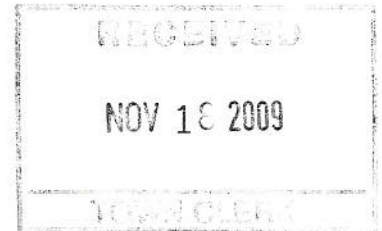


Final-110

**TOWN COUNCIL OF NEW CANAAN
REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, March 18, 2009**



MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mark De Waele
Kenneth Campbell
Paul Foley
Christine Hussey
Elizabeth Jones

Steve Karl
Thomas O'Dea
Johnny Potts
Dick White
Penny Young

ALSO PRESENT: Gary Conrad, Chief Financial Officer; Cheryl Jones, Director Human Resources; Carol McDonald, Director Human Services; Tony Phillips, Director Youth Services; Chris Kaiser, Director Information Technology; 6 Boy Scouts

Dr. De Waele convened the meeting at 7:30 p.m. Mr. O'Dea called the roll, noting the absence of Ms. Murphy and Ms. Devereaux and read the notice of the meeting. Mr. Karl arrived as the meeting began.

Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of February 18, 2009.

Upon motion of Ms. Young and second of Mr. White, the Council voted to approve the minutes.

There were six members of local Boy Scout Troop present, fulfilling a requirement for receiving the merit badge for Citizenship and Community.

Item 1, To hear a budget presentation from Human Services.

Carol McDonald, Director Human Services, gave a brief presentation on the Human Services budget. One change has been in part time salaries, with \$34,560 removed due to resignation of the Prevention Coordinator. These funds were moved to the Outside Agencies part of the budget.

Tony Phillips, Director Youth Services described the resources and services available in youth development. There have been no major changes in the Youth Services budget.

Ms. McDonald discussed the Outside Agencies budget and the Getabout program. State funding in the amount of \$25,000 will likely not be available next year for this program and there is also an insurance issue in that the program must provide its own at its own cost. Insurance costs last year were approximately \$12,000 for the Getabout program, and these costs are expected to go up slightly next year due to a fourth vehicle being added.

Ms. McDonald said that she has been in contact with Norwalk Transit for out of town trips currently made by the Getabout vehicles.

There is a possibility that New Canaan Cares will take over the New Canaan Coalition program. Ms. McDonald is waiting for cost proposal figures from New Canaan Cares. This agency provides information and services with regard to risky behaviors, underage drinking and youth in crisis, and also works with MADD.

With the current financial climate, Human Services receives five to seven new clients a week, requesting information, assistance and referrals. Richard Taylor, a member of the audience who works in the retained search business, pointed out that the possibility of a 9% unemployment rate in New Canaan alone is very real. The national unemployment rate may be as high as 14.9%, because those that do not receive federal or state assistance do not show up in the unemployment statistic. Resources are strained due to the fact that some unemployed residents are tapping into savings but continue to live at the level of spending they did while employed. When working with residents asking for financial assistance, Human Services asks for 3 months of bank statements in order to determine spending levels and counsels recipients on ways to cut spending and methods of living within one's means.

The food pantry, which has done very well through donations, also experienced 40 to 45 additional residents utilizing this service every other week. Ms. McDonald has sought additional energy assistance through state funded programs. Staffing levels are adequate at this time.

Ms. Hussey commended Ms. McDonald and her staff for the work they do and the assistance they offer those in need.

Item 2, To hear a budget presentation from General Government.

Cheryl Jones gave a brief presentation of workforce reductions. Ms. Jones and her staff looked at departments that experienced over utilization and/or a reduction in income, and looked at where positions could be cut. In April and May, Parking, Inland Wetlands, the Building Inspectors office, and a Custodial position in the Recreation Department were 4 positions that were let go. Vacant positions such as the DPW Director, a Recreation Supervisor, Assistant Supervisor of Parks and an open position at the Police Department also showed savings this year and reductions next year as there will be no re-hire of those positions.

Part-time staff reductions were determined based on discussions with department heads, and part time positions in the Town Clerks office Sanitarians office, Medical Directors office, Fire Marshals office and a part time position at the Wastewater Treatment Plant.

All of these positions equaled \$162,250 in savings for this year and \$476,424 for next year. Before any of this was done, an early retirement package was offered to 18 employees, and only 2 individuals have come forward to accept the package.

Savings were also realized in health and dental benefits. Ms. Jones discussed health benefit contributions, pension contributions, health insurance costs and insurance claims.

Gary Conrad gave a brief presentation on General Government budgets. The biggest percent change has been in cutbacks, and the Selectmen salaries were not increased and have been frozen for two years. One of the few increases has been experienced in legal services. Others include health and security benefits (11.2%) and an increase in contingency.

The approved capital budget is \$2,044,759, proposed \$687,500, with a difference of \$1,357,259 or -66.38%.

GIS implementation (map overlays for land use departments) is down substantially.

Debt service for the 2008-09 approved budget is \$13,447,917, proposed \$14,107,969, with a difference of \$660,052 or 4.91%.

Smaller budgets discussed included the Waveny Pool, Railroad Property Fund, Property Rental Fund, Animal Control Fund, and the Movie Theater. Some offices on the second floor have not yet been rented.

Total income this year is approximately \$7 million, and last year was \$9.8 million.

The General Fund is down \$2.6 million.

Chris Kaiser, Director Information Technology, reported that his department is down 20%-30% in expenditures. Through repair and maintenance, existing machines are experiencing a longer life as opposed to replacing them with new machines. The IT budget has reduced to \$80,000 this year, down 20% from last year. There is a five year plan to replace core equipment, and joint cost sharing with other towns, the Schools and outside agencies is planned.

Item 3, To hear a proposal regarding Tax Relief for the Elderly or Disabled.

Mrs. Young gave a brief update. The sub-committee is mandated by the State to revisit the tax credit issue every two years, and works closely with the Tax Assessor. Once the revaluation was complete, the sub-committee focused more closely on this item. The current ordinance needed an update and has undergone some revisions. The tax credit qualifications have been expanded to include net assets up to \$200,000. The State Commission on Aging has done an extensive analysis which gave the sub committee some guidance as to how other communities work with this issue. The program should benefit those residents with income brackets where the most need is experienced. The three brackets are \$0 to \$19,999, \$20,000 to \$39,999 and \$40,000 to \$60,000. Within these three groups, tax credit amounts were increased in the first two categories, as this is where the most need is experienced. Last year 137 people generated \$164,000 worth of credit given, which translates to a loss of Town revenue. It is anticipated that with the

current economic situation, the numbers of people who will be applying for tax credit could be upwards of 20% in each category. This would take the loss of revenue to the Town over \$200,000, which the sub-committee feels is still manageable.

The Tax Deferral program has been removed, as this was not frequently utilized. The date of the application has been changed from October 1st to May 15th, which coincides with the application dates for the State of Connecticut's programs. A public hearing will be scheduled, followed by a Council vote for approval of the revisions.

Upon motion of Mr. O'Dea and second of Mrs. Young, the Council voted unanimously to enter Executive Session at 9:40 p.m. to discuss union contract issues. Also in attendance were Cheryl Jones and Gary Conrad.

Upon motion of Mrs. Young and second of Mr. Potts, the Council voted unanimously to exit Executive Session at 10:35 p.m. No votes were taken.

There being no further business, upon motion of Mr. Potts and second of Mrs. Hussey, the meeting adjourned at 10:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas O'Dea, Secretary