

**CITY OF NORWALK  
FINANCE/CLAIMS COMMITTEE  
NOVEMBER 13, 2014**

ATTENDANCE: Bruce Kimmel, Chair; John Igneri; David McCarthy; Jerry Petrini;  
Douglas Hempstead (7:08 p.m.)

STAFF: Thomas Hamilton, Finance Director; Robert Barron, Director  
Management & Budgets; Fred Gilden, Comptroller; Lisa  
Biagiarelli, Tax Collector; Gerald Foley, Purchasing Agent;  
William O'Brien, Assistant Tax Assessor

OTHERS: Eloisa Melendez and Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco, Common  
Council members

Mr. Kimmel called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. and introduced the Committee members and the Common Council members.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr. Kimmel asked all those present this evening to be patient; noting was going to be voted on for a while. He said that the Oak Hills project was broken into two phases.

Ms. Diane Lauricella urged the Common Council to try the possibility of having a forensic account look at this because there is a lot of money that might be involved.

Mr. Hempstead joined the meeting at 7:08 p.m.

Ms. Lauricella said that she was very hopeful that all of the Common Council would be open to the public and that there will be a two way street and that people will be treated with respect.

Mr. Scott Kimmich, Gillies Lane said that he would like the Common Council to understand that the projections for Oak Hills come from one source and he would like an independent analysis made. He said that they have to look at throwing good money after bad. Golf on the east coast has been going down and he is concerned that they are beating a dead horse. He said that the plan for the driving range was highly developed, but not anything else. He said that the plan may not be as complete as it should be. He said that he did not feel that 36 bays will ever be fully occupied.

Mr. Paul Cantor, presented a sales pitch for the driving range.

Ms. Diane Cece, said that she wanted to have the opportunity to speak after the presentation and appreciated that Mr. Kimmel said that there would be no votes this evening. She said that she hoped everyone would keep an open mind and stay focused. She asked the Committee members to not fall for the “but for: financial analysis or the “or else” tactic.

Mr. Kimmel asked three times if anyone else wished to speak. Hearing none, he closed the public participation portion of the meeting.

**APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING:**

**OCTOBER 9, 2014**

- \*\* MR. MCCARTHY MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED**
- \*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**DISCUSSION OF PURCHASING PROCEDURES: LOWEST RESPONSIBLE BIDDER SHOULD INCLUDE TAKING INTO ACCOUNT MONIES OWED TO THE CITY. APPROVAL TO SUBMIT DOCUMENTS TO ORDINANCE COMMITTEE FOR FURTHER ACTION.**

Mr. Kimmel explained the item. The Committee members reviewed the draft document. Mr. Foley said that they purposely did not assign a dollar amount. He said that as a part of the bid process, he would contact the Tax Office to determine if they are in arrears and tell them that they have to make themselves whole to be considered. Mr. Kimmel gave an example where they might find themselves with a bidder who has a \$60.00 ticket, but is the lowest bidder by \$60,000 and said that he was sure they could work that out.

Mr. Hempstead asked if the parking violations are for construction vehicles. Mr. Foley said that they agreed that it was for commercial entities.

Mr. Petrini said that other departments like to piggy back on projects to save money. However, now the City is limited to one company, and the work can't get completed this year. He asked if the company could pay off or work off their payments. Ms. Biagiarelli said that they can't do that if they are in bankruptcy.

- \*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO APPROVE SUBMITTING DOCUMENTS TO THE ORDINANCE COMMITTEE FOR FURTHER ACTION**
- \*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco said that this item will be on the Ordinance Committee agenda in December.

**CLAIMS COMMITTEE: RECEIVE THE MONTHLY CLAIMS REPORT;  
REVIEW AND APPROVE CLAIMS AS REQUIRED FOR CLAIMS REPORT  
DATED:**

**NOVEMBER 13, 2014**

Ms. Biagiarelli reported that she had a claim that needed approval by the Committee. It is for \$22,491.60 for a sewer use fee correction.

\*\* MR. MCCARTHY MOVED TO APPROVE THE CLAIM  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

**NARRATIVE ON TAX COLLECTIONS DATED NOVEMBER 13, 2014-  
RECEIVE REPORT AND DISCUSS.**

**MONTHLY TAX COLLECTOR'S REPORTS- RECEIVE REPORTS AND  
DISCUSS:**

**OCTOBER 31, 2014**

Ms. Biagiarelli highlighted the reports included in the meeting packet. She said that they are slightly ahead of last year at this same time and are now focusing on enforcement. They will be launching into Health Department permits.

Ms. Biagiarelli reported that she hopes to get the tax bills out in mid December and taxpayers will have until Monday, February 2, 2015 to pay their tax bill.

Mr. Hamilton said that the strong performance in the first quarter is attributable to the Tax Sale that took place in July.

**PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF  
OAKS HILLS MASTER PLAN.**

Mr. Kimmel said that he plans to follow this item in the Finance Claims Committee as he deems necessary. He said that when the Common Council does come to a decision, they will have heard from Finance and the public.

Mr. Kimmel thanked Mr. Barron who does a lot of work with Oak Hills and he seems to have a handle on that. He said that he appreciates the time put in by Mr. DesRochers.

Mr. Clyde Mount said that this is a good way to get the message out and have a real dialogue. He said that this is phase I of two phases.

Mr. Hempstead said that the driving range seems to be the biggest issue and said that he would like to hear from Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Barron. Mr. Hamilton thanked Mr. Barron for all of the work he has done on this. He also thanked the Oak Hills Park Authority and Mr. Mount and Mr. DesRochers for how cooperative and responsive they have been. He said that he finds it helpful and useful that Oak Hills has presented a master plan. It is good to have a long range vision of what Oak Hills wants and this plan gives a good sense of where they want to take the facility.

Mr. Hamilton said that the main goals were to analyze the numbers and discuss areas where there are concerns. He said that the main concern was that phase I was \$3 million. He said that phase I should coincide with the state grant for \$1.5 million. Mr. Hamilton said that the grant indicated that the City was responsible for the entire scope of work. He said that the City has not appropriated any funds and there has been some back and forth with the State. At this point, the Mayor does not have a grant agreement in front of him.

Mr. Hamilton said that he and Mr. Barron have some serious concerns and reservations with this plan. He said that he has concerns with the numbers and assumptions. The proposal assumes that the City will forgive the existing \$1 million of existing debt relative to the construction of the restaurant. He said that it is a valued commitment and the City expects them to pay the full obligation they entered into and will not back away from that position.

Mr. Hamilton talked about the expected number of rounds and said that the numbers seem aggressive. He said that he is not confident that the debt will be paid by the golfers and is raising a cautionary flag. He said that he asked if there is an opportunity to look for alternative financing sources to help fund the long range aim of the Oak Hills Park Authority. He said that they may want to consider if there is a way to phase this in over a period of time. He said that no one wants to shut the door and the \$1.5 million grant can be used to make improvements, but he said that he is raising a yellow caution flag.

Mr. Barron said that a big highlight is that the Oak Hills Park Authority developed a master plan and secured \$1.5 million to implement a good part of the plan. He said that he believes they can spend that money right away and complete a lot of projects at no cost to the taxpayers.

Mr. DesRochers said that the financing that was put together by the City was one of the grandest pieces of junk paper. He said that the way it was structured, it pledged the cart revenues to the bonds and created financial leverage that made it difficult to meet the debt service. The restaurant is no more than a catering hall and that is not what it was

intended. He said that it is a financial burden. He said that the trade area is a 20 minute drive time.

Mr. DesRochers said that 78% of the golfers will use the practice area and 88% will come back to practice without playing. He said that they looked at all three contingencies of what could happen and feels confident with the number they can hit.

Mr. Mount said that they started to look at other financing avenues to build the school. They reached out to a different organization to come up with a way to make this grander than just a driving range. Mr. DesRochers said that this will be a full fledged golf learning center. The intent is to expand the summer camps and provide a golfing experience for juniors from all walks of life. The people using the golf course are reflective of the City. Mr. Mount said that currently 800 kids go out of town to learn how to play golf.

Mr. Hempstead asked for information from 16 years prior to when the Oak Hills Park Authority was created. Mr. Hamilton said that he was not sure he could get records dating back that far. He said that he believes there may have been a time when there was nothing to cover all of their expenses.

Mr. Hempstead said that from a logical standpoint, there is no way to predict that the revenue from the restaurant will cover the debt service. He suggested addressing it the way they addressed The Maritime Aquarium. Mr. Hamilton said that the Oak Hills Park Authority has been paying it back for the last two years. Mr. Kimmel told Mr. Hempstead that that issue is a separate discussion. Mr. Hempstead asked for the past history of how much the city put into Oak Hills, five years prior to the conversion. Mr. Barron said that the debt for the restaurant was originally going to mature in 2025, but Oak Hills extended it out to 2036.

Mr. Petrini said that looking at this from a business standpoint; they kept on coming back to the City for support. He said that a plan needs to be created to get them on their feet. He said that he understands that there was an agreement but they are looking for a way to make themselves profitable so that they do not have to go back to the City.

Mr. Kimmel said that the restaurant is a separate discussion and the public will be made aware when that takes place.

Mr. Kimmel said that the participation rates do not make any sense. A discussion took place about golf range utilization. Mr. Igneri asked if they will expand the market by building the school. Mr. DesRochers said that is one of a dozen methods used to develop the numbers.

Mr. Hempstead said that he wants Oak Hills to be healthy and does not want to put them at a disadvantage. He said that for the first time, he sees someone taking a hard look and coming up with ideas.

Mr. DesRochers said that the public does not understand that what happened at Oak Hills over the past two years is amazing. The greens are as good as at any private club; Shelley and Ed have done a tremendous job. This Authority through Mr. Mount's leadership has been increasing round utilization of the golf course.

Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco said that she has the perspective of having been on the Oak Hills Park Authority. She said that three years ago, they were in lot of trouble. She said that if the City could look at the budget and take the debt service away, this would be a profitable business in the City. Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco suggested looking at the history of how they got here. She commended Mr. DesRochers and Mr. Mount and said that she is excited to see where this can go.

Mr. Hempstead said that if they get to a certain point, they may want verification of the numbers. He suggested being open minded about this. Mr. McCarthy said that in the long run, an independent consultant is needed. Mr. Hamilton said that he would support that; Mr. Kimmel agreed.

Mr. Kimmel said that it is fortunate to have this discussion now and said that the Committee will continue to discuss this issue as well as the restaurant issue. He thanked the public for coming out this evening and thanked Mr. Mount and Mr. DesRochers and said that the Committee will continue this discussion going forward.

**UPDATE BY TAX ASSESSOR ON VISION APPRAISAL SYSTEM AND ANY  
OUT OUTSTANDING ITEMS RELATED TO THE REVALUATION  
ASSESSMENT PROJECT.**

Mr. O'Brien gave an update and an overview of the circumstances. He said that there were problems with the contractor. He said that about 90% of the outstanding issues have been completed and corrected. Mr. Hempstead asked for a timeline for the corrections. Mr. O'Brien said that they are having IT people coming here next week to address that. Mr. Hamilton said that they have made real progress; there were 57 issues on the list and they are now down to eight.

Mr. Hempstead said that he noticed that the most recent ownership of properties is not on the website. Mr. Hamilton said that he will follow up on that. He said that up until last week, the data had not been refreshed.

Mr. McCarthy asked about coding miss match and asked if the Tax Assessor office was working on that. Mr. O'Brien said that will be corrected immediately. Mr. Kimmel

asked if anyone was going out to confirm the information on the record. Mr. O'Brien said that they all do field work daily. They take the information and go out to the specific property and the surrounding property.

Mr. O'Brien said that they are required to follow statutory guidelines. They value at the median and have to follow very strict standards to show that it is a fair and equitable re-valuation. He said that they did not have as many appeals this year as they did during the last re-valuation.

Mr. Petrini asked if they ever go back and take a sampling of the difference between the old and the new re-valuation and raise someone. Mr. O'Brien said that they can't go back and change the evaluation unless there is a mistake. Mr. Igneri asked if they re-evaluate a property if it has lost value. Mr. O'Brien said that they will not do that until the next cycle.

Mr. Kimmel talked about senior tax relief and said that he wants it advertised as extensively as possible. He asked if the Tax Office could include something in the tax bills. He said that he will send out an e-mail to the appropriate folks.

**RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE BORROWING OF NOT EXCEEDING  
\$4,000,000 FROM THE PROCEEDS OF  
REFUNDING BONDS OF THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT HEALTH AND  
EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES AUTHORITY THAT WERE USED TO FINANCE  
THE EXPANSION OF AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS TO THE  
NATHANIEL ELY DAY CARE CENTER.**

Mr. Hamilton said that Mr. Gilden went to Hartford for more information. He said that in 2006, the City financed a \$6 million building renovation at Nathaniel Ely Child Care Center. He described the financing and said that the City was involved as the owner of the building. He said that the State wants to refund the bonds and needs the City's authorization to do that. Mr. Gilden said that all costs will be paid by the State and will benefit the Norwalk Housing Authority. He said that each of the agencies that were funded will save \$2,000 per year.

Mr. Hamilton said that this is not a City debt; it is a debt of CHEFA. Mr. Gilden said that one of the covenants is to maintain the facility as a child care facility.

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED THE RESOLUTION TO THE FULL  
COMMON COUNCIL  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

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

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi  
Telesco Secretarial Services