clerk; Thomas Hamilton, Director of Finance; Ossie Lewis, Director of Budget and Management.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Moccia called the meeting to order at 7:45 p.m., and introduced the members of the committee.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The rules of public participation were presented by the Mayor, who requested that speakers be polite and precise, and limit their comments to three minutes. The mayor asked for a show of hands for the departments for which the speakers were commenting in behalf. He noted that there were no speakers listed to comment in behalf of Public Safety, Police, Fire Department, or Public Works.

The following public comments were made:

1. Patricia Genuario thanked the committee for the opportunity to provide input relative to the defunding of the Fair Rent Department Field Representative. She stated that it is very hard and sad to eliminate services, but the department faces dire consequences as functions will now change beyond what is mandated by the state as their role. It was the Common Council that created the Fair Rent Department in response to the city needs for the services it provides. Without the Field Representative if there was a need to go in the field, it would be the director who should have to go. The impact on the director would be very difficult, and the Department will not be able to provide advice on landlord-tenant issues, evictions, complaints, etc. The Field Representative is the person who investigates and presents facts to settle disputes and if there is a hearing, the

- interactive involvement burden is not placed upon the Director. She also stated that this would result in program cuts with seminars and public educational lectures on housing issues. She asked the Board to reconsider the decision and to fully fund the Field Representative position for 2009-10.
2. Vicky Su thanked the committee for this time dedicated to comment on the defunding of the Fair Rent Department and Human Relations Field Representative. She stated that the residents of Norwalk will lose out in services that are critical in giving them an advantage on housing opportunities. This will leave citizens with no other channel to seek help during these hard economic times. She commented on her understanding that these are difficult choices, but the department is losing 1/3 of its staff. Outreach programs such as Diversity Day, and the Human Rights Quorum are at risk. In the absence of the Field Representative, it is the Director who takes on much more of the work and those functions will now change beyond what is mandated by the state.
  3. Earl Carpenter spoke on behalf of the League of Women Voters, stating that a part-time position of registrar is no good for the City. Part of our democracy is the representation of the Registrar of Voters, and the City should be ashamed that it is cutting back this valuable service position. So much extra work is involved, that the position could not possibly be done part time. Adding extra part time workers does not help because there is a level of qualification and training involved to keep the City straight with all the rules, new machines. He feels strongly to keep this office in tact as it currently is.
  4. Donald Smith started to speak in behalf of the Registered Voters of Darien, but Mayor Moccia asked him to step down as this was a public hearing for citizens of Norwalk only.
  5. Sister Maria Lucia Monest said that on behalf of the League Of Women Voters, the position of registrar of Voters should be full-time.
  6. John Lombardi spoke in support of keeping the Registrar of Voters a full-time position. He did research compared to other towns, and Stamford has 2 part time Registrars that are paid \$37,000 each, but there are two full-time assistants that are paid \$59,000 so they have a big staffing advantage versus Norwalk. During the election they discovered that many people registered multiple times. He asked the Board to keep in mind that this will not be able to be done, and the office will not be able to clean up problems with only a part-time staff. He distributed a chart of analysis on the Board of Education spending over the last seven years, and highlighted the teacher/pupil ratios continue to decrease while the budgets are increasing. He added that Norwalk has the highest paid teachers in the state, and that it is time for the Board to set a cap and to hold to that cap. The Board should

ask why the budgets are recommended as high as they are and to really look closely where the money is going.

7. Stuart Wells asked to speak in behalf of the Registered Voters and reviewed the responsibilities of the Registrar. He thanked the Council for their efforts on Election Day, but added that the work is not over after elections. It takes a continual effort and amount of diligence to maintain the records up-to-date, and they are busy all year long. He compared Norwalk to other towns, and as the fourth largest number of voters in the state it has had two full-time Registrars for fifty years. These positions require twelve-hour days and many times, 24-hour days during elections.
8. Daisy Franklin stated that the cuts of the Field Representative for Fair Rent and Human Relations, will hurt a staff that does some very hard work.
9. George Cody requested to speak in behalf of the Registered Voters of New Canaan, but Mayor Moccia again stated that he does not go to the Darien and New Canaan meetings, and this was a public hearing for citizens of Norwalk only.
10. Dr. Salvatore Corda, Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools stated that he has persuaded the Board of Estimate and Taxation and supported budget requests each year, but this is a different year and times are very difficult. Despite efforts to cut back from the proposed recommendation, including staff reductions, what the City is asking for now is to tighten the spending belt beyond what is feasible. He suspects that any kind of increase is dramatic, but because this year is different, he suggests there may be another way for the City to meet the budget. Consider lowering the minimum Fund Balance--the rainy day reserve for emergencies. The may go contrary to the agencies advocating fiscal soundness of the city, but he suggests to reduce the Fund Balance in a way as not jeopardize the level necessary to maintain the desirable bond rating. What is the minimum fund balance, and can the difference over time be used for the purpose of getting thru this crucial budget shortfall. This would be a multi-year strategy during the recession, which in all likelihood of financial predictions will run its course over a three period. How can the city manage this in a way to mitigate using the fund balance on a temporary basis. This is worth exploring, and if it results in funds available, it could be well worth using this to avoid an additional tax increase to the taxpayers. Any additional reduction beyond what we have already done will make conditions unbearable. While he will not speak for the Board of Education, it is reasonable to assume the 3.46% increase reduced to 2% represents a cut of \$2million, and not only is the pain unbearable, but the good work that has been established in the Norwalk Public School System will be significantly jeopardized.

11. Richard Booth presented a plaque he received after twenty-five years of service on the Fair Rent Commission. He read the role of the Field Representative and highlighted the work involved with preparing for hearings, and the cost of investigations, and the importance of having this position as the key contact person with landlords. Without a full-time Field Representative, the Department cannot protect the city from being sued. He spoke again later in the order of speakers to add that the Registrar of Voters works until midnight, and is always there to help in a timely manner. A twenty-week position is in no way sufficient to handle the complexities of the office.
12. David Davidson commented on the process of openness by the Board and he is pleased with the public input for framing the budget. He encourages the Board to not change the priorities of no tax increase for this year.
13. Donna Ridell, introduced herself as representing the Norwalk Public Schools Federation of Non-Certified Educational Personnel. She fully supports the Board of Education budget request. She highlighted the role of non-certified personnel is to provide second hand support for teachers. According to input from the Cambridge Report and NCLB surveys, additional cuts to secretarial support staff will suffer. Already reduced staff has difficulty meeting the demands of teachers that are already stretched beyond. They are proud of the City and its valuable educators. The severe cuts cannot guarantee quality education. To remain status quo many parents are here and she sure they agree to fully fund the Board of Education request so that the Norwalk Federation of Educational Personnel can continue to support our educators.
14. Bruce Mellion, Norwalk Federation of Educators, fully supports the 3.5% increase. Additional cuts beyond this recommended budget will have a dramatic impact on personnel at all educational levels. There will be fewer elementary courses, more study halls, and the educational objectives for all students will not be met. Just one example of this budget cut is the 18 Literacy teachers from 2007-08 will be reduced to 12. The many pleas that have been made for more teachers and more support with technology, will not be met. He did thank the Board for its work in support of the early retirement package offer to the Norwalk Public Schools employees.
15. Joan Joakim stated that it is foolish to defund the position of Assistant Director of the South Norwalk Library. She express her concern about staffing at the South Norwalk Library Children's Department that has been exceptionally busy, and that the Mayor, and the Board of Estimate and Taxation should be made aware of the value of what the Norwalk Library does.

16. Also the South Norwalk Library meets the diverse needs of the community especially the many Haitians, along with the needs of NEON. The defunding of Library personnel must be reinstated at an absolute minimum, the budget decisions were ill-advised and not amenable to the needs of the Library for the size of the City of Norwalk.
  
17. Christopher Potts spoke in opposition to the defunding of the Field Representative of Human Relations, the Conservation Officer with the Environmental Commission, and the change from full-time to part-time for the Registrar of Voters. The defunding of these key positions will result in a lack of regulation enforcement. By fully funding these position the City is ensured of compliance with state mandated rules of operation. He suggests the Board re-look at those City positions whose compensation is not required by contract, such as grant writer. He urged the Board to re-think about the ramifications of these cuts in staff.
  
18. Diane Lauricella, President of the League of Women Voters of Norwalk, presented a letter stating their opposition to the elimination or reduction to the full-time staff position in the Conservation Commission. This position is needed in order to provide public education about resource protection efforts and provide guidance to expand the aquifer protection efforts for wells. The City of Norwalk has been slow to embrace the need for groundwater protection and is now taking a further narrow view of its potential benefit.

In addition, she called attention to the ramifications of changing the full-time to part-time for the Registrar of Voters, and compared Norwalk as the fourth highest voter participation in the state and the difficult job done during the recent election. Compared to other towns, apples to apples not apples to oranges, she urged the Board to look at function/value analysis. There are clearly needed public outreach programs that will not happen with these cuts. Making cuts to Field Representative and Fire Marshall positions just do not make sense. She asked about the “sacred cows”, and suggested the Board look at the Historical Commission, or other non-essential budget funding areas. How does compare to saving lives, public health and safety, it does not compare to the value-added functions they provide. She stated that Mr. Lewis and Mr. Hamilton had presented an evaluation that added personnel is not justified by collected fees. She is very concerned about the process, and the City cannot afford to avoid the land Use driven vote as a source of properly handling and management to pay for part of this position. Mayor Moccia clarified that he has not eliminated any Fire Fighter positions.

Relative to the Environmental Professionals, she stated that the lack of staffing for the Conservation Commission cannot function to meet state requirements. Due to problems with enforcement. This is another area that does not have revenue generating function to save dollars. She encouraged the Board to look at other areas to save money. Recycling in the Norwalk Public Schools does NOT happen, although the blue bins are in place, the custodians do not separate the recyclables. The Department of Public Works should meet with the Custodial Unions to train the staff on how to recycle. Mayor Moccia asked if Sal could meet the Hal to rectify the recycling issue.

Ms. Lauricella continued, that double sided copies could save thousands of dollars, and that every copy issued by the City should be double sided. Also, look at salary freezes of the City staff positions. Back-yard leaf composting should be done. Rather than trucking our leaf and yard waste out of town, we should look at a regional facility, that can compost our leaves. In summary, she urged the Board to look at other areas to save money rather than taking a pick-axe to the necessary positions that affect the regulatory agencies in the required Departments and Commissions.

19. Marny Smith spoke in behalf of the Conservation Commission and in opposition to the position cuts, which will put the Commission back five years in comparison to the needs of Norwalk. He pointed out a survey of BEST management practices with state mandated process where the current staff person has full days keeping up with violations in a busy office. The GPS boundary maps help the Land Use process, but if the personnel budget is cut in half, how will the Department function.
20. Seeley Hubbard spoke in behalf of the Environmental Conservation office, and that the elimination of a position places an extraordinary burden on Alexis Cherichetti , who cannot handle the workload necessary to function in a responsible and efficient manner. The protection of the environment and enforcement regulation will fall on the fellow commissioners. The City is blessed with these volunteers that provide the necessary manpower—and if necessary would have to testify in court if the City is found in violation. The City has a commitment and the foresight to protect the environment and is bound by two state statutes mandated to research of land index of open space, wetlands. The Conservation position also obtains information for the Planning and Zoning agency for rivers, ponds, lakes, and the City should be actively making the city “greener” not stepping backwards with the cutting positions of the Conservation Commission.

21. Kate Tepper spoke in opposition of cutting the Registrar of Voters staff in half, the Human Relations Field Representative and Conservation positions. She offered the idea of running ads in the local newspaper to ask the public for ideas on how to help with the problems. The Registrar of Voters must enforce regulations, and how can that be done part time? The Conservation Commission must ensure regulations, and now how can that be done. She asked why the Mayor and subordinate salaries have not been frozen in this time of inflation. What about voluntary reductions for the “gatekeepers of democracy”?
22. Karen Doyle Lyons submitted a letter in behalf of the Registrar of Voters cut to a part-time position solely on federal/state laws in order to comply with office demands it must remain full time. She made comparisons with Stamford, Stratford to Norwalk—cities less than our size with much larger staffing. Cannot override the “a-plus” for election work. Will cost budget due to removal of public documents if not returned, vacant offices result in loss of productive work, and a paper chase. The voters of our city deserve the best election. Part-time jeopardizes the integrity of elections. Mayor Moccia clarified that he never indicated that he would make no contract regulations with paid sick times and paid vacation time,. These should be paid by the state not the city.
23. Scott Kimmich stated that he was proud of the election and how well the registrar of voters handled the city’s many voters. And, with a city population of over 84,000 the environment has to be a key issue. The City should not lose these valuable positions.
24. Matthew Caputo introduced himself as a ten year member of the Conservation Commission as compliance officer, and asked the members to stand. He thanked the Mayor and Board for the opportunity to speak. The issue is hitting one of the most valuable positions in the city with a 50% cut. The workload is too great even for someone like Alexis Cherichetti. He stated that he has always shared the position of the Ms. Lauricella of a cost savings wish list like a regional facility for yard waste.
25. Ester Lester stated that citizens have the right to vote, and she is concerned that a part-time Registrar of Voters will not take advantage of parental rights. She urged the Board to reconsider this decision.
26. Joseph Redd spoke about Reggie LaFort who has been the South Norwalk Branch Manager for twelve years. He knows people by name, speaks four languages, and in many cases he has handled things well beyond the scope of his job. He is an educator, always helpful with youth, gets along well with others, creates a climate of a friendly atmosphere, and treats people with respect. If this position is defunded, why is it necessary to have an assistant Director with more salary than a director—it does not make sense.

27. Robert Soldero spoke that he has a vested interest in the City, and seen problems with frustrated people who do not understand the registration process. Unfortunately the voters don't see the impact of these cuts.
28. Rachel Mante spoke about the South Norwalk Librarian Reggie, as a breath of fresh air. He has provided so much guidance and is an asset of the City that should be preserved. She also has a recommendation about speed bumps along Flax Hill Park to avoid the foul play and dangerous situation with the speed of cars. The Norwalk Animal Control volunteer system is a proven method of dog adoption through the friends of Flax Hill Park. The Mayor asked her to limit her comments relative to the proposed budget.
29. Kathleen Wheeler spoke in behalf of keeping the Conservation position and wanted to add another cost saving is to turn off computers. By shutting down computers, the City could save thousands of dollars.
30. Dave Park is a member of the Historical Commission, and relies heavily on the work done by the Parks & Recreation Department. The grounds and maintenance of the building along with special projects with site lighting and security from dusk to dawn have been attributed to the hard work of Michael Moccia and his crew.
31. Mary Conrad spoke on behalf of the League of Women Voters, and asked to have until next week for public comments. Norwalk is the sixth largest city in the state and for 90 years the Registrar of Voters has been a full time position. This office is key and a full time position is essential, and after a census there is lots of work. Also, the position of Environmental Conservation, the position should not be cut. There is too much to be done in this city, for example, there is considerable hazardous waste on school park such as Silvermine. Here is where the conservation Commission should be allowed to focus their efforts, not position cuts.
32. Edna Brooks asked to keep Reggie in the South Norwalk Library and to keep the Registrar of Voters full time.
33. Stanley Siegel, president of the Norwalk Board of Library Trustees spoke to clarify that the defunding of positions had nothing to do with the "person" in the positions, they were just personnel cuts to accommodate the city's budgetary issues.

Mayor Moccia thanked the participants for their public comments. The Public Session ended at 9:48 p.m.

## CAPITAL BUDGET CAP

Mr. Wilms read the following from his letter to the Members of the common Council.

In accordance with Section 3-09 of the Norwalk City code, the Board of Estimate and Taxation is required to advise the Common Council in writing on or before April 1 of its judgment as to the amount of funds proposed for the capital budget and of its opinion concerning the effects of the capital budget on the City's operating budget and credit. The code also empowers the Board to transfer all or part of the funding for capital terms to the operating budget.

It is the judgment of the Board that the capital budget for FY 2009-10 should be capped at \$14,324,00, with the amount to be bonded and repaid from the City's general fund capped at \$11,588,000; \$2,736,000 will be financed from grants and other non-general fund sources. The Board of Estimation has examined the various capital requests, and is convinced that there are \$14.3 million of worthy capital projects that should be undertaken and funded in the next fiscal year.

The Board's gross funding recommendation is consistent with the Mayor's recommended capital budget. The Board has examined the potential impact that the FY 2009-10 capital program will have on the future city debt service and other debt ratios. We believe that the impact on the city's overall debt profile will be modest, and will the City to preserve its superior credit ratings.

The Board of Estimate and Taxation is content that the City's capital plan is fiscally sound, and does not believe that the FY 2009-10 capital budget will have an adverse impact on the City's credit rating.

Mr. Wilms asked the Board for any comments or questions relative to the budget cap statement. There was no further discussion or comment regarding the budget cap.

- \*\* MR. WILMS MOTIONED THAT IT IS THE JUDGMENT OF THE BOARD THAT THE CAPITAL BUDGET FOR FY 2009-10 SHOULD BE CAPPED AT \$14,324,00, WITH THE AMOUNT TO BE BONDED AND REPAID FROM THE CITY'S GENERAL FUND CAPPED AT \$11,588,000. OF THAT \$2,736,000 WILL BE FINANCED FROM GRANTS AND OTHER NON-GENERAL FUND SOURCES.**
- \*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**ADJOURNMENT**

- \*\* MR. WILMS MOTIONED TO ADJOURN.**
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox  
Telesco Secretarial Services

