

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS  
COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
APRIL 8, 2021**

**ATTENDANCE:** Ernest Newton Co-chair; Scott Burns, Co-chair; Jorge Cruz, Jeanette Herron, Matthew McCarthy, Mary McBride-Lee, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia

**OTHERS:** Council Member(s): M. Pereira, S. Suliman, R. Roman-Christy & E. Martinez; Thomas Gill, OPED Director; Bill Coleman, OPED Deputy Director; Tyler Mack; K. Flatto, Finance Director; N. Nkwo, OPM Director; Barbara

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Co-chair Newton called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. A quorum was present.

**Capital Discussion – OPED**

Council Member Newton said that they were present to talk about the Comprehensive Plan for 2022 and the discussion will focus on that. He added that he would not allow any questions about other projects in the City because the Council Members should contact Mr. Gill or Mr. Coleman for additional information. He added that Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo were present to answer questions through the Chair. This is not a debate, it is a time to listen and develop questions. Anything beyond that will be ruled out of order because that is not why the meeting was being held. He said that he would be asking Mr. Nkwo to give an overview and then Mr. Gill and Mr. Coleman would present their requests.

Mr. Nkwo said that the FY 2022 Capital Plan include projects that are deemed to have an immediate need or essential. He added that Mr. Gill would be speaking about Land Management Acquisition. There will also be a discussion regarding the Remington project. The building has been an eyesore for a long time. The funding for the Lafayette re-alignment is the remaining City matching funds of approximately \$1.3 to \$1.4 million dollars. He said that the request for \$650,000 was just to have the City's portion for this year's match. The Gateway to the South End is another project that the Mayor wishes to pursue. Blight Demolition will also be addressed by Mr. Gill.

Council Member Newton asked if they had considered using some of the Federal infrastructure funding to cover the cost about the infrastructure project. Mr. Nkwo explained that the budget estimates and projections had been done long before anyone knew there would be Federal funding for infrastructure. He added that there were no details available about how much would be available or what the project requirements would be. The Capital Plan is the first step in the project and this is followed by the decision to bond for the money. If the Federal funding is allocated and the project qualify, the City will not have to bond.

Mr. Flatto said that the American Rescue Act only involves projects that involve sewer, water infrastructure and broadband. The guidelines are expected to be released from the U.S. Treasury in about a month and if the activity is related to COVID, the project may qualify. He added that he would report back to the Committee once they have more information.

Mr. Gill then explained that the Land Management and Property Acquisition entailed funding to acquire abandoned properties that are not owned by the City. Those produce no tax revenue. Once they are acquired, they are demolished to preserve the site in order to clear up the blighted aspect. Then they are sold in order to create tax revenue. The city wide Blight Demo clean up involves properties that are blighted throughout the City and those properties are demolished because they are liabilities to the City, health and safety risks and detrimental to the neighborhoods. He listed a number of sites that had been acquired and others that had been demolished.

Council Member Pereira asked about a list of properties that were slated for land acquisition. A million dollars seemed like a great deal of money for that project.

She also wished to have some clarification regarding the Gateway to the South End City wide Strategic Acquisition and what kind of property would be acquired for that.

Mr. Gill said that there were properties that were becoming available in all shapes, sizes and prices. Some could be acquired for tax foreclosures but there were other properties that need to be acquired through negotiation. A million dollars is not a lot of money when acquiring properties. There are properties that absentee landlords have banked for years and they need to be addressed.

Relative to the Gateway, there are situations where they are trying to improve the streets leading down to Seaside Park but there are also trouble spots along the way. Those may need to be acquired during the process. The funding would be for blight removal or to improve lighting down there.

Council Member McCarthy asked for clarification on the City buying tax foreclosures. Mr. Gill explained that there could be a situation where an individual has acquired a property through tax foreclosure and the City may have to acquire the parcel back. He gave an example involving a bank foreclosure.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the Land Management funding and the demolition process. Mr. Gill said that the funding would be taken from the demolition funding rather than Land Management. He added there are situations where there are brownfields and may eventually become affordable housing.

Council Member McCarthy said that there were \$3 million allocated for Remington this year and \$2 million next year. He wished to know how much the money would cover. Mr. Gill said that it may not get everything leveled but that they would be able to stabilize the shot tower, which needs to be saved and preserved. He gave the details and said that the two buildings present the greatest liability to the City. They are dangerous. DuPont is still responsible for remediation of the property, but it is contingent on the City demolishing the buildings.

Council Member McCarthy asked if they had investigated brownfield funding. Mr. Gill said that the funding would come through the State and they have discussed this with the State already.

Council Member Cruz asked about the removal of some items along Park Avenue. Mr. Gill said that they would not be removing anything along the street or the divider islands, but have to improve the lighting and the under passes. There are considerations about having a bike trail along there. There are some businesses that have caused problems for the South End residents, and they have to work on that issue. Discussion followed about the details.

Council Member Cruz said that the Warner Co. building was a problem because of constant dumping. He said that Mr. Nadrizny had been able to remove a lot of debris from the property. He asked if there were plans to go after the absentee owner who is allowing this to happen. He said that there were tree branches that fall from the Warner Co. building onto cars parked on a nearby property.

Mr. Gill said that the City has dealt with the absentee landlord in the past. He owns two properties and unfortunately keep their taxes current and pay their fines promptly. The only thing the City can do is try to acquire the property.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked about the I-95 and railroad underpasses, which were handled by the State and MetroNorth. She asked if they would be contributing to the cost of making those areas safer for the drivers and residents. Mr. Gill said that they were having difficulty getting the State to allow them to just pave there or even clean up the area there.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked if there was some kind of contract regarding cleaning up the I-95 entrance and exit areas. She added that the Mayor had worked an agreement out early in his administration. Mr. Gill said that DOT just doesn't care and there is no agreement to split the costs.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that they had worked hard to get the State to agree for work at the ballpark and the Arena. Those projects entailed having the State Legislators involved. She mentioned that it might be time to do the same thing for the under passes.

Council Member Martinez said there were a lot of blighted properties on the East End. She asked if they had amounts collected from homeowners who have paid blight fines. She asked if the funding was used to clean up other properties.

Mr. Gill agreed and said that they had done this in the past. He explained that Mr. Nkwo would have a better idea of how much money had been generated this way, but cautioned everyone that because of COVID, the blight inspectors have not been able to go on site. They are looking for other options.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked Mr. Gill if they had considered using eminent domain to take properties that are blighted. Mr. Gill said that this was what they have been thinking about in regard to Warner Co and another blighted property. Discussion followed.

Council Member Burns asked about the Land Acquisition bonding money to acquire the properties which are then sold off. He wished to know if there were records on these various transactions. He also asked whether there were other bonded funds that they could repurpose for this project.

Mr. Gill said that there were bonding funds available that had been identified for specific projects while other capital had been bonded for already. They constantly review the capital funding available and utilize the older capital funding first.

Mr. Gill said that they have all the records of the Land Acquisition transactions and when a property is sold there is a closing on the transaction, so those records are available.

Council Member Burns asked Mr. Nkwo about the figures in the budget that would indicate the revenue generated from the Land Acquisition transaction. Mr. Nkwo said he knew that the land sales from last year were about half a million dollars, but had no way to know how the property came to be in the City's possession. The money was booked into the General Fund.

Mr. Flatto said that when Mr. Perez works on preparing the properties for sale, they are presented to the Council. He added that OPED had repurposed \$4.5 million to the City for the Arena, so the City did not have to go out to bond.

Council Member Pereira asked for clarification about the Gateway Strategic South End Strategic Acquisition. She said that this was clearly not about blighted properties and said that she could not think of any major blight other than the former Marina Village. She said that she would like to know what the \$1 million dollar allocation was for.

Mr. Gill said that it was the South End Gateway, and was the project name. He said that it was to improve the connections between downtown and Seaside Park, the University and other areas as needed to compliment on-going projects, like Southwest Health.

Council Member Pereira said that Mr. Gill could not even identify a specific project. Discussion followed about the details.

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY MOVED TO CHANGE THE LINE ITEM TO STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENTS RATHER THAN STRATEGIC ACQUISITIONS.  
\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ SECONDED.**

Mr. Flatto said that he usually gives the project names to Bond Counsel and they are only allowed to use the money for the purposes specified. He requested a week in order to modify the project name with Bond Counsel.

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY WITHDREW HIS MOTION.  
\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ WITHDREW HIS SECOND.**

Mr. Nkwo pointed out that this is a working document. When the Committee is ready to vote, he will be happy to change the title accordingly.

Council Member Newton reminded everyone that the Council Members were there just to listen and to hear the Department presentation. When it comes time to vote on the Budget Capital Plan, changes can be made at that time.

Council Member Cruz asked if the City could use any of the \$2 million dollars that they received from the PSE&G payment for the Gateway project.

Mr. Flatto said that the money flows through non-profit groups and the City does not receive that funding. He added that Mr. Coleman may know more about that.

Mr. Coleman said it was important that the City be at the table and do some planning for the South End. He said that detailed considerations such as the tree canopy need to be factored in. They will be on the planning side and as specific recommendations evolve, they will be able to give some input.

Mr. Coleman said regarding the strategic acquisitions when the City wants to acquire property, they have to bring it to the Council. However, he requested the Committee leave the description of “Strategic Acquisitions” in the line item because there may be moments that arise where they would want to come back to the Council for approval. He gave an example of past acquisitions in the East End near the Civic block when they had the funding available to purchase specific parcels.

Council Member McCarthy asked about South End Gateway. He said that cleaning up State Street to the Arch and Broad Street down to the Park would be a priority. He asked if they had any plans to acquire a particular parcel. Mr. Gill said that the City had no intention of purchasing that particular parcel at this time.

Council Member Newton asked about the status of Arch which was discovered to have structural damage. He asked for an update on the project. Mr. Gill explained that it was a Public Facilities project rather than OPED. He added that work has started on the Arch.

Council Member Newton requested that OPED speed up on their demolitions because there have been many buildings that have been waiting for many years.

Council Member Burns asked about the Remington Arms building and whether they had asked about Federal funding. \$5 million was bonded a few years ago and another \$5 million is needed. He wished clarification on what the funding was being used for.

Mr. Gill said that the stabilization was underway, and the fencing needs to be replaced. The property is in need. The funding that will be requested next year will be directed towards the demolition aspect. There are also restrictions with historic buildings. They are trying for additional State funding because the site is a safety and liability danger.

Council Member Burns asked about the liability aspect and whether the City Attorney’s Office was advocating for the City to protect them. Mr. Gill said that new fencing has been ordered and the shot tower will be boarded up soon. Blighted properties attract problems. It is imperative that they clean up the property as much as possible. The City Attorney’s Office has been very supportive and Atty. Pacacha has been busy on the project.

Council Member McCarthy requested that the Committee receive a progress report on the projects that were approved in 2020, so he can be assured how the money was being spent. Council Member Newton said that Mr. Nkwo could probably provide that information.

Mr. Nkwo said that when the items were adopted in the Capital budget, bonds were not necessarily requested at that time. He said that he could provide the Council Members with a list of projects that had been already bonded. They bond as needed. When they are ready to bond, they have to come before the Council for approval. Discussion followed about the details.

Council Member Cruz asked Mr. Gill about the proposed electronic billboard, but wished to know about future developments on that parcel.

Mr. Gill replied that the parcel was a strategic location for development and an RFP would be sent out for developers.

Council Member Pereira said that the Remington Arms funding had been approved but she did not remember what other projects that were authorized. Mr. Nkwo said that those projects would be listed in the report he will generate.

Council Member Burns said that they would be having a Capital Discussion with Public Facilities and also start with the Operating Budget on Saturday.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO ADJOURN.  
\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA SECONDED.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services