

The regular meeting of the Council of the City of Norwich was held January 4, 2021, at 7:30 PM in Council Chambers. Present by a roll call vote: Mayor Nystrom, President Pro Tem Bettencourt, Ald. Nash, Gould, Wilson, Myles and DeLucia. City Manager Salomone (via phone) and Corporation Counsel Michael Driscoll were also in attendance. Mayor Nystrom presided.

Please be advised that meetings of the Norwich City Council can be viewed in their entirety on the City of Norwich website “norwichct.org”.

President Pro Tem Bettencourt read the opening prayer and Ald. Wilson, led the members in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Nystrom called for a moment of silence for Jason Vincent and his family.

Upon a motion of Ald. Myles, seconded by Ald. Gould, on a roll call vote it was unanimously voted to adopt the minutes of December 7 and 21, 2020.

Mayor Nystrom gave the State of the City Address as follows:



ESTABLISHED 1659

CITY OF NORWICH
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Peter A. Nystrom
Mayor of Norwich

100 Broadway
Norwich, CT 06360

First let me welcome you all to a New Year! With 2020 behind us I hope there is optimism throughout our community as we move forward. The year in review has unquestionably been one of the most daunting challenges that everyone has faced. COVID-19 has rewritten societal norms. As a people we thrive on getting together, seeing friends, spending time with family. Here in the council chambers the participation of our public has been removed due to Covid. The executive orders established by Governor Lamont, while clearly offered with the best intentions to keep the public safe, have limited public access. The same impact of denying public access to our small businesses and restaurants has placed a significant burden on them.

I'm happy to say that that has not gone unnoticed nor has that been ignored as our city reached out to help create outdoor dining facilities, even shutting down the road that passes along City Hall itself. Our local lending institutions as well as the Norwich Community Development Corporation, were extremely supportive in helping businesses receive funds from the federal government. Thankfully, additional dollars have been made available at this time and total almost \$1 million to help small businesses, families and others get through

these cold winter months. Specifically, \$419,000 in Covid HUD funds and \$550,000 additional CARES Funds are going to be available. I want to particularly thank Norwich Public Utilities and their staff for all that they are doing for this community. Like the city side of government, they too are playing a vital role in helping people. Going forward we are putting together an operations team that will oversee the distribution of these funds. I invite any additional small businesses in our community and families in need to seek assistance as this program unfolds. I have asked NCDC and Cathy Crees from the Norwich Community Development Block Grant program to expedite this effort. Authorization for this effort was in fact supported by resolution of the entire City Council and I extend my thanks to them as well. Clearly our work as a city government is only just beginning. The process of distributing these available dollars from the federal government will allow us to also protect the many small businesses that have invested in our community over the last several years, particularly the minority owned businesses that you can see in Foundry 66 and other areas in downtown and across the city. We must continue to acknowledge that controlling the growth in government spending locally is important. Our council will be voting on its second budget this current year that will impact investors' decisions, including the decision to purchase a home in our community. Acknowledging that what we invest in and how it can stimulate or stop grand list growth is vitally important.

Soon after Covid hit, I implemented weekly calls every Friday morning with our State Senator Cathy Osten, state representatives, city department heads, Angela Adams of the Greater Norwich Area Chamber of Commerce, Jillian Corbin of the Saint Vincent DePaul Soup Kitchen, Pro-Tempore Mark Bettencourt, the General Manager for NPU Chris LaRose, and our City Manager John Salomone. The Uncas Health District led by Pat McCormick has been an integral part of these discussions, providing Covid updates and strategies in order to put best practices in place for the people of Norwich. I have been particularly impressed with our Superintendent of Schools Kristen Stringfellow, the staff of Norwich Public Schools and our Board of Education as they have had to respond daily to continued impacts of Covid while keeping our kids safe and providing them an education. Dr. Brian Kelly of NFA, Linda Allen of Norwich's school readiness programs, and Ellen Retelle of the Integrated Day Charter School were also a valuable part of these discussions.

It would be a mistake not to acknowledge hardships that businesses have endured here in Norwich. At the moment, the issue remains as to whether minor-league baseball will continue in our city.

Losing the copper producing plant Freeport McMahan and the shutdown of ALS services has impacted revenues to our own Norwich Public Utilities. I'm proud to say that this was not ignored and that we reached out, marshalled state services to help place the affected workers in new employment and I can tell you today that many of them accepted new employment. As a member of the Eastern Workforce Investment Board CEO Council, I am grateful that we assisted in this effort as well as those in the manufacturing community here in Eastern Connecticut.

Our city also responded appropriately to the concerns of many of our citizens during a prayer vigil and peaceful rallies. We gathered together, giving voice for our people who needed to share their concerns regarding police accountability. With almost immediate response, local community leaders and community police officers took action to gather every week and

continue their dialogue. This has led to community activities such sprucing up playgrounds and skate parks, monthly gatherings referred to as Coffee with a Cop hosted by Foundry 66, and in the warmer times a community picnic was held in Mohegan Park and a family picnic was hosted at The Daniel Jenkins Park on Mechanic Street. These community building events are fostering better awareness and understanding of the role of police officers to build stronger relations. I want to thank Sergeant Rankin, all the officers who contribute, and the local citizens who participate in this community effort. Police Chief Patrick Daley is fully supportive of these efforts and attends when possible. Anyone in the general public is always welcome. These efforts have sparked progressive ideas to move toward the goal of improving social equality and equity for people of all color and walks of life. Building relationships takes the collective collaborative effort of everyone.

Additionally, our city is taking advantage of every opportunity to foster food security throughout our community. I want to give thanks to Jillian Corbin, Director of St. Vincent DePaul Soup Kitchen and Lee-Ann Gomes, Director of Human Services for their tireless efforts.

Planning Director Deanna Rhodes and Alderwoman Stacy Gould organized Bags for Hunger. This program raised \$4,400 to purchase gift cards for food at local supermarkets. Together they have been rock stars filling the gaps for families in need. I know for a fact that they have inspired others to step up as well. As a city we have hosted food distribution sites during the past year and may have the opportunity to bring other food pantries to this community as the need continues.

In an effort to grow the grand list, I will be asking our City Council to consider and review the possibility of a new code compliance grant program. The current downtown bond program ends April of this year. This program was made possible by the voters of the City of Norwich and the Norwich City Council in 2010 as they supported the referendum allowing for its creation. As I've seen firsthand the need for development in other parts of our community, I would request that the two components be for code compliance assistance and rental rebate assistance. The current downtown Bond program has generated seven dollars in private investment for every dollar in public investment for code compliance. The Program generated \$13 in private investments for every dollar invested in assistance for rental rebates. This time however I will suggest that we focus on a program that helps development throughout the city following the neighborhoods identified in Norwich's adopted Plan of Conservation and Development. The Ponemah Mills project continues to grow as they are working on an additional 77 units of housing. Further dialogue with the Council and the developer is required.

For myself I have been incredibly inspired by the generosity and resiliency that so many people and small businesses have demonstrated over the past year. Even while many have struggled they continue with their philanthropy and support for our nonprofit organizations.

And now with a light at the end of a very long and dark tunnel we must all keep our local businesses in mind and help them recover so that they can either rehire employees who have been let go or move forward to make the investments that were delayed during the pandemic.

In closing I ask everyone to be vigilant. The dispersal of a vaccine is giving us hope, but we cannot let our guard down. Continue to wear a mask for yourself and your family members. Practice social distancing and take nothing for granted. Norwich will get through this, but not without your determination and diligence. I wish you and your families a healthy and happy 2021.

Mayor Peter Albert Nystrom
City of Norwich
860-608-2165

Mayor Nystrom call for a public hearing on AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE #1789 ADOPTED SEPTEMBER 21, 2020 PERTAINING TO AN EXEMPTION FOR THE NORWICH ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESAN CORPORATION FROM THE PAYMENT OF TAXES ON CERTAIN PROPERTY LOCATED AT 25 OTIS STREET FROM THE DATE OF PURCHASE

Speaking in favor:

Marvin Serruto, 100 Starr St, spoke in support of the ordinance.

There were no emails.

Speaking in opposition:

There were no speakers.

There were no emails.

There being no further speakers Mayor Nystrom declared the public hearing closed.

Mayor Nystrom declared citizen comment closed.

Upon a motion of Ald. Gould, seconded by President Pro Tem Bettencourt, on a roll call vote it was unanimously voted to waive the reading of the full text and incorporate it into the minutes this ordinance being given its second reading.

Upon a motion of Ald. Gould, seconded by President Pro Tem Bettencourt, on a roll call vote it was voted to adopt the following ordinance introduced by Mayor Nystrom and President Pro Tem Bettencourt and Ald. Gould.

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE #1789 ADOPTED SEPTEMBER 21, 2020 PERTAINING TO AN EXEMPTION FOR THE NORWICH ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESAN CORPORATION FROM THE PAYMENT OF TAXES ON CERTAIN PROPERTY LOCATED AT 25 OTIS STREET FROM THE DATE OF PURCHASE

WHEREAS, that certain property located at 25 Otis Street, Norwich, Connecticut was purchased by The Norwich Roman Catholic Diocesan Corporation on May 1, 2019 to be used for educational and charitable purposes; and,

WHEREAS, said property since May 1, 2019 has been used for educational and charitable purposes by The Norwich Roman Catholic Diocesan Corporation; and,

WHEREAS, said property was not considered to be tax exempt on the Grand List of October 1, 2018 and October 1, 2019; and,

WHEREAS, Connecticut General Statute Section 12-81(b) provides that any municipality may, by ordinance, provide that the property tax exemption authorized by any of subdivisions (7-16), inclusive, of section 12-81 shall be effective as of the date of acquisition of the property to which the exemption applies and shall, in such ordinance, provide procedure for reimbursement of the tax-exempt organization for any tax paid by it for a period subsequent to said date; and,

WHEREAS, Connecticut General Statute Section 12-81(7) provides that real property, owned by a corporation organized exclusively for educational purposes and used for educational purposes, shall be exempt from taxation; and,

WHEREAS, the Norwich Roman Catholic Diocesan Corporation subsequently filed an M-3 application with the Norwich Assessor for the real property located at 25 Otis Street to be eligible for the exemption based on its' use; and,

WHEREAS, the Assessor has approved the exempt status based on its current use; and,

WHEREAS, taxes on the October 1, 2018 Grand List, which covers the period of October 1, 2018 through September 30, 2019 were \$4,818.20; and,

WHEREAS, The Norwich Roman Catholic Diocesan Corporation has paid the real estate taxes on the October 1, 2018 Grand List for the property located at 25 Otis Street in the total amount of \$4,818.20; and,

WHEREAS, The Norwich Roman Catholic Diocesan Corporation, owned the property located at 25 Otis Street for a period of 212 days on the October 1, 2018 grand list; and,

WHEREAS, The Norwich Roman Catholic Diocesan Corporation would be entitled to a reimbursement in the amount of \$2,018.84.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWICH that such property at 25 Otis Street be and hereby is exempted from the payment of any real estate taxes, interest or penalty due on the Grand List of October 1, 2018 from the date of purchase, May 1, 2019, and the Grand List of October 1, 2019, as approved by the City Assessor, or until said premises are no longer used by The Norwich Roman Catholic Diocesan Corporation for educational and charitable purposes and the City of Norwich shall reimburse The Norwich Roman Catholic Diocesan Corporation for any City of Norwich real estate taxes paid by it on the Grand List of October 1, 2018 for the period subsequent to May 1, 2019; which reimbursement shall be in the sum of \$2,018.84 for real estate taxes paid to the City of Norwich.

On a roll call vote of 7-0 the above ordinance passes.

City Manager Salomone report:

To: Mayor Nystrom and members of the City Council
From: John Salomone, City Manager
Subject: City Manager's Report
Date: January 4, 2021

I hope everyone had a good holiday. Meetings attended via conference call or video were with Southeastern Council of Governments, (SCCOG), Region 4 Emergency Support Plan, Department of Health COVID-19 updates, Passport to Norwich Campaign Committee and storm preparation. Thankfully there were no major issues with the storm.

The second installment of Real Estate, Personal Property bills and Motor Vehicle Supplemental bills are now due. Due to the pandemic, the City of Norwich has opted to lower the interest during the months of January, February and March to 0.25% on any payment made/postmarked after 2/1/2021. The City of Norwich continues to encourage taxpayers to pay their taxes remotely if at all possible. Current payments can be made at any Norwich Peoples United Bank locations during the month of January, including the drive-up window where payment(s) can be processed via cash or check. Delinquent taxes will not be accepted at bank locations and must be paid at the City Hall tax office located at 100 Broadway. Taxpayers do not need to be a People's United Bank customer to make their payment at a branch location. This partnership provides greater access and convenience to taxpayers. Payments can be made online at <http://norwichct.org/taxes>, through the mail and in-person. Fees for credit or debit card payments do apply, but there is no fee for online ACH/Electronic check payments in the month of January.

Public Works hosted a Regional DEMHS COVID PPE distribution with approximately 200 participants on December 21st.

The City Clerk's office is working with the State of Connecticut Department of Health to create an electronic death registry to comply with Federal Regulations. New London County is the first to try out this new system.

Norwich Human Services assisted 115 families with Christmas gifts and food for the holiday. The community donated over \$2,000 to assist the family feature in the Day's "Make a Difference" article.

Thank you to La Stella Pizzeria who coordinated a fund raiser for Norwich Youth and Family Services. The Greater Norwich Chamber held a check presentation on December 23rd donating \$1,200 to NYFS. Thank you to the Norwich merchants and businesses who are also struggling due to the pandemic, who donated contents for "The Downtown Norwich Themed Basket", and those that purchased tickets. The money will be used to help youth and families program access clothes, food and pro-social opportunities that they would otherwise not have access to.

The Recreation Department and Norwich Events Organization each held holiday decorating contests this year. The winners were posted on the City's Facebook page. Thank you to those that decorated their homes and businesses in Norwich during the pandemic to make the holidays a little brighter.

Mayor Nystrom called for citizen comment on resolutions.

Emails received:

There were no emails.

Speakers via telephone:

Marvin Serruto, 100 Starr St, spoke in favor of Resolution #1.

Mayor Nystrom declared citizen comment closed.

Upon a motion of Ald. Gould, seconded by Ald. Myles, on a roll call vote it was unanimously voted to adopt the following resolution introduced by Mayor Nystrom, President Pro Tem Bettencourt and Ald. Gould.

WHEREAS, the City of Norwich will be required to make repairs and replacement of the slate mansard roofing on the historic Norwich City Hall; and

WHEREAS, this project may be eligible for a grant under the Historic Restoration Fund administered by the State Historic Preservation Office, \$100,000 being the maximum grant amount available; and

WHEREAS, the City of Norwich plans to apply for a grant of \$100,000 for the first phase of this project;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWICH, that Norwich City Manager John L. Salomone be and hereby is authorized, empowered and directed to execute and deliver on behalf of the City of Norwich an application together with all documents, reports, plans and other materials necessary to complete a grant application for this project seeking funding of up to \$100,000 from the Historic Restoration Fund administered by the State of Connecticut Historic Preservation Officer.

Upon motion of Ald. Gould, seconded by Ald. Nash, on a roll call vote it was unanimously voted to adjourn at 8:15 pm.



Betsy M. Barrett
City Clerk