

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
APRIL 27, 2021**

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

OTHERS: Council Member(s): M. Lyons, M. Pereira, R. Roman-Christy, E. Martinez & M. Valle; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Tyler Mack, Callie Heilmann, Julian Shafer, Melanie, Cayla Bamberger, Tim O'Connor, RPS; Thomas Burns, Barbara, Kacey (she/they)

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC HEARING: GENERAL FUND BUDGET

Ms. Heilmann of GenNow greeted the Committee and said that she lives at Grovers Avenue. She was testifying against Mayor Ganim's proposed General Fund budget. She said that Mayor Ganim had a moral obligation to address the deep damage of systemic racism, classism, segregation, over-policing and underfunding in the city particularly during this year due to George Floyd's death and COVID-19. In the proposed budget, education has been flat funded again while the police department budget is 5.8% higher than last year. This has been a disturbing trend for many years, including the last five years when Ms. Heilmann has testified at these hearings on this matter.

In July of 2019, the Public Safety and Police Accountability Committee at GenNow sponsored an opportunity for members to give testimony on their experience with violence and misconduct with the Bridgeport Police Department. They spoke to former Chief Perez and Chief Ramsey who was present at the time. At the forum, a Bridgeport resident and mother spoke about the fear for her 18 year old black son who was autistic. She was concerned about officers dealing with black and brown children with invisible disabilities. Many of them will become combative and non-compliant over a simple request like "What are you doing?"

Those fears are justified by the deaths of Patrick Warren, Sr, Daniel Prude and others show that armed police responses to mental health issues and substance abuse crisis end in tragedy. During this legislative session, Brian Preleski, the New Britain's States Attorney stated that introducing a firearm into a volatile situation turns the situation deadly.

Transforming our society and creating a system of public safety that keeps everyone safe requires shifting everyone's perspective. The policy making must be shifted and in Bridgeport,

the administration must shift their budget. Public safety must be viewed through a Public Health lens and strong investments must be made in address the root causes of violence, substance abuse, mental health, the schools, the high cost of housing and more.

Mayor Ganim's status quo budget means that Bridgeport will remain one of the most inequitable cities in Connecticut. The Council has the courage and moral compass to do the right thing. While the current administration has sent much needed Federal dollars, the temporary relief funding is a one-time grant. It will not reverse this terrible trend of underfunding the communities needs and over funding the Police Department. It is time to work together to transform the City budget with community needs and equity at the forefront. The injustices laid bare are not going to disappear with the vaccine or with the Federal aid. The Council must take a bold and courageous approach.

Council Member Pereira came forward and made the following statement:

The City of Bridgeport's budget is more than just a financial document with a bunch of numbers. It demonstrates what we as elected representatives believe to be important and vital to the success of both those we serve and represent as well as the City as a whole.

The City's Grand List increased by 1, 695,591,400 dollars driven mainly by false flag home sales in the last 9 months of 2020 due mainly to the influx of New Yorkers fleeing the epicenter of Covid-19 cases and deaths in New England.

The Mayor has proposed reducing the mill rate from 53.99 to 43.99 which equates to a 19.5 % decrease which in no way compensates for his 33% tax increase in 2016. Single family houses went up in value as little as 11% in Black Rock to as high as 52% in the Harding Precinct. Multi-family homes went up in value as little as 19.8% in the Beardsley Park Area and as high as 46.9% in the Harding Precinct. You do the math. If the mil rate is decreased by 19.5% but the property value increased by 52%; the property owner will still be facing a 32.5% increase in their property taxes if the mil rate is reduced to 43.99.

Any mil rate set at over 40 mils is a tax increase. Plain and simple.

And even with this massive increase in the Grand List and millions in additional Pilot and Stimulus Revenue; the Mayor has not even proposed a zero increase for our over 19,000 students. He has literally proposed a \$500,000 reduction. Our public school student population is 88% Black & Brown, therefore Mayor Ganim and his administration have in essence stated that the education of these children, many who live in poverty, is of no value, irrelevant and inconsequential.

The City Council has 13 members who are minorities. Are all of you, many of whom stood at press conferences with Justice for Jayson and other events promoting racial justice and equity going to vote against the \$6,000,000 the BOE has requested while voting in favor of the \$6,000,000 allocated to the BPD? A proper education is critical to racial justice and equity. If you vote to give the public schools zero or some paltry amount; will you then go to murdered children's' or young adults' funerals, go on News

12, etc.; offering your sympathies and condolences? I certainly hope not because your statements will ring hollow.

In 2016/2017, Mayor Ganim proposed ZERO and the City Council approved ZERO, \$16,000,000 in cuts were made. The Mayor has now proposed the second zero increase budget for the BOE over 6 years after promising on a videotaped Faith Acts for Education event in November 2019 that he would commit to increase the BOE Budget by a minimum of \$2,000,000 per year over the next 5 years.

As of this current year's budget; the Mayor and City Council has only approved an increase of ½ a percent to the BOE over the last 5 years forcing the BOE to make \$44,000,000 in devastating cuts. This Mayor & City Council contributes the least to its public schools in a percentage basis out of all 169 municipalities in CT. I would hope we are all embarrassed by that.

In 2019, just 15 days before his 2019 primary, Mayor Ganim found emergency funding for bus transportation via a Lighthouse allocation for \$1,201,810 as an election gimmick; in the 2021 budget only \$500,000 was allocated on the very last Saturday meeting of the B & A Committee yet the Mayor 's budget has now proposed that Lighthouse allocation at zero. Therefore, the Mayor's Budget is actually reducing its appropriation to the BOE by \$500,000. So our 19,000 Black & Brown students will be worth less effective July 1st than they are today.

Yet just about every single city department is receiving between a 1.4% to 26.4% increase, but not our students.

We have another \$6,000,000 budgeted for the BPD including at least \$600,000 of the \$1,000,000 hidden on page 415 on a contingency line for the raises in the next negotiated bargaining agreement.

The BPD is budgeted to receive \$6,000,000 for approximately 400 employees while the BOE requested \$6,000,000 for over 19,000,000 students and 2700 employees. Which one has our constituents supported year after year during the budget cycle and at public hearings? Yet another over 5% increase for the BPD and literally a decrease for our traumatized and deserving students.

What this budget document demonstrates is that we value the BPD with another \$6,000,000 increase, Civil Service with a 26% increase, Benefits Administration with an 8% increase, IT with a 9% increase, EOC with a 8% increase, Recreation Programs with a 8% increase, OPED with a 7% increase, Zoning with an 12% increase, Health Administration with a 9% increase, but our vulnerable students who must have a solid education as a means of lifting themselves out of poverty and laying the foundation for successful lives; well, that's not worth anything.

I don't know if this budget could be any more immoral.

Council Member Newton came forward and said that this was something that they normally don't speak during a public hearing. He would be remiss if he allowed someone to paint a doom and gloom picture. When the re-val was done, some properties went up and others went down. He was glad that his property value went up because 10 years ago, his property was underwater, but today, he would be able to sell it.

It is sad to single out minorities and it is wrong. The Council will address the needs of the residents of the City, as they have. There are no lawyers or accountants on the Council. He said that he would not allow anyone to make untrue statements because he and Council Member Burns have worked hard to make sure things are right.

Council Member Burns asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak.

Mr. Julian Shafer said that it was straight forward and there were two large items in the budget that need to be addressed. The Police budget has continued to grow. He said that there were protests about George Floyd, police accountability and how the police budget eats up all the City funding.

He said that they need to have a budget that makes the residents feel safe. As a teacher in Danbury, he is well aware of the impact of a short budget. Passing a flat funded education budget while increasing the police budget is wrong. The way the budget stands is upholding systemic racism. He is in opposition to this budget. He hopes the Council can pass a budget that will be fair.

Ms. Keilia said that Fairfield County was one of the richest counties in the nation and she said that it was embarrassing to admit that her school district was always underfunded. She said that there were problems that had been given to the police to solve and it would not help. She said that she wondered what it would take to have this changed.

Council Member Burns stated for the record that Council Member McCarthy was a CPA.

Kasey (she/they) of 497 Laurel Avenue said that she was member of Generation NOW. Kasey said that she was opposed to the budget because it prioritized police funding over education. With people spending most of their time indoors, she did not understand why their budget increased. The City could invest in education and mental health care, better housing and improving the community. The Council united with many activists during the summer yet the police department continues to enact violence on the community in Bridgeport. The people are sick of this as is she. Education, housing, Green New deal and green energy are the future.

Council Member Burns asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak on the Budget.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she does not like to speak during Public Hearings but wanted to echo what Council Member Newton said about the budget and mis-information. She is an African American and is worried about her son and other male relatives when they go out. The black men that died were all brothers, but the Bridgeport Police are not like some other

police departments that she knows of. She knows the KKK and skinheads when she sees them. There is some good in the worst of us and some bad in the best of us.

Council Member Burns asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak on the Budget, he asked a second time and a third time. Hearing none, Council Member Burns closed the public hearing at 7:35 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services