

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CITY COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEARING
JUNE 1, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Thomas McCarthy, Council President; Jeanette Herron, Richard Salter, Nessah Smith, Kathryn Bukovsky, Jack O. Banta, Denese Taylor-Moye, John Olson, Mila Feliciano; Anthony Paoletto (5:55 p.m.); Eneida Martinez (5:59 p.m.); José Casco (6:05 p.m.)

OTHERS: Atty. Lisa Trachtenburg, Associate City Attorney; Mr. Daniel Roach, Mayor's Office; Mr. Philip Smith; Council Member James Holloway; Ms. Lela Florel; Mr. J.D. Smith; Ms. Stephanie Mastro; Ms. Shequana Shaw; Mr. Nicholas Novia; Ms. Maura DeVellis Council Member AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia; Mr. Jeffrey Kohut; Council Member Mary McBride-Lee (6:29 p.m.); Ms. Dorothy Goodwin, Council Member Michelle Lyons, Mr. John Marshall Lee, Mr. John McLaine

CALL TO ORDER

Council President McCarthy called the public hearing to order at 5:42 p.m. A quorum was present. He gave a brief overview of the topics and reminded everyone that the Council Members are present to listen and not to respond or answer questions posed by the speakers.

Proposed Sale of excess D. Fairchild Wheeler Golf Course Property. (Item #124-15)

Atty. Trachtenberg, Associate City Attorney, came forward and said that she was the principal attorney involved with this proposal.

The proposal is to sell eight (8) acres of the Fairchild Wheeler Park to Sacred Heart University for four (4) million dollars. She then reviewed the details of deed restriction for those present.

Mr. Daniel Roach, the Director of Community Outreach & Diversity, came forward and said that Sacred Heart was offering \$4 million dollars for the property which the City cannot use but Sacred Heart can. He said that the University was looking to expand the property they own so they can build more on their main campus.

Mr. Roach said that not only was he present for the administration, but also speaking as a former Bridgeport resident.

Mr. Philip Smith came forward read the following statement into the record. (See attached)

Council Member Paoletto joined the meeting at 5:55 p.m.

Ms. Lela Florel came forward and said that one of her fondest memories was spending time at Beardsley Park. She said that it was not a good idea to sell off assets and that the \$4 million would not go into the General Fund. She also added that it was one time blip on the economic horizon. Sacred Heart had many students living on off campus housing and the police were up City of Bridgeport.

there frequently. Global warming is increasing and it is poor thinking to move ahead with this. She repeated that the money would not go into the General Fund and asked The Council not to sell off this precious asset.

Council Member James Holloway (139th) came forward and said that he was appalled that this was being considered.

Council Member Martinez joined the meeting at 5:59 p.m.

Council Member Holloway said that he was on the school building committee and when the Fairchild Wheeler School was built, the family had to sign off on the agreement and they requested that it retain their grandfather's name.

Council Member Holloway said that he was a golfer and that he did not want to see anything built on the property. He explained that he would be presenting a resolution at the next council meeting requesting a 99 year agreement that nothing would be build on the land. If the resolution does not pass, Council Member Holloway said that he would not be voting for the main resolution.

Mr. J. D. Smith came forward and said that his wife had spoken earlier and covered most of the important points. He said that the idea of selling off parcels for debt payment was not a good idea.

Council Member Herron left the meeting at 6:03 p.m.

Ms. Stephanie Mastro of Bear Paw Road came forward and said that she was a Bridgeport resident and had problems with the Sacred Heart students overrunning her property. She said that the neighbors are afraid to even speak to the students. They throw garbage all over her lawn and she would not want to see them grow any further into Bridgeport.

Ms. Shequana Shaw of Bird Street came forward to speak.

Council Member Casco joined the meeting at 6:05 p.m.

Ms. Shaw said that she was life long Bridgeport resident and was raising two children in the City. She said that she had never been to Fairchild Wheeler before and thought that getting \$4 million for an under utilized space was a good deal in her mind.

Mr. Nicholas Novia came forward and stated that the deal was confusing. He said that he had looked at the area via Google Earth. \$4 million dollars was not enough for the land. Mr. Novia said that this was also about Veteran's Park and he was a Vietnam veteran. He said that the public had not had access to the information. He said that he was present to make sure Veteran's Park remains as it is. Council President McCarthy reminded everyone that Fairchild Wheeler was a public golf course.

Ms. Maura DeVellis of Doreen Drive came forward and said that she was a lifelong Bridgeport resident and that her neighborhood has changed. It was an amazing neighborhood and now she is seeing it change for the worse. She said that she pays over \$10,000 in taxes and would really like to see the neighborhood not continue to slide downhill. She can understand why people will City of Bridgeport.

rent their homes to students for \$33,000 a year. However, while the land is under utilized, it will be important to make sure that the students do not push the Bridgeport residents out of the park. She asked what the City would get in return for the \$4 million dollars, which is a drop in the bucket against the City's debt. She said that she was fed up with this.

Council Member AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia (134th) came forward and said that she was Bridgeport born and raised and also a Council Member. She said that Sacred Heart University has a long term plan to occupy more and more of the Bridgeport property. She reminded everyone that the university was tax exempt and the agreement of \$4 million was not near the value of what the parcel would be today. She said that Sacred Heart University had plans for tennis courts, and various other things. This proposal was not a good for the City and Sacred Heart University has been more of a headache than it has been a benefit. She encouraged the Council Members not to approve this proposal. Sacred Heart University needs to build on the Fairfield side.

Mr. Jeffrey Kohut of Wickliffe Circle, came forward and said that as an institutional neighbor, Sacred Heart University has been obnoxious and bullying. They disrupt the neighborhoods. They steal services. They plan to expand their campus and that will just bring in more students. They are controlling Bridgeport and undermined the school system during the State takeover. While the City might gain \$4 million dollars, Sacred Heart University would gain control more of the park. He said that he had witnessed a high level Bridgeport official promise that the Sacred Heart University students could use Veteran's Park facilities without restriction. Sacred Heart University is undermining the City and is evil. This is a terrible proposal and an evil deal.

Ms. Dorothy Goodwin came forward said that she agreed with the people that had already spoken and felt like she was waking up in a terrible nightmare. She asked how much more Sacred Heart University could do to make Bridgeport worse. She said that she had been to the park and it was a beautiful place. Sacred Heart University has made their lives miserable and now they have to deal with absentee landlords all around them in their neighborhood. She asked if the Bridgeport residents would have a tax increase if Sacred Heart University gets the land. There are more students living in the rental houses than there should be. She would love for a City administration to spend an evening on her street and passed her iPad to the Council Members to show them the garbage and problems that were happening in the neighborhood. The students were taking advantage of the City. On Nancy Drive, there are 15 residences. Eight of those are rented to students. Ms. Goodwin asked that the Council remember the neighborhoods.

Mr. John Marshall Lee came forward and said that he agreed with Mr. Smith's comments on Charter, process and history were helpful. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia spoke as a representative for neighborhood and district issues. He noted that it was interesting to see Council Member Holloway step up and defend against the sale of park land. Mr. Lee added that Council Member Holloway did mention an amendment that would provide him an out that would protect this land from any development but would allow him to vote as he is being urged for something he knows in his heart is wrong and rushed. He said that he was pleased that Mrs. Goodwin had brought photos on a tablet of problems that disturb her.

Council Member McBride-Lee joined the meeting at 6:29 p.m.

Mr. Lee said that the meeting was about more than dollars. He said that there no assets in this City that exceed our liabilities. Therefore the City should be very careful in selling assets, City of Bridgeport.

because if everything was sold off today at the values recorded on City books, there would be nothing left and only a burden of debt and obligations on our back. He asked what the rush was. Mr. Lee asked the Council to consult the Master Plan for Parks and see about priorities from that document. He also asked what the long term plan of Sacred Heart University is? If they have a long term plan and we only have tactical considerations, we are in such a compromising position, no? And what are the expenses born by the City taxpayers for the presence of Sacred Heart University straddling the Fairfield and Bridgeport line? Time will tell.

Council Member Michelle Lyons (134th) came forward and said that she represents the 134th District and works at the Discovery School. She said that she was in favor of the 99 year amendment to the resolution. She said that she was not in favor of this overall proposal at all. As far as the Master Plan, Council Member Lyons said that this was one of the most valuable pieces of property. Council Member Lyons said that she did not believe in one shot deals and that when an agreement is made, financial funding should continue. The police have to come in and protect that area. With no real boundaries, there is no protection for the golf course. She mentioned the problems associated with the 2007 State bond package that would have allowed the State to purchase Veteran's Park. She was not in favor selling any part of the land.

Mr. John McLaine, a Bridgeport resident, came forward and said that understood the frustrations of the residents. He pointed out that the problem was the absentee landlords, not the university. He said that he did not believe Sacred Heart University would not support the poor behavior by their students. If the proposal is approved, the residents would still be able to enjoy the park property that the residents currently enjoy. The sale itself will have little or no impact on the City, but the \$4 million would help somewhat in repairing the damage left by the former administration who are the ones who led the neighborhoods onto the down-hill slide. He then said it was incumbent for the residents to bring the names forward if they have problems with Sacred Heart University students.

Council President McCarthy asked if there was anyone else present that wished to speak. No one came forward. He repeated the question twice. Hearing none, Council President McCarthy closed the public hearing at 6:37 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PAOLETTO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER CASCO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services