

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
PUBLIC HEARING
MAY 6, 2014**

ATTENDANCE: Susan Brannelly, Co-chair; Patricia Swain, Denese Taylor-Moye, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia; Lydia Martinez; Council President Thomas McCarthy (6:20 p.m.); Michael Marella, Co-chair (6:20 p.m.);

OTHERS: Council Member Rick Torres; Council Member Milta Feliciano; Council Member Jack Banta, Council Member Mary A. McBride-Lee; Council Member Richard Salter (6:20 p.m.); Council Member Michelle Lyons (6:20 p.m.)

CALL TO ORDER

Council Member Brannelly called the public hearing to order at 6:08 p.m. A quorum was present. She introduced the Committee members present.

PUBLIC HEARING

Ms. Beth Lazar 1241 Main Street came forward and said she believes that having a strong school system was necessary for a democracy. This requires money for books, paper, and computers. She said that the towns and cities that spent the most money has the highest scores. Bridgeport, which does not meet the MBR, has one of the lowest scores. She said that the Mayor's budget with the in kind services included was actually a cut.

Ms. Donna Kooris came forward and said that she lives in Fairfield but is a teacher in Bridgeport. She said that Fairfield never have to go after the people for more money because they pay their taxes and spend the money on education. She said that the Board shouldn't have to beg for money. Her students often can't afford the more expensive supplies.

Ms. Maria Perriera came forward and spoke about how she was had been involved in the school district for years since Mayor Fabrizi had under cut the Board of Education. She said that some of the Council Members had signed a letter to the State saying that the students at Marin should have social workers, ELL workers and an extended day. However, every Bridgeport student should have this, not just the students at Marin. She said that the MBR was State Law and if the Council did not provide the District with the full MBR she was organizing a lawsuit and will sue everyone over this.

Ms. Mary Filo said that there were some things that were basic common sense. She said that the Mayor had stated that taxes will never go down. This is scary. In her job, if she didn't reduce her budget at work, she would lose her job. The City has been spending money reckless and now Bridgeport is in poor position. The citizens and the children pay for this. She said that in order

to save money, the Committee should start looking at Council Member Taylor-Moye's stipend spending.

Ms. Kathy Silver, a teacher at Bassick High School, came forward and said that she had been teaching in Bridgeport for 23 years. She said that the Council should do whatever it had to do to fully fund the schools. She listed the figures and said that the schools will lose funding in 2016 if they do not get the money. She said that she has been working on canvassing for people to vote. Politicians think that the charter schools will solve the problems but the top performing schools in the world, Finland, has strong public schools. The original goal for the charter schools was to collaborate with public schools not to compete with them. Charter schools are taking away from the public schools. She then went on to list reasons why charter schools are not helpful.

Ms. Gloradine Braxton came forward to address the Committee members. She said that she likes to have her kindergarten daughter attend these types of forums with her to give a visual example of the actual students. She said that she had been requested to participate in her local school and has hands on experiences. The teachers are overworked and the parent participation is at an all time low because of loss of hope. She wanted to know why the students didn't have the basic equipment.

Council President McCarthy, and Council Members Richard Salter, Michael Marella & Michelle Lyons joined the meeting at 6:20 p.m.

Ms. Braxton asked why the students didn't have updated computers, and money not available for beautifying the school property. The Committee has the ability to make a decision that will affect the students positively. Don't disappoint the students.

Ms. Joanne Kennedy said that she would not be repeating what others said, but reminded everyone that they knew children. This shouldn't be turned into a situation of haves and have nots. People have come forward and tried to be cordial. The residents shouldn't have to sue the Council over the funding. She said that she didn't know why the Committee was looking at the residents differently. This is disrespectful to the residents, particularly when people just sit there and listen to the people but do whatever they want. She said the Committee members should think about what they love and what they could lose because they will be held accountable.

Mr. John Marshall Lee came forward and said that he had been to many of these different meetings through the years. He encouraged the public to come to the Education and Social Services meeting. He also asked about the Lighthouse program funding and whether the Council would reduce the Council stipends. He said that there were 90 ghost positions in the City and removing these things from the budget would fund the shortfall. Mr. Lee said that he had gotten a copy of the final report and said that the public needed to review the CAFR report. He said that the public could help and need to be involved.

Mr. Steve Karjens, of 473 Washington Avenue spoke next. He said that he was a social worker for 20 years in Bridgeport Public Schools. The budget for Bridgeport is completely inadequate. New Haven's budget is almost twice the amount and has the same demographics. The

Superintendent suggested that a lawsuit would be in order after the budget is passed. He asked why the State representative and Senators from Bridgeport were not present. He also asked where the Mayor was. He said that the City was conspiring to deny the Bridgeport students a fair education and was creating an educational holocaust. He then requested that the Superintendent to ask for a Federal investigation of misappropriation of funds and cronyism. Education costs money, but so does ignorance. The City is failing the students. He suggested that the Committee go back to the drawing board and work harder at finding the money for the schools.

A parent of a Harding student then came forward and said that there had been shortages since 2007. Mayor Finch had informed the residents that the taxes were being increased to fund the schools, but only 4 million was used for the schools. The City is required by State law to fund an additional 3.3 million in cash, not in kind services. As of today's date, the District has not been paid one penny of that 3.3 million, which is required by law. She said that anything less than what is required is unacceptable. She said that payments to the Internal Service Fund or in kind services are not acceptable. The residents will be noting how everyone votes for the budget and informing parents how everyone votes to under fund the schools. The children should not have less than what the students in Westport, Wilton, Trumbull and Stratford have.

Ms. Karen Jackson came forward to address the Committee. She said that she was a Bridgeport parent and a social studies teacher. She said that she is letting her students know what the City Council is doing. Her school is being defunded and she can't even take children to the library. Many of the parents of the students do not speak English. She said that there had been a flyer sent to Marin about this issue. She said that there was an area where there was no sidewalk but now that there is a corporation that is coming to Bridgeport, a sidewalk was put in. She said that it made her feel bad that a corporation was more important than the school children. There are parents who are not involved in their children's education. She asked the Committee to go back to the original budget and fully fund the schools.

Dr. Rabinowitz, the Interim Superintendent of Schools came forward and said that this was a passionate display and commitment by the parents of the students. She said that she was in partnership with the parents. The budget is inadequate for the District. She said that she looked carefully at other cities in Connecticut and the City is funding the schools at a lesser amount than other communities. She reminded everyone that she had been in Bridgeport 20 or 25 years ago and the same issues were being discussed. It is heartbreaking for her as a superintendent to have less money while having more students. She then asked the Committee to do whatever they could for the schools. The City of Bridgeport is only as good as the schools and the schools bring people to the City.

Mr. Ethan Book came forward and said that he was a candidate for the 131st District and said that he had met with Mayor Bill Finch back in 2005. He then described his meeting with Mayor Finch about various illegal police activities including his false arrest in 2006. He then spoke about Mr. Tiago being recently hired for a City position and possible conflicts of interest. He concluded his remarks by referring to Ben Franklin's comments on political issues.

Mr. Mustafa Salahurder came forward and said that for the past six years he was seeing line items in the school budget that were cut because there was not enough funding in the budget. He said this needs to be addressed by the Federal government and the State government. This is one of the States with the highest taxes. He then asked that when the Committee gets up in the morning and looks in the mirror, they like what they see. He said that the Committee needs to leave a legacy and do the right thing, If the Committee was not working with the BOE, then they will become their adversaries and no one needs.

Council Member Martinez-Walker joined the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Mr. David Gordon came forward and thanked the Council Members for attending. He said that it was important to follow the law and meet the MBR for Bridgeport education. People have told him that it was a disgrace and a shame not to meet the legal requirement. He said that the Council Members would have to live with their decisions.

Mr. Steve Karjerns, who is a Social worker from Blackham School came forward and said that two SPED teachers with many years of teaching left in the middle of the school year. The staff is leaving because the conditions are so bad.

Ms. Valerie Salahurder said that she was involved in PAC. Her children come home every day with photo copies from a book. She said that she didn't understand what happened and where the break down happened. Why are the children's schools are so under funded. Trumbull and Stratford have lap tops and full computer labs. Bridgeport's students don't have tablets or laptops. She said that she didn't understand why the Council couldn't increase the budget.

Council Member Brannelly asked if there was anyone else present who wished to address the Committee. No one came forward. Council Member Brannelly asked if there was anyone else present who wished to address the Committee. No one came forward.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED TO ADJOURN.
** COUNCIL MEMBER TAYLOR-MOYE SECONDED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

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