

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS  
PUBLIC HEARING  
MAY 7, 2013**

**ATTENDANCE:** Susan Brannelly, Co-chair; Denese Taylor-Moye, Lydia Martinez, Council President Thomas McCarthy. AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia; Angel dePara, Co-chair.

**OTHERS:** Council Member M. Evette Brantley; Council Member Steve Stafstrom, Jr.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Council Member Brannelly called the public hearing to order at 6:17 p.m. A quorum was present. Council Member Brannelly then introduced the members of Committee and other Council Members present.

Ms. Eva Canales of 252 West Avenue said that she was happy that the people were out to talk about the budget. She suggested that the position of the Mayor's spokesperson be eliminated because the Mayor should be able to speak for himself. She added that the cellphones and other perks including Council stipend should be eliminated

Mr. Tim O'Connor of 511 Lake Avenue said that he understood that the budget issue is complicated with many different facets. He said that he would strongly support the City Council in holding the line on taxes. Bridgeport can go forward and last year, the City stepped up and provided more money for the schools. Now it's time for the City to hold the line.

Ms. Susan Harrison of 307 Helen Street said that any increase right now would hurt everyone. She said that right now Bridgeport has the highest tax rate in the nation. It is hard to find jobs just to earn enough for the utilities. For those who are on fixed income, it's even harder. In conclusion the residents are asked the Council to vote No on the increased taxes. 90% of the residents are now living from paycheck to paycheck.

Mr. John Stevens of 11 Penfield Place came forward and said that he lived in his home in Black Rock for 31 years. The American dream of owning a home has now become the American nightmare. He said that he would like to better understand what was causing the 6 million dollar shortfall in the budget. In the last few years, 31 municipalities have gone bankrupt. Following his layoff, Mr. Stevens has been able to manage on a third less income, but not everyone is so fortunate.

Mr. Angel Reyes of 1219 East Main Street came forward and spoke about the difficulty of running a business with such high taxes. New investors look at location first, taxes second and safety as a third. He said that the taxes should be reduced to attract investors.

Mr. Reyes said that he was at the last meeting when someone had written a plan to help the City manage better. Like that person, Mr. Reyes had a meeting with School Superintendent Ramos and Ms. Kabel about correcting situations and improving the quality of life in Bridgeport.

Mr. Reyes said that at the last meeting, one of the speakers had compiled a list of items that could be done to avoid raising taxes. Mr. Reyes was able to obtain a copy of that list and the Council needs to consider those suggestions. He added that a caller to his radio program had announced that Bridgeport was the most corrupt city, which bothered him. He encouraged the Committee to review the list of potential savings measures.

Ms. Helen Olga Losak of 304 Bradley Street came forward and said that she was the neighborhood block watch for her neighborhood. She said that at the last public meeting, she had read a story based on the "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see?" story by Eric Carle adapted to the problems with raising taxes. She said that last year, the taxes were raised by \$500. However many of her neighbors were on fixed incomes.

She pointed out that in January, the Mayor gave himself a raise along with other employees. Ms. Losak said that when Mayor Finch was first elected, the homeowners were promised a \$600 rebate, which they are still waiting for. Ms. Losak said that she was angry because she believes that a person should honor their word.

Ms. Losak said that the Council Members, the Mayor and the City Attorneys do not follow the City Charters. She pointed out that the Mayor's Mission Statement hanging in front of the Civil Service, the first bullet point is the reduction of taxes. She added that he had promised to have one City Hall, but that has not been done. The residents have had to do more with less. If employees have to be laid off, so be it.

Mr. David Walker came forward and said that the final budget should not result in any tax increase. Mr. Walker submitted a 48 page booklet titled "Connecticut at Risk: Will the State Navigate to Prosperity?" by the Comeback America Initiative and the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis [downloadable from the following link:  
[http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2254913](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2254913) ]

He also submitted copies of his statement, which he read to the Committee along with a copy of a document titled Bridgeport City Council Public Hearing on the Mayor Finch's Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2014, April 8, 2013 (Revised 4/28/13). See Attached.

Mr. John Marshal Lee came forward and spoke about the twelve month budget report and held up a diagram with twelve month signs and a number of watchdogs. He said that the three public hearings were good, but that they had not been advertised well. Mr. Lee then read a statement into the record.

### **Budget and Appropriations Committee-2013**

Ladies and gentlemen of the Council, it has been a busy month for you. Just like cramming for exams in the days when I was in school. But I learned early that regular work throughout the year was a way to master a subject rather than killing myself at the end. Is there a lesson in holding to your meeting schedule instead of canceling a good number? I hope so.

You are to be commended this year for having held three hearings, although certainly attendance can be improved through better broadcast of meeting schedules to the community. As of April 1 a firm schedule was not available and then there was confusion on sites, etc. As I have said in the past you need to specify one of these as a Capital Budget hearing and provide enough info to the public on the City website or as handouts for them to be included. We buy so many trucks, cars, and other equipment that it seems that we have an unlimited budget, but we don't. I have not heard either the Mayor or Council prioritize the items for the Capital Budget. That vote is approaching also, or perhaps it has been made?

Having appeared before the City Council twice in the past five weeks and for a third time in front of you, you may feel that I am repeating myself. I try not to, but some obvious things need re-stating. Economic development is not yet producing growth in the Net Grand List. It has been shrinking. That puts a greater burden on the folks still on the list.

Our real property values are shrinking, too. That fact will become obvious when the revaluation is complete as of October 1, 2013. But it is the budget that drives Mill rates so that the budget you were handed on April 2, 2013 increases our current 41.1 rate by 6% if you do nothing. We have learned that the State may be restoring 70-80% of the revenues initially threatened to be lost. None of us can be sure of the exact numbers at this moment, but something in that range should reduce the Mill Rate increase by itself to 1.8 Mill increase. Of course, as I asked you several weeks ago, did you have an entire budget? And the answer seems to be NO. The State "minimum budget requirement" was communicated to Thomas Sherwood well before April 1, 2013. Only he knows why he did not increase the funding for education by \$3.280, 000. In a way the budget was a sham for an administration that called itself "accountable" for financing schools and getting money to the children in the classroom. Perhaps that happens when you are rushing to provide an answer and hope that people do not check on your work?

As one of a few observers of this budget for the past three years I can assure you that you have passed along ghost positions to the tune of around \$5 Million including benefits for 2011 and 2012. There are 40 vacant positions this year. Why are we going through this again? Look at what the administration did last

September with cutting \$4 Million of those vacancies. Where is the money being spent now? Do you know? Regarding your monthly financial reports, they are always about one month later than called for. A problem. They have less info for your easy comprehension of what is ongoing. An issue if you can't tell we are headed for another deficit this year. But you have no summary page. And you have no narratives to explain the variances. And worse yet, I understand that several of you have asked for information and do not get it from the administration. You have a right by Charter to that info. Stand up for your rights. You are our representatives as you assist with the budget. It is reasonable to ask why people are getting 20% raises and why Public Safety overtime is so grossly overspent for nearly two years. Can it be that the new labor contract moving them to the CT MERF plan uses total compensation for the highest three years including internal and external overtime? Will we be surcharged by the State in the future for the unanticipated and unmanaged use of overtime by eligible safety employees?

Last point. You ignore offers of assistance. Why? What fear do you have? That you might learn something to benefit all the people. I am specifically talking about an offer that David Walker has made on multiple occasions. It is to proceed in a comprehensive and thoroughgoing manner to look at all of the fiscal matters that are within your purview as our only check and balance unit left for the public. Bark! David will help you. He does not bite. Bark again, if you are not getting info that you think you need!! Keep barking. You have been too silent for too long. Show us you are alive. Time will tell.

John Marshall Lee May 7, 2013

Mr. Philip Blagys of 258 Balmforth Street came forward and spoke about the country's forefathers who had addressed property rights in the founding documents about how government must protect property. He reminded everyone how several people had spoken at the first public hearing about how they could no longer afford to live in their own homes because of the tax burden. He said that the Committee must hold the line on taxes and that means no tax increase.

Mr. Marc Delmonico of 50 Sailor's Lane came forward to speak about the high tax rate in the City. There are two ways to handle this, to discredit it or fix it. The Mayor has chosen the first option. Businesses either increase sales or cut costs when these situations happen. He pointed out that the Council members were elected by the residents, not Tom Sherwood. If Mr. Sherwood wants to play games with taxes, he needs to move to Bridgeport and pay the taxes. There was undeveloped water front property for 15 years. The excuse was that the economy was not good. While the economy was not always good, it wasn't always bad. All Bridgeport had done lately is destroy people's dreams.

Ms. Jennifer Buchanan of 159 Seabright Street came forward and said that she was here to explain that the Council Members should be getting ideas from the residents. She said that she lived in Westport for many years but moved to Bridgeport. She has seen many other people who do not have children living with them move to Bridgeport. One person who had invested for 20 years, is looking for a single family home but won't consider Bridgeport because the taxes have tripled in the last few years. Bridgeport is no longer an option for people who are looking to downsize.

Ms. Buchanan said that she believed that furloughs were a better option than laying people off. There should be a zero hiring and a fixed budget. The Budget and Appropriations Committee should be demanding a monthly meeting with the department heads to explain how their expenditures are going to remain within their budgets.

Ms. Buchanan pointed out that both Mr. Fardy and Mr. Lee have been giving the details of how to curb the budget along with the input from the former Comptroller of the United States. How can the Budget and Appropriations Committee not find ways to cut the budget?

Mr. Ernie Newton of 190 Read Street then came forward and spoke about the tax situation and reminded the Committee members that they represent the residents. He then suggested that the taxpayers call for a referendum on the budget. He pointed out that when the landlord gets a tax increase, the renter suffers. It's time to take a stand. After the large tax increase last year, there shouldn't be anyone in the City that should have their taxes raised. The residents can not afford another tax increase.

Mr. Steve Christensen of 145 Sunburst Road came forward and said that his taxes are \$7,000 for a ranch. This is a hardship for everyone. Single parents are struggling. It is impossible to continue to live in Bridgeport. He spoke about the residents who struggle to handle the large garbage cans. It is time to put a freeze on raises. He wondered why the booting of vehicles was being done by an outside company.

Mr. Jim Fox of 286 Seaside Avenue came forward and said that the Mayor was holding back on 3.4 million for the Board of Education. He said that the Mayor was blaming others. He then stated that Black Rock would not have a hard time succeeding from the City of Bridgeport. The homes that are on the market are two and three family homes because the rents no longer cover the taxes. He then there were too many outside contractors like Pullman and Comley used by the City and reminded everyone about the City employees on the Council.

Mr. Charles Coviello came forward said that he hoped everyone was listening because the Committee's reputation is on the line. If the Council Members vote for the budget, they should not be re-elected. He said that in trying to sell a house in Bridgeport, and the taxes on the house is larger than the principal of the payment. It's time to draw the line on taxes because if it isn't done, then no one will be able to sell their houses in Bridgeport. Mr. Coviello asked how many properties came off the tax rolls for schools or non-taxable projects. It's important because the Council is giving away the residents' money.

Mr. Robert Halstead came forward and said that he was present to exercise his Constitutional rights. He spoke about how he did all the work on his house, but now was having trouble making ends meet. His taxes on his property went up \$4,000. He questioned whether building a new school will actually help the students. The City has to pay 20% of the cost, plus the maintenance, and staff. He then spoke about how Housing or Anti-blight fines residents \$100 a day.

Another resident came forward and said that after the taxes were increased last year, the Mayor gave himself and the administrators a raise. The administration is top heavy. She wanted to know how many administrators actually live in Bridgeport. She said that many municipalities have mandatory residency requirements for jobs over \$100,000. The resident said that fining the residents who are trying to fix or repair was wrong. She said that the Anti-blight should look at the City properties many of which are blighted.

Mr. Todd Devorsky came forward with a shovel that he used during the blizzard. He said that one of the neighbors saw a resident he knew shoveling out the street he lives on. Mr. Devorsky then thanked Gilbertie's of Westport for plowing the street out. For the taxes he pays, he receives garbage pick up. The recycling is done only every other week. Bassick High School teams don't have uniforms and don't have the opportunities that the students in nearby communities have. He said that he can't sell his house because he'd only get 50% on it. He also asked what the Mayor was

Mr. Bill Moncrier said that when he moved to Bridgeport 18 years ago, the taxes on his home was \$6,000. Now it's \$36,000. He wanted to know when this would end? His daughter moved to Milford and bought a house two blocks from the water. The taxes were \$4,000. He then pointed out that the Mayor had a meeting with residents during which he spoke for 50 minutes non-stop.

Ms. Nicole Edison came forward said that as a realtor, she was not comfortable selling property in Bridgeport. She is paying more in taxes than she is interest on her car. She can't sell her home, but she can't let the bank foreclose because it will ruin her credit. If the bank forecloses, then there will not be any taxes paid. She was disappointed that there were not more Council Members present at the meeting or residents. But the residents are probably working their second jobs. She doesn't have children, but if she did, she would have to leave the City. She is disappointed in the roads and the behavior of the administration during the snowstorm. It took three days for her street to be plowed out. You can not continue to lean on the residents of Bridgeport without creating an alternate tax base with businesses. But she pointed out that a company that moved to Bridgeport would have a difficult time asking their employees to move to a city where the educational system is so poor.

Ms. Saunders who works in health care came forward and said that her tax bill is almost as high as her mortgage. During the snow storm, her husband had to drive up and down the street to flatten the snow so that her father could get to dialysis.

Mr. Murali Chiraneri came forward and said that he really loves Bridgeport and pays \$32,000 in taxes. He said that he did not see any evidence of a plan. His three children go to private school because the public schools are so poor. The property values are so high, it has destroyed the value of the houses.

Mr. Rick Torres came forward and said that the residents were actually on trial. He said that he didn't think anyone has spoken in favor of the tax increase. He began to yell that this was enough and the council was doing this to the taxpayers.

Ms. Linda Keller of Seaside Avenue came forward and said that she moved from Westport to Bridgeport seven years ago. Her one acre house in Westport was \$6,000. In Bridgeport, she pays more in taxes on her small house. She is a senior and will be forced out by the taxes. This is ludicrous. She pointed out that the reason that some of the people were not present was because they didn't believe the Council could make a change. When she handed the flyers to other residents, she was told that the Council was not for the residents. She urged the Committee members to wake up.

Ms. Cruzmilda Maldonado, a widow who has lived in Bridgeport for 12 years came forward to address the Committee. She purchased a burned out house at 2578 Fairfield Avenue and worked on it to improve the house. Now her taxes are \$10,000. Another \$500 to \$1,000 a year in taxes, it won't work. This system has to change.

Ms. Katrina Cough of Amsterdam Avenue came forward and said that she was disgusted and angry with the administration. She said that the Mayor was not the problem, but the Council members. If the Council Members can't lead they should get out of the way.

Council Member Brannelly asked if there was anyone else wished to speak. No one came forward. Council Member Brannelly asked a second time if there was anyone else wished to speak. No one came forward. Council Member Brannelly asked for a third time if there was anyone else wished to speak. Hearing none, Council Member Brannelly closed the public hearing on the budget at 7:51 p.m.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services

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