

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS  
COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
APRIL 28, 2021**

**ATTENDANCE:** Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton Co-chair; Jorge Cruz, Jeanette Herron, Matthew McCarthy, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia (6:06 p.m.) Mary McBride-Lee (7:04 p.m.)

**OTHERS:** Council Member(s): M. Brown, M. Lyons, (6:10 p.m.); E. Martinez, M. Pereira, R. Roman-Christy & M. Valle; T. Gaudett, Mayor's Office; K. Flatto, Finance Director; N. Nkwo, OPM Director; E. Jackson-Shaheed, Acting Health Department Director; P. Ulatowski, Vital Statistics; A. Gaines, Deputy Enforcement Officer; T. Papa, Acting Deputy Director of Health; C. Vickers, Legislative Affairs; Barbara, Citizen, Sg, Jodie Fulton, 203-414-0712; 203-880-5666; 203-209-1058

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Co-chair Newton called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

Co-chair Newton reminded everyone that they were to be respectful to one another and the Department heads. The staff is present to provide information.

Co-chair Burns said that there was a Resiliency Meeting also going on this evening.

**GENERAL BUDGET DISCUSSION: Heath and Social Services**

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she had a PowerPoint presentation that she would like to share. Council Member Burns explained that due to FOI requirements, they were not allowed to accept any documentation that was not presented before the meeting.

*Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia joined the meeting at 6:06 p.m.*

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she was the new Acting Health Department Director and the mission of the Department was to promote public health. There is a Health Department, a Social Services Department and a Human Services Department. She then gave a brief overview of the re-organization of the department, which was outlined organizational chart in the PowerPoint presentation.

*Council Member Lyons announced that she had joined the meeting at 6:10 p.m.*

Council Member McCarthy asked how long the Blight Department had been under the Health Department. He also wished to know how much blight had been handled.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that there was a Blight Officer who goes out and reports on areas that are blighted. Then the report is then sent to a crew who goes out to clean up the area.

Council Member McCarthy said that he would like to receive a weekly report regarding the blight reports and the sites that have been cleaned up.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they were looking into ways to improve the blight situation in Bridgeport. She said that she would work on getting the report.

Council Member Burns suggested that Housing Code is on page 368 and contains a number of blight information points. There are two types of blight, such as large projects involving demolition and a second one that handles smaller clean ups.

Mr. Flatto said that OPED handles the funding for blight.

Council Member Cruz said that there were nine vacant positions at the Health Department and wished to know why these positions were still unfilled, including the Health Director, Deputy Director of Health and Epidemiologist. He said that these were very important positions.

Mr. Nkwo said that both the Health Director and Deputy Director of Health left their positions in the middle of the pandemic and it has been very difficult to fill those positions. There have been transitions and retirements during this time, so they are working on recruitment.

Council Member Cruz said that he would like to see a more aggressive effort made to fill these positions.

Council Member Herron said that she would like to welcome the Acting Health Director, who seems to be very well versed. She said that she would not like to have opinions expressed as to why people left their positions.

Council Member Herron said that she would like to know what it would take to have a Social Services Department. She said that she did not want to hear any more excuses about COVID because other departments have hired during the pandemic.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she had been doing some observation during her short time in Bridgeport. She said that connectivity was important and being under the Human Services is a good start. Some of the positions that are vacant are permanent positions, but many of the positions are grant funded and frequently part time positions. Many of the applicants want a full time job, so they are looking into possibly have a full time position made of 20 hours from one grant and 20 hours from another.

Council Member Herron asked what Ms. Jackson-Shaheed's vision was for the homeless population.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that often homelessness population is combined with the Veteran's Services or the Disabilities Department. She said that she would be looking into this.

Council Member Herron encouraged Ms. Jackson-Shaheed to contact the State because there were grants for homelessness that the City never applied for.

Council Member Pereira said that she could keep a blight officer busy in her district alone. She said that while she had submitted numerous blight reports and the situation was never fully resolved.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed asked if Ms. Gaines could respond since she was the supervisor for that area.

*Council Member McBride-Lee joined the meeting at 7:04 p.m.*

Ms. Gaines said that there was a Blight Officer in the 138th District and that staff member was also the Housing Code Officer and handles blight. Due to the situation, they have been working on tracking down the responsible parties and fine them. There will be Blight hearings starting again in May.

Council Member Valle said that there was a vacancy for the Director of Social Services. She wished to know if the City had a Social Services Department. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that there was a Social Services Department.

Council Member Valle asked if there was a Human Services Department. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she saw a tab for the Human Services Department.

Council Member Valle said that it would be helpful to have a nurse that the seniors could come to check in with at the Senior Centers. The City has been talking about having Social Workers available and she would like the seniors to have the same services available because they are very lonely.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed agreed with Council Member Valle and said that there was a Department of Aging and there are specific grants available.

Council Member Martinez echoed Council Member Herron's statement and the Health Department was a critical need. It has been understaffed and underfunded for many years. She said that Ms. Gaines had played a major role in many important issues. It is unfair that this staff member had to handle all the extra work. Despite the Health Department having vehicles, during the pandemic, the staff ended up using their own vehicles, their own gas to do their job.

Looking at this budget, the Health Department is underfunded and fill positions. The high ranking titles need to go and the money needs to be directed to the positions where the work gets done. She said that she was looking forward to meeting Ms. Jackson-Shaheed and getting to know her since Council Member Martinez has been working with the homeless for many years.

Council Member McCarthy said that on page 267, the Housing Code Department lists a number of Special Project Coordinators, and Housing Code Inspectors on different lines. He asked what the Special Project Coordinator do.

Ms. Gaines said that before this past year, the Department had four Housing Code Inspectors. Last year, the department inherited two Special Project Coordinators who are actually the Blight Officers.

Mr. Nkwo said these were anti-blight employees that were transferred from Public Facilities to Housing Code last year. They are now under the supervision of the Housing Department.

Council Member McCarthy said that the transferred employees were receiving about \$25,000 more than what was listed.

Mr. Nkwo said that one was a union employee and that the others had been receiving the same rate of pay in Public Facilities.

Council Member McCarthy said that every three years in New Haven, the residence must be inspected if there are more than 3 families in a building. He asked if Bridgeport does something like that.

Ms. Gaines said that there has been an ordinance since the 1990s that when a property that is three families or more where there is no landlord in residence and the property is sold, the Housing Code goes in for an inspection.

Council Member Cruz said that he wanted to thank Ms. Gaines for her hard work and the local inspector who had worked so hard to get rid of the garbage cans on the street.

Council Member Cruz said it was depressing and embarrassing to see how far behind the City was in this area. The administration is not backing up their claims to care about the City. The Council is failing this Department. He asked Mr. Nkwo and Mr. Flatto to review the unaffiliated positions and remove them. The money should then be given to the Health Department to make the positions permanent. The Council is complicit in this because they have not done anything about this.

Council Member Burns welcomed Ms. Jackson-Shaheed. He said that the farmer's markets had not previously been included.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the farmer's market was actually a grant and handled by the Department of Aging.

Council Member Burns asked about the Food Policy Council. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that it was not part of her department.

Council Member Burns asked if they had streamlined the processes.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that there had been one consultant that had done a great deal of work on reaching out. She said in her presentation, they had suggested a re-organization of the department and said that an Epidemiologist would be working under communicable diseases. Having the consultants continuing to work with the Department and it would be good to have the consultants come on full time because they are doing an excellent job.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that in Zoning they have particular titles so they enforce issues in court. She asked whether this was also true for the Health Department and if the Housing Code inspectors go to court.

Ms. Gaines said that the Housing Code Inspectors go into the courts and they work with the State regarding the housing code.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked about the Inspectors duties. Ms. Gaines said that there were many actions to handle blight. They see blight, they record it and contact the property owner. Letters are sent out and need to be followed up. The inspectors do not just drive around, there is a lot of work involved.

Council Member Newton thanked Ms. Gaines for all her previous hard work. He asked Ms. Jackson-Shaheed if these combined part time positions included in the organizational chart.

Council Member Pereira said that the department had exorbitant salary increases. She referred back to the Department Summary. Mr. Nkwo said that Ms. Sandra Ferreira would be able to answer that question and he would get the information for her.

Council Member Pereira asked what the justification was for a 13% increase for a Vital Statistics position. Mr. Nkwo said that the same titles that were in the book last year, but they compressed it to get it on the page. He then listed the Vital Statistics personnel. Some of the positions in the Department are entitled to step salary increases.

Mr. Nkwo said that he would provide Council Member Pereira with the step increase chart.

Council Member Roman-Christy thanked Ms. Gaines for all that she accomplished in the past. Regarding the Special Project Coordinators and Special Project Managers, she wished to know why there were two different line items for the Housing Code Inspectors.

Mr. Nkwo said that the Special Project Coordinators and Special Project Managers, LIUNA has one of those positions and NAGE has the other.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked about the job title differences were between the Special Project Coordinators and Special Project Managers. She also said that on page 367, one of the Special Project Coordinators would be converted into a Housing Code Inspector.

Mr. Nkwo said that the three different titles were three different unions. These were pre-existing positions and were transferred into Housing Code from Public Facilities.

Council Member Burns asked about page 353 in Vital Statistics. He said that marriage certificates and birth certificates were not available in the various municipalities where people lived.

Ms. Ulatowski said that anyone who was born in 2002 and forward could obtain their Connecticut birth certificate in their town of residence in the State of Connecticut. That reduced the revenue for the City.

Marriage and Death Certificates still require the applicant to go the town where the event occurred. However, the State is working on having all the death certificates available in the Connecticut resident's town.

Ms. Ulatowski said that this year the birth record revenue had increased this year, and they are 17% over the previous years.

Council Member Lyons said that she had called around about the marriage licenses and Bridgeport is able to provide the licenses online rather than applying in person.

Ms. Ulatowski said that their office was opened throughout the pandemic and interacted with the public.

Council Member Valle asked about the Housing Code Summary page and wished to know if the Co-chairs knew the names of the employees that are filling the positions. She wished to get a list of those staff members.

Council Member Newton said that they have never used the employee's names during the budget meetings.

Mr. Nkwo said that there had been an agreement that they would disclose the names of the staff because it could get personal.

Council Member Valle said that it might matter when they are trying to cut, unfund or increase positions. She asked if the employees receive job evaluations. Driving through her district on the East Side, she sees things that need to be addressed and wonders why the issues are not being taken care of.

Council Member Newton said that the question was sent to the appropriate parties to find out about the evaluations.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she would be meeting with all the departments and the department directors will be submitting reports about the various job positions. This will help with the re-organization. She noted that they have to take in to account the labor agreements or job description. The goal is to simplify the positions. She listed some issues such as the Environmental Officer who would coordinate the Blight efforts and have the inspectors able to handle both housing code and inspections.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that it has been the City's policy not to release the employee names due to labor issues. If there are situations that require discussing a particular staff member, it would be best to go to Personnel or the City Attorney's Office.

Council Member McCarthy said that he applauded the re-organization concept. He recommended that they should fill the Blight Inspectors positions.

Council Member Pereira said that all public employee's information is public information and it is allowed under State law.

Council Member Pereira asked about a secretarial assistant position that was scheduled for a 16% raise. Mr. Nkwo said that it was a NAGE position with salary steps. Council Member Pereira said that this was not a salary step position. Mr. Nkwo said that the information had been provided to the Council every year.

Council Member Pereira said that the BOE staff were all highly educated but don't get step increases. Council Member Newton reminded Council Member Pereira that this was not the BOE.

Council Member Pereira then cited a sanitarian position that had an increase. Mr. Nkwo said that he would send the pay scale to the Chairs and the salary steps are on it.

Council Member Pereira asked about page 357 regarding the Housing Code. She listed the previous transfers from the various departments to the Housing Code Department and the raises associated with those positions. Council Member Pereira said that she wanted to get a table to address all these issues.

Mr. Nkwo said that the staff members who were in the union were entitled to salary steps. When a staff member retires, the new employee will start on the lowest step, but their salaries will increase over time.

Council Member Newton said that the issue was that the employees were members of the union. Council Member Pereira said that she had worked in many unions during her career. Council Member Newton replied that her previous experience with unions did not matter, nor did her experience with the BOE. The unions have contractual agreements with the City.

Mr. Nkwo reiterated that the Civil Service could provide Council Member Pereira with a list of all the salary steps.

Council Member Pereira said that she had a major problem with the massive salary increases and felt they were very suspicious.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the anti-blight technicians.

Council Member McCarthy noted for the record, the two Housing Code Inspectors increases were not massive raises. Discussion followed about the details.

Council Member Pereira said that the two housing inspectors had received a \$10,000 raise last year.

Council Member Pereira asked about the Lead Prevention Department which has only one person. She asked how the position would have \$11,000 increase for one position. Mr. Nkwo said that he would provide the backup information for the position.

Council Member Pereira stated that she had the right to ask about salaries. Council Member Newton said that they would provide the information to Council Member Pereira. Council Member Pereira said that this was a Freedom of Speech issue.

Council Member Pereira asked why the Disability Department only had half a person listed.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they had noticed this and wanted to combine the position between Social Services and Human Services. She reminded everyone that often the Veterans Affairs shares the same population as the Disabilities.

Council Member Pereira said that she wished to know how a half person would be the only employee for the Disabled population. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the staff member works closely with the Veterans Affairs. She reiterated her earlier explanation that often the Veterans Affairs serves the same population as the Disabilities.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she would like to present the goals for the Department. She said they had been working on the mass vaccination. They are focused on having as many of the Bridgeport residents vaccinated as possible and their population has been widened to the teens.

They are working on switching over the electronic health records from the hard copies. She said that they were working on this. It was already underway before Ms. Jackson-Shaheed arrived and she is looking forward to completing this.

They are looking at the Emergency Preparedness and also opening the parks. There are still some testing sites at Seaside Park.

Council Member Herron thanked Ms. Jackson-Shaheed for presenting the same information several times. She said that cross training was key to providing good service. Council Member Herron said that she has worked with each of the Health Department units and they have done the best they could with what they had. She said that she would be following up with Mr. Nkwo about the funding and filling the vacant positions. There are many Council Members who are out in the field helping with the Social Service needs.

Council Member Herron thanked Ms. Papa for doing an amazing job when the need arose. Council Member Lyons and Council Member Cruz both agreed.

Council Member Burns said that Council Member Herron had covered most of what he was intending to say. The last thing anyone wants is a change of leadership in the middle of a public pandemic.

Council Member McCarthy said that everyone he had spoken with that had been vaccinated at Central praised the staff for how well it worked. He said that Ms. Jackson-Shaheed came on afterward, so all the credit would go to Ms. Papa.

Council Member McCarthy asked whether the Parks would be limited to the City residents or open to non-residents.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they would be opening the beaches to City residents and Connecticut residents, but not out of state vehicles. She added that there was a number of changes coming from the CDC and that there may be a major change in terms of restrictions for the nation on May 19th. The Department is following the trend that other cities are establishing



as well to allow their residents to enjoy their parks. There will be constant updates on the website.

Council Member Cruz said that he seconded Council Member Herron's comments regarding Ms. Papa, and Ms. Jackson-Shaheed. He said that he was impressed with Ms. Jackson-Shaheed presentation. The Council is present to work with the Health Department, not against.

Council Member Roman-Christy said that she wanted to echo Council Member McCarthy's comments about the vaccines at Central. She commended Ms. Papa and Mr. Appleby for their wonderful work at that site.

Council Member Lyons thanked the staff for the Housing Code information. The explanations were very helpful. She said that she was listening to the restrictions for the beaches and restaurants. She asked if they would be able to call in regarding restaurants involving COVID issues.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that while the residents can call in about issues now, as of May 1st, there will be changes in terms of curfew, restrictions on businesses serving alcohol and other issues. Regarding social distancing and mask protocols after May 19th, there may be major changes. The guidance is still being discussed. DPH is still receiving guidance from the CDC. They want to see fewer cases and more vaccinations.

Council Member Lyons asked for details about private gatherings and parties. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that private gatherings had different guidelines because of the venue, social distancing and capacity. The first change will happen on May 1st and again on May 19th. She said that they are asking everyone to continue with the protocols for now.

Council Member Lyons thanked Ms. Jackson-Shaheed and the other staff for their hard work. She said that Ms. Jackson-Shaheed had become very knowledgeable about the department. Council Member Lyons thanked Ms. Gaines for her recent assistance, along with Ms. Papa. These ladies show strong leadership.

Council Member Pereira asked about page 401, and said that the transportation services. The last line indicated that the column indicated that there was no allocated funding where it had been \$500,000.

Mr. Nkwo said that on page 120, there was a line item for Health Insurance, City Share. There is a negative \$600,000, which was an anticipated savings and \$500,000 was given to the BOE for transportation. The remaining portion was used to balance the budget. Discussion followed about the details.

Council Member Pereira asked about page 388, the Department of Aging. There are two Senior Center Coordinators. However, the East Senior Center closed and the employee remained on the payroll.

Mr. Nkwo said that the Governor had stated that the staff should not be laid off due to COVID.

Council Member Pereira said that if they don't have a Senior Center Coordinator, the staff member should be transferred to another position to benefit the City.

Ms. Papa said that the City did not renew the lease after December 2020. The Center was closed to the public and the staff member has been working on Renter's Rebate program at 999 Broad Street. That staff member had been providing services for that program and also assisting at the Eisenhower Senior Center call center.

Council Member Newton thanked everyone for attending and the staff for all the hard work. It wasn't easy and still had challenges, but they have done a tremendous job ensuring the Bridgeport residents are receiving the vaccines. It was a job well done. Special thanks to Ms. Jackson-Shaheed for putting the reorganization chart together. The Council Members support her for getting the department up and running.

Council Member Burns said that the Mayor's Office had not made a formal announcement regarding Ms. Jackson-Shaheed's appointment as Acting Health Department Director, which is overdue.

Council Member Burns said that they were reaching the end of the budget process. Questions and suggestions need to be emailed to the Co-chairs. Mr. Nkwo has been helpful in providing information. They need to be ready to make decisions on positions that they want to reduce, modify or increase.

Council Member Burns said that they should plan to stay late tomorrow. He would like to have Saturday to be relatively quick.

Council Member Newton said that the Committee has some work to do and the Co-chairs will be presenting some suggestions to the Committee. He would like to have this done by Monday.

Council Member McBride-Lee explained that she had arrived late due to an emergency.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services