



## ***Legislative & Rules Committee – Board of Representatives***

Eileen Heaphy, Chair

Elise Coleman, Vice Chair

# **Committee Report**

**Date:** Monday, August 3, 2015

**Time:** 6:00 p.m.

**Place:** Democratic Caucus Room, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Government Center

The Legislative & Rules Committee held a special meeting as indicated above. In attendance were Chair Heaphy, Vice Chair Coleman and Committee Member Reps. Day, Mitchell, Nabel, Okun, Ryan, Silver and Zelinsky. Also present were Reps. Buckman, DePina and Summerville; Michael Pollard, Chief of Staff; Rick Redniss and Mike Cotela, Boys & Girls Club and approximately 30 members of the public (see the [Public Hearing sign-in sheet](#)).

Vice Chair Coleman called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

### ***Under a Suspension of the Rules:***

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Committee Action</b>
1 <a href="#">LR29.061</a>	RESOLUTION <u>and Public Hearing</u> ; Approving a Lease Agreement by and between the City of Stamford and Boys & Girls Club, Inc. re: the Yerwood Center. 07/21/15 – Approved by Planning Board 07/22/15 – Submitted by Mayor Martin 07/23/15 – Approved by Board of Finance	Failed 3-3-3

A motion to suspend the rules to take up Item No. LR29.061 was made, seconded and approved by a vote of 8-0-0 (Reps. Heaphy, Coleman, Mitchell, Nabel, Okun, Ryan, Silver and Zelinsky in favor).

Chair Heaphy opened the public hearing at 6:02 p.m.

Eleven members of the public spoke:

Pat Parkinson spoke in opposition to the lease, expressing concern that the Yerwood Center will not have a place to go and was tricked out of its land.

Michael Coleman of the Save the Yerwood Committee spoke in opposition to the lease. He spoke about the injunction sought by the committee and its dismissal for lack of standing. He said that the Committee was not given an opportunity to help the Yerwood Board. They wanted recourse to fix the violations. He noted that the Community wants input into fixing this situation and the City has bullied the current Yerwood Board into entering into this lease.

Joyce Griffin spoke in opposition to the lease and described the history of the Yerwood Center and the purpose of the Center. She expressed concerns about the Yerwood Board's taking away of the Community's involvement and questioned how the City became the owners of the land and the building. She is concerned that the Community will no longer be in charge of running the Community Center. She is concerned that the City is taking this away from the Community and giving it to the Boys & Girls Club without any involvement by the Community.

Dawn Solomon spoke in opposition to the lease. She said her mother and Dr. Yerwood would be turning in their graves and questioned how the property became City property.

Cynthia Bowser also spoke in opposition to the lease. She noted the importance of Yerwood Center to the Community. She asked for an explanation of how the Yerwood Center does not own the building and the land.

Anne Marie Walker stated that she grew up with the Community Center; that she does not want to lose the Community Center and wants the City to stand with the Community in preserving the Community Center.

Richard Duffy questioned how and when the City took ownership of the Yerwood Center and how the present Yerwood Board got control of the Center without any input from the membership.

Jack Bryant, NAACP, stated that the Yerwood Center is now shut down. He stated that the Yerwood Center needs to be opened in order to be a relevant building as it was in the past. The legacy of Dr. Yerwood needs to remain in the building.

Jere Eaton, Mayor's Multicultural Council stated that the Yerwood Center was a grooming ground for inner city students. Since 1998, the Yerwood Center has run fewer and fewer programs and the doors have been closed for the last 1½ years. She is in support of the Boys & Girls Club taking over the Center, but wants to ensure that the sign continues to say Yerwood Center, that the street be renamed the "Dr. Joyce Yerwood Way", that a mural of Dr. Yerwood be installed and that the name and integrity of Dr. Yerwood be preserved

Joyce Carwin, Dr. Yerwood's granddaughter, stated that if this lease is approved, Dr. Yerwood's legacy cannot and will not die. She supported Jere Eaton's suggestions and felt the doors should remain open.

Wanda Welcome stated that there needs to a Community Center for the Black Community in Stamford.

Kindrea Walston is a member of the Saving Yerwood Committee. She noted that the Yerwood Center resigned and the new board has signed a lease to give the building away. She questioned how much the Yerwood Center is worth. She could find no record of the property being sold. The bylaw regarding membership was removed.

The public hearing was closed at 6:45.

Mr. Pollard reviewed the history of Yerwood Center since Mayor Martin took office:

- At the beginning of the Mayor's term, the Yerwood was in turmoil. The administration was approached by the Community to put in a leader, but they were unable to find someone who was willing to accept.
- By January/February 2014, the leadership of Yerwood had changed and the State was rejecting licenses for afterschool programming and daycare at the Center due to facility and programming issues. The administration searched for sources of support from other organizations and the Community to allow the Yerwood legacy to continue but was unable to find anyone.

- In May 2014, the State revoked the Yerwood Center's license to conduct programming and the City fixed the code violations in the building and began to look at other organizations.

Mr. Pollard explained that:

- There is an agreement between the Yerwood Center and the Boys & Girls Club to collaborate and provide services.
- There needs to be a facility manager to ensure the safety and security of the people using the Center.
- The Community has requested after-school activities and senior activities.

Mr. Redniss stated that:

- The Boys & Girls Club understands that the Community Center is more than an after-school program.
- The Club has no debt and a large endowment, and can help the Yerwood Center and continue the legacy of Dr. Yerwood.

In response to questions and concerns of the Committee, Mr. Pollard stated that:

- According to the Assessor's office, the Yerwood Center property has been City property since 1974.
- The options to extend the lease are consistent with the terms of leases with other non-profits.
- The Board of Finance zeroed out the amount requested for Yerwood and put the money in contingency. Any use of these funds would be approved by the Board of Finance and the Board of Representatives.
- 40 children from the Yerwood after-school program have been in the Boys & Girls Club building.
- The agreement between the Club and the Yerwood Center relates to building accessibility and programming. The Club will be the landlord, but the Center is to bring in programming but needs to provide funding; there are limitations to how the building can be used while the children are in the building; it is clear that the building will be known as the Yerwood Center.
- The rush for this is to have a place for the children who live on the West Side to go as of 9/1; there are no other organizations willing or able to take over the Yerwood Center.
- The Administration would have liked to have seen the Yerwood Center succeed, but it has not.
- The City will be willing to amend the lease to include a requirement that the building remain named the Yerwood Center.

A motion to approve this resolution was made, seconded and failed by a vote of 3-3-3 (Reps. Heaphy, Mitchell and Silver in favor; Reps Coleman, Ryan and Zelinsky opposed; Reps. Day, Nabel and Okun abstaining).

Chair Heaphy adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eileen Heaphy, Chair

This meeting is on [video](#).