NEWS

"So live in the light of resurrection and renewal of this world, and of yourself, in a glorius, never-ending, joyful dance of grace."
TIM KELLER

Residents at budget hearing urge funding for climate office, food aid

BY NELLIE KENNEY & JESSICA HICKLE
STAFF REPORTER

Residents called for the mayor's new city budget to fund climate services and food pantries at a Board of Alders Finance Committee meeting on Tuesday.

About 40 residents gathered in the Aldermanic Chambers at City Hall as the committee heard public testimony on Mayor Justin Elicker's proposed budget for the coming fiscal year. An additional dozen activists from the New Haven Climate Movement gathered at the back of the room, hoisting signs with messages reading "the earth's future is our future" and "stop denying our earth is dying."

Of 26 total testimonies, ten spoke in support of Elicker's proposal for continued funding of the city's Office of Climate and Sustainability after the federal funding that paid for it expired. Another eight called for continued city funding for the Coordinated Food Assistance Network, a group that is focused on creating a unified system of food assistance in the greater New Haven area. Funding for that group was not included in Elicker's proposed budget.

All ten of the residents who testified about the Office of Climate and Sustainability supported its continued funding.

The office was created in 2022 using funding from the American Rescue Plan Act. That year, the Board of Alders voted to allocate $1 million toward funding personnel for the office through the end of 2026. In Elicker's new proposed budget, funding for the office would come from the city's general fund.

New Haven residents and climate activists urged alders to approve Elicker's proposal.

"In the face of a growing climate crisis that is only accelerating, we cannot afford to take a step backward. Maintaining momentum is not optional. It is needed," Andrew Zielinski, a board member for the Urban Resources Initiative, a Yale program engaged in community forestry activities throughout New Haven, said.

Ward 24 Alder Evette Hamilton said in an interview that she shared many of the residents' concerns.

A common thread through many residents' testimonies was the call for more money from Yale.

"We've got Yale going on. Why are we starving today?" resident Cheryl Rabe asked.

Earlier this month, Yale pledged to increase its voluntary payment to New Haven to around $29.9 million in the coming fiscal year. The University's total payments to the city are set to equal $230 million over the next seven years. The increase came after many local union leaders called on Yale to up its yearly payments to $110 million to compensate for money the University does not pay in taxes.

In addition to climate funding, residents testified in support of funding for the Coordinated Food Assistance Network. In the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the city allocated $345,439 to the network. Continued funding was not included in the mayor's new proposed budget.

In a statement published in the New Haven Independent, Elicker wrote that "As a city, we work to identify funds and meet many important priorities — and the budget is a collaborative process with the Board of Alders. Of course, CFAN [the Coordinated Food Access Network] is welcome to participate in the budget public hearings once again this year."

Supporters of the network asked alders to restore and increase its funding to $500,000.



JESSICA HICKLE / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

The Board of Alders Finance Committee received input from residents and city departments on Mayor Justin Elicker's proposed city budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

Several residents noted that demand for food assistance will only continue to grow as a result of federal cuts to programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which was passed in 2025, will reduce funding for the program by approximately $186 billion over 10 years, according to the Harvard Kennedy School.

"This funding is needed now more than ever because food is a right, not a privilege," New Haven resident Susan Harris said.

In an interview, Ward 17 Alder Sal Punzo acknowledged that the public testimony included "a lot on CFAN," referring to the food assistance network.

Punzo said he has "witnessed" the lines of people waiting for food assistance on Saturday mornings. "Food is important. It's a necessity," he said.

Residents also voiced support for the New Haven Free Public Library. Fair Haven resident and library board member Lee Cruz testified that funding for the library has not kept pace with locals' demands for its services.

"Last year alone, more than 420,000 people walked through our doors, not just to borrow books, but to access computers, apply for jobs, attend programs, participate in civil life," Cruz said.

Punzo said that finding additional funding for services was "complicated."

"You have to look at every department, every aspect of the budget," he said.

The Board of Alders Finance Committee meets on the second Monday of every month at 6 p.m. at City Hall.

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Before latest Yale-city deal, 90 years of New Haven's calls for money

BY NELLIE KENNEY
STAFF REPORTER

This month, Yale President Maurie McInnis announced that Yale will pay around $230 million to New Haven over the next seven years.

Thirty-six years ago, the city and University struck their first voluntary payment deal, which involved only $1.17 million and was linked to the fire department's budget, according to the News' coverage from the time. In the years since, the voluntary contribution has been a topic of frequent discussion and reevaluation among Yale administrators, city politicians, residents and students.

"Successive mayors — DeStefano, Harp, and Elicker — and presidents — Levin, Salovey, and McInnis — and the parties have each made substantial growth" to the "partnership" between the city and the University, Michael Morand, New Haven's city historian and former Yale associate vice president for New Haven and state affairs, wrote in an email to the News.

Morand wrote that the city's call for payment from Yale dates back "at least" to the 1930s.

In 1937, a committee assembled by then-Mayor John Murphy presented a brief to the Yale Corporation requesting that Yale contribute money to pay for city services the University relied upon, according to a News article written that May. The presenters acknowledged that Yale provided "cultural aid" to the city but argued that Yale should also make an "annual cash contribution" to offset the "withdrawal of property from the taxable property list," the article reported.

All Yale property used for academic purposes is exempt from local property taxes due to Yale's status as a non-profit. As of last year, 56 percent of New Haven property value is tax exempt, the New Haven Independent reported. The state's Payment in Lieu of Taxes Program, which was first instituted in 1969, is intended to offset the loss of tax revenue in cities like New Haven with large nonprofits.

The University refused to make such a payment in the 1930s, and over the next five decades, town and gown clashed repeatedly over taxes on Yale properties, including Ingalls Rink, the Yale golf course and housing for married students, according to the News' coverage.

Jonathan Einhorn, who served on New Haven's Board of Alders from 1976 to 1991, said in a phone interview that Yale's tax exemption was the "nub" of the relationship between Yale and New Haven, adding that during his tenure as alder it was "in the back of the administration and the aldermen's minds when Yale would come to the city and request approval for something."

The "spirit of contribution" began in the 1990s, Einhorn said. He credited that spirit in part to the city realizing that it had a "valuable asset" in Yale, as well as to Yale realizing the importance of the city being "safe" for students. In 1991, the murder of Yale student Christian Prince '93, who was shot on the steps of St. Mary's Church on Hillhouse Avenue, "brought home the message to Yale," Einhorn said.

The early 1990s were marked by financial difficulty for New Haven. Between 1986 and 1990, New Haven went from being ranked the seventh poorest city in the United States to the fourth poorest, according to a 1990 News article.

In 1990, Connecticut State Rep. Patricia Dillon SPH '98 proposed a bill which would have allowed Yale land not used for educational purposes to be taxed, Dillon said in a February phone interview.

Instead, Yale and New Haven arrived at their first voluntary contribution agreement, which Dillon said "kind of mooted" the bill. At the time, Dillon had speculated that her willingness to withdraw the bill from the finance committee was a major factor in the agreement's success, the News reported.

Then Mayor John Daniels and former Yale President Benno Schmidt '63 LAW '66 announced the agreement, which included a commitment by the University to make annual payments for fire services on its tax exempt properties, as well as to pay taxes on the Yale golf course, in April of 1990, the News reported at the time. Simultaneously, the city sold the University portions of Wall Street and High Street that cross through Yale's campus.

Daniels died in 2015, and Schmidt died in 2023.

The agreement was approved by the Board of Alders in October of 1990 by a 19-7 vote.

Einhorn said he had qualms with the closure of city streets by Yale but added that the 1990 deal began to "warm the relationship" between Yale and New Haven.

The 1990 agreement set the city and University on a "new path," Morand, who was also an alder at the time, wrote.

In 2005, the University added a payment of $1.8 million in addition to its established fire service payments, which at that point amounted to about $2.3 million annually, according to a News article from the time. The additional payment was calculated by a formula which multiplied the number of student dormitory beds and full-time university employees by $250, and was linked to inflation.

John DeStefano, who served as the mayor of New Haven at the time, said in a phone interview that it is "hard to draw a line between what happened in 1990 and what happened in 2005 and what's happening now."

DeStefano said he didn't remember the exact considerations that went into the 2005 payment formula but said that "whatever we did was largely aimed at getting to a number that both the University and the city felt was reasonable, and then we created a formula to get to it."

During his tenure, DeStefano viewed the University's tax exemption as an "issue having to do with the state of Connecticut and the tax structure that existed in the state of Connecticut," rather than with Yale, he said.

Asked about the voluntary contribution before the deal was announced this month, Governor Ned Lamont SOM '80 pointed to Yale's large contribution to the New Haven economy.

"Yale will tell you they contribute more to the New Haven economy than probably any other Ivy League does to their community," he said in an interview. "Does that mean they can't do more? No, they can do more."

"They're a big piece of that community, and they own a big piece of the community, which is tax exempt," Lamont added.

Yale owned more than 300 parcels of land in New Haven in 2025, totalling over 850 acres, according to an article in CT Insider.

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MARTIN PERALTA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Since the 1930s, New Haven has requested that Yale contribute funds to the city to make up for lost property tax revenue. Yale and New Haven reached the first voluntary contribution deal in 1990.