

APPROVED
STATE OF CONNECTICUT
MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW BOARD
SPECIAL MEETING NOTICE AND AGENDA

Meeting Date and Time: Thursday, May 11, 2023, 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Meeting Location: West Haven High School Auditorium
1 McDonough Plaza
West Haven, CT 06516

Microsoft Team Meeting
Meeting ID 264 504 828 714
Password: crUZtH

Call-In Instructions: Telephone Number: (860) 840-2075
Meeting ID: 101 354 946#

Members in Attendance: Secretary Jeff Beckham, Thomas Hamilton, Susan Weisselberg, Steve Falcigno, Robert White, David Biller and Mark Waxenberg (via Team).

Council Members in Attendance: Chairman Peter Massaro, Meli Garthwait, Mitchell Gallignano, Robbin Watt Hamilton, Robert Bruneau, Victor Borrás, Steven Johnstone, Gary Donovan, Ronald Quagliani, Colleen O'Connor and Stacy Riccio, Clerk of the Council

Staff in Attendance: Kimberly Kennison, Simon Jiang, Bill Plummer, Michael Reis, Lori Granato and Lori McLoughlin

I. Call to Order & Opening Remarks by Secretary Jeffrey Beckham

The meeting was called to order at 6.05 p.m. in the West Haven High School Auditorium. Mr. Beckham welcomed everyone in attendance and thanked those attending.

II. Introductions of MARB Members and OPM Staff

Self-introductions of MARB members and OPM Staff were made.

III. Introductions of City Council members, City and BOE Staff

Self-introductions of City Council members were made.

IV. Purpose of the Meeting

Mr. Beckham explained that the purpose of this meeting was that members of the MARB expressed interest in talking directly to the City Council, getting feedback on the MARB's work to date; provide an opportunity to openly have a dialogue publicly between MARB members and the West Haven City Council. He also remarked that he is looking forward to collaboration amongst the groups, and to have respectable and constructive discussion focused on the path to provide the City financial stability, best practices, internal controls, mitigating risks and building a solid financial infrastructure.

V. Discussion with West Haven City Council

Secretary Beckham began the discussion with ideas of the city's strengths, potential challenges and areas of improvement or efficiency.

Council Chairman Massaro thanked everyone for coming stating that it's a good thing to have a dialogue with each other.

Mr. White thanked everyone and started off by asking the Council what they see as some of the major things that need to be done in the next few years to put the city in good shape.

Councilman Quagliani spoke about collaboration with the MARB, the legislative branch and the executive branch. He would like to see a commitment to changing the culture of the city. There needs to be an emphasis on economic development within the city. He also spoke about the need of proper staffing within the city to implement proper internal controls and to make sure the city can handle modern day municipal departments.

Councilman Johnston stated that he would like to continue to sit down and have continued dialogue. Perhaps quarterly meetings so that the Council and the MARB can come prepared and have open discussions.

Councilman Donovan thanked everyone for having this meeting and is looking for assistance where possible.

Mr. White spoke about taxes and economic development and noted that the city needs to spend money on infrastructure and people but recognized that there is not enough funding to go around.

Councilman Borrás said he wants to work with the MARB.

Secretary Beckham provided a brief summary of the MARB's activities. The MARB has hired a consultant to assess and review with the City, practices, policies and procedures and financial controls. The consultant has a draft report which will be discussed at the next meeting on May 18th, 2023. They have come up with a set of recommendations that the staff has turned into an action plan with short-term, medium-term and long-term items to reduce the risk of any financial losses. Additionally, there will be a Financial Manager assigned to the City who is about to be selected. The Financial Manager will work with the City on a regular basis to address the areas of risk. We will have a subcommittee meeting every month and receive updates from the Manager. Mr. Beckham indicated his appreciation of the City to show initiative in cleaning up some of the items already noted.

Mr. Hamilton offered his observations regarding what he would like to see as priorities. He noted that the reality is there must be slight increases on a regular basis to the mill rate in order to maintain sound financial practices. What is most important given the breakdown of financial controls is improvements in those financial controls. Additionally, there needs to be the right professional staff in key areas such as finance and human resources; the 2 key areas that are critical to running an organization well. Mr. Hamilton also mentioned his concern with long-term liabilities particularly OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits). In addition, Mr. Hamilton agreed that long term, economic growth, and development is key to growing the grand list to reduce the tax burden on residents.

Ms. Kennison echoed Mr. Hamilton's remarks and added 2 other positions that are critical including payroll and IT. She would like to see that the IT and payroll infrastructure has solid professional support and expertise.

Mr. Biller mentioned that he appreciates this forum and the open dialogue and opportunity to talk and listen to each other's opinions and would like to do this more regularly. Mr. Biller said that we need corporation and accountability along with qualified staff.

Representative Borer thanked MARB for its strong recommendations. She spoke about updating the MARB legislation and the positions that are yet to be filled such as the Economic Development Director and Grant Writer.

Mr. Falcigno mentioned the wealth of information amongst the team of City Council and MARB members and that the challenge of recognizing positive culture as opposed to negative culture which currently permeates certain sections of the City. He also praised Mr. Taylor for his work.

Mr. White also spoke about hiring professional people in the right places. He recognized the tough labor market. Mr. White recognized Mr. Spreyer for his work.

Mr. Quagliani spoke about sustainability as it relates to bringing in the most qualified people. He indicated a big impediment is the city charter and the fact that department heads are appointed. This is not sustainable when a newly elected Mayor can replace department heads and we need to build a team and keep them here.

Ms. Kennison echoed Mr. Quagliani remarks and mentioned that key positions should not be appointed, and the Charter should be revised accordingly. Critical positions such as the Finance Director, Personnel and Legal directors should not be at risk of turnover every two years so the City's financial operations need to continue seamlessly and maintain expertise.

Mr. Waxenberg mentioned that he would like to see a new organizational chart so the right people are in the right positions. He would like to see centralized decision-making authority. Mr. Waxenberg hopes that the Financial Manager will work in that area with the cooperation of the City Council and the elected leaders, so that over time there is a structure where everybody feels confident and comfortable, that there's accountability, transparency and if anybody asks a question about where those dollars are going, it's easily answered.

Ms. Weisselberg expressed optimism about moving forward feeling that there is a road map and there is a greater commitment. Also, she would like to hear from the council more regularly on what else the MARB can do to support the City.

Councilwoman Garthwait has a list of changes that her team would like to send to the MARB members for comment. She echoed other comments regarding the need to change the charter.

Council Clerk Ricco would like MARB to assist with management policies so that the Council has the tools they need to serve the City.

Secretary Beckham indicated that we are getting ready to give lots of suggestions.

Councilwoman Hamilton has seen positive things happening more recently but wants to make sure that the City is hiring the right people and that they are doing their day-to-day duties.

Councilwoman O'Connor asked if there are guidelines regarding MARB authority.

Secretary Beckham walked thru the areas where there is information and indicated the MARB is not a takeover board.

Councilman Donovan would like more information to represent to constituents. City systems are not set up to be able to get information from each department.

Representative Borer asked the Secretary to walk thru the budget approval process.

Secretary Beckham noted that MARB has the City's FY 2024 Budget and 5-Year Plan and that MARB is looking to make sure the documents are compliant.

VI. How to Report Waste, Fraud and Abuse

Ms. Kennison spoke about how the public can respond to reporting waste, fraud, and abuse. She will leave a handout with all the information on how to contact the FBI, Attorney Generals office and the Auditors of Public Accounts.

VII. Public Comment Period - *The Public Comment portion of the agenda will be announced by the Chair. Members of the public will be provided an opportunity to speak. Before making their comments, members of the public wishing to speak must be recognized by the Chair. Speakers may be asked to limit their comments due to time constraints of this meeting. Speakers who called in by phone please press *6 to unmute.*

Secretary Beckham opened the meeting up to public comment.

Public comment was given by Paige Weinstein, Steven Mullins, Kathy Hebert, Gail Eisler, Rich Hebert, and a caller who did not state her name.

VIII. Adjourn

Secretary Beckham adjourned the meeting at 8:02 p.m.