

**CITY OF NORWALK
FINANCE CLAIMS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
AND
SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 19, 2015**

ATTENDANCE: Bruce Kimmel, Chair; Douglas Hempstead; John Ignieri;
David McCarthy; Jerry Petrini

STAFF: Thomas Hamilton, Finance Director; Robert Barron, Director
Management & Budgets; Hal Alvord, Director, Public Works;
Michael Mocciae, Director, Recreation and Parks;
Richard Rudl, Chief Financial Officer, Board of Education;
Chief Thomas Kulhowik, Police Department, Frederic Gilden,
Comptroller, Chief Dennis McCarthy, Fire Department

OTHERS: Richard Bonenfant and Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco, Common
Council members

PUBLIC HEARING

Public Hearing on Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Operating Budget

Mr. Kimmel opened the public hearing at 7:04 p.m.

Mr. Hamilton highlighted the operating budget process. He said that to adjust the cap, it would require 2/3 (10) affirmative votes and then the Board of Estimate and Taxation sets the final budget in May.

Mr. Hamilton said that the recommended budget is \$326,769,467, which is an overall expenditure increase of 2.9%. The Board of Education's budget increases by 2.7%, which is the request made by the Board of Education. The City budget is increased by 21/2% excluding the debt service. The total tax levy increases by 2.25 and the average mill rate increases by 1.4%. The difference is due to the growth in the Grand List. The median tax on a single family home in the 4th District would increase by \$57.00.

Mr. Hamilton summarized the budget requests and noted that there are no cuts to the Board of Education's request. The proposed budget includes a position in Parks and Recreation and funding to restore the Bulky Waste program. It also includes the downtown street sweeping program, increased contributions to the OPEB (other post

employment benefits) trust fund, funding for new Police vehicles, the Head Start program, two new grant agencies and the bi-annual tax sale.

Mr. Kimmel noted that Governor Malloy announced his new budget. Mr. Hamilton said that he did not recommend incorporating any changes at this time, because not all of the numbers have been released or calculated. His proposal has a long way to go before it is finalized.

Mr. Hamilton said that it appears that the PILOT Payments are going to go up and an incentive was built into next year's budget, due to the construction at Norwalk Hospital.

Mr. Michael Mushak, Elmwood Avenue spoke in support of the proposed budget, but said that Public Works needs another Civil Engineer to process permits. He said that they are overworked and deal with crisis management. Mr. Mushak said that this position would pay for itself by speeding projects along, which would increase the grand list. He said that they work so hard and are over worked. Mr. Mushak noted that Public Works deals with issues of public safety. He asked the Committee members to fund a Civil Engineer position.

There were no other members of the public who wished to speak and the public hearing was closed at 7:22 p.m.

Mr. Kimmel thanked Mr. Mushak for coming out on such a cold and icy night and for his commitment to the City of Norwalk.

SPECIAL MEETING

Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Operating Budget and Cap Review and Discussion and Recommendation

Mr. Kimmel called the special meeting of the Finance/Claims Committee to order at 7:23 p.m. and called the Roll. He also thanked the department heads for coming out this evening.

Mr. Petrini said that his questions were answered last week and that he was pleased to see that they can keep the tax increase very modest. He said that he talked to other Common Council members who also feel, along with a few others, that they need a Civil Engineer in Public Works to process permits. He said that they were told that funding this position could increase the grand list. Mr. Petrini said that as a Common Council, they talked about increasing the cap just for this position, but he said that he is not sure if they will have to go to that extent.

Mr. Petrini said that the Common Council does not have control over line items, but he feels strongly that this position should be funded.

Mr. Kimmel said that he was hesitant to get into line item debates and is sure they can work this out.

Mr. Hempstead asked about out of district care for special needs students and asked if there is going to be a true savings. Mr. Hamilton said that there are two issues; the Board of Education is outsourcing custodial services at a few schools and services for special needs students will be brought in house. He said that a net savings of \$330,000 has been identified.

Mr. Hempstead asked about transportation for the students. Mr. Rudl said that they requested additional buses and hope to get a bid out shortly; they are looking at a variety of scenarios. Another area being funded is school safety, which is high on their radar.

Mr. Kimmel said that five years ago, he would have said that it was impossible to narrow the gap between the City and the Board of Education, but it is now narrowed and fully funded; it makes for a lot of good will.

Mr. Kimmel asked about the Police vehicles and if towns are looking at ways to reduce costs. Chief Kulhawik explained that the life expectancy of Police vehicles is 7-8 years. Last year they started a replacement program with the help of the Board of Estimate and Taxation and Mr. Barron. He said that a marked car is driven 23/7. There are a few municipalities that lease cars, but most municipalities purchase cars out of their operating budget. He said that Fairfield purchases 10 – 12 cars per year.

Mr. Kimmel asked if they discussed hybrid or smaller vehicles. Chief Kulhawik said that more agencies are going to the SUV version of the Ford due to the equipment and storage. A lot goes into the Police package and that makes their cars unique.

Mr. Kimmel commended Chief Kulhawik and Officer Orr for their explanation at a previous meeting.

In response to Mr. Kimmel's question, Mr. Hamilton explained that the City had been granting \$1.3 million to NEON. This year's Head Start grant is for \$355,000 for the same level of service and the same number of children. Mr. Kimmel asked if the City was within the Federal guidelines when they cut funding to NEON. Mr. Hamilton said that the Head Start program anticipates there will be funding involvement from the community; Norwalk's contribution far exceeded the federal local share that was required.

The Committee members talked about adjusting the cap. Mr. Hamilton said that there is nothing in the code that precludes the Common Council from adjusting the cap.

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:**

WHEREAS, SECTION 1-289 OF THE NORWALK CHARTER REQUIRES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE COMMON COUNCIL VOTE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIFIC SPENDING LIMITATION ON LOCALLY FUNDED EXPENDITURES DURING THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK, THAT:

THE MAXIMUM LIMIT ON TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CITY OF NORWALK FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2015 SHALL BE NO MORE THAN \$309,714,111. THIS APPROPRIATION CAP REPRESENTS TOTAL EXPENDITURES OF \$326,889,467 LESS ESTIMATED INTERGOVERNMENTAL GRANTS OF \$17,175,356.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE RESULT OF THIS VOTE AND RESOLUTION, TOGETHER WITH THE ATTACHED 2015-16 BUDGET GUIDE, BE FORWARDED BY THE CITY CLERK OF THE CITY OF NORWALK TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business and the special meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services