

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 29, 2021**

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

OTHERS: Council President A. Nieves, Council Member(s): M. E. Brantley, E. Martinez, M. Valle & M. Pereira (6:09 p.m.); K. Flatto, Finance Director; N. Nkwo, OPM Director; Dr. Herron Gaston, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer; Patricia Howard, Democratic Registrar of Voters; Linda Grace, Republican Registrar of Voters; Earl Bloodworth, Mayor's Initiative for Reentry Affairs (MIRA) Director; Barbara, Call in User 1, 203-209-1058; 203-880-5666; 203-275-6420, 203-414-0712

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. A quorum was present.

Co-chair Newton thanked the guests for attending and reminded everyone that they should be respectful to one another.

REGISTRARS OF VOTERS

Ms. Howard displayed a document on the screen and updated everyone on changes to allow all those who are in line at 8:00 p.m. when the polls close to vote. She reviewed the two clerical positions and said that one was currently filled. One was eliminated in the last budget cycle. She said that there were only 6 staff to handle the Bridgeport voters.

Ms. Grace reviewed the grants that they received from the State to cover the mandated actions.
[Loss of call]

Council Member McCarthy said that he was concerned with the actuals for 2021 and felt the line item would need to be increased.

Mr. Nkwo said that 2021 would be lower because the part time staff would be paid from the grant from the State. Discussion followed about potential primaries and the request for \$125,000 in additional funding.

Council Member Burns asked for the details regarding the State grant and then how it was spent. Mr. Flatto said that he thought it was a shared grant of \$250,000, part of which was given to the Town Clerk for the absentee ballots.

Council Member Cruz asked about page 78 where they were going to relocate from Harding High School to Claytor and Batalla. He wished to know if they would move back to Roosevelt.

Ms. Howard said that Marina Village is no longer there and UB population is greatly reduced. Batalla has more parking and is more centrally located.

Council Member Cruz asked for the number of voters at Batalla and repeated that he would like to have the vote location moved back to Roosevelt.

Council Member Newton pointed out that when it is not a Presidential or Governor's race, the numbers are lower. Ms. Howard agreed but explained that they were required to man the sites for all elections. They can add locations and staff, but they have a minimum requirement to meet.

Council Member Pereira stated that she joined the meeting at 6:09 p.m.

Council Member Pereira said that based on the lower turn out and the potential re-instatement of COVID requirement, she wished to know if they would supply grant funding for municipal elections.

Ms. Grace said that she did not know what they would require. Mr. Nkwo said that when the State determined that they should send grant funding, the City had already spent funding. The State funding relieved the City from spending more, but he did not know if the State would re-instate the funding.

Council Member Pereira asked whether when the money was appropriated, they could claim the costs. She wished to know if they could claim the previous expenses. Mr. Nkwo said that the State will set a date and any costs before that would not be considered.

Ms. Grace reiterated their request to have the additional staff position restored. The Registrar's work goes on year round even though the election only lasts one day. She said that just researching the DMV changed and registrations have a major impact.

Council Member Newton asked if having three seasonal positions would be helpful. Ms. Howard said that it might be helpful. Discussion followed about the details.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she did not believe that they should spend money they don't have. She would prefer the money be allocated and if there was grant funding comes in, great.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked Ms. Howard if she was an Acting Registrar. Ms. Howard said that when Ms. Ayala retired, she was sworn in as Registrar. There is no "Acting" position.

Mr. Nkwo said that he would adjust this.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that she wanted to add someone to their department and would also like the training costs to be shown. That will give a viable picture of the department, which is a vital department.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked for clarification regarding the State grant funding. Mr. Nkwo reviewed the details.

Council Member Newton said that Harding High School was no longer open and there were some problems in the 139th re-districting. Ms. Howard said that the new Harding High School would be okay in a State election, but because it was not okay to have a municipal election there because it is in the 138th District. She said that they would have to present the changes to the Council by State statute for approval. Discussion followed about the status of that issue.

Council Member McCarthy said that they had already talked to the Registrars enough and should move on to discuss MIRA.

MAYOR'S INITIATIVE FOR REENTRY AFFAIRS – MIRA

Mr. Bloodworth said that there were no changes in his budget from last year. Mr. Nkwo said that it was a status quo budget from last year.

Council Member McCarthy asked about Personnel services and the fact that there were fringe benefits that were over 50% of the salaries. Mr. Nkwo said that the major cost driver was health insurance. There are two staff members salaries were relatively low, but the City pays for the same medical coverage.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the Special Services costs. Mr. Nkwo said that it was for providing the clients with I.Ds.

Council Member Newton thanked the B&A committee from two years ago for funding the MIRA program. He went on to give a brief overview about the various benefits that the Department has provided for those who are returning from incarceration. He explained that when someone was released from prison, they often do not have valid I.Ds. Mr. Bloodworth worked out an agreement with the Motor Vehicle Department regarding this.

Mr. Bloodworth said that they were working on a grant program for reunifying families. They have just connected with the technical advisor. He also spoke about Families First program. Discussions about forming a partnership regarding acquiring a State ID or a vehicle license. There is also an expunging program where events from years ago will be removed so they will pass the background checks. Detroit has attorneys on staff that assist clients with this process. Detroit found that for every dollar spent on the expungement process, there is a return on investment of three dollars.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that a few of her congregants were previously involved with incarceration and could not get a job. She asked what services would be available to a returning resident.

Mr. Bloodworth said that the clients may have multiple meetings to attend, such as Child Support and they may not be able to hold on to a job after being out of society for so long. He said that he has been working with Civil Service to allow clients to work in seasonal

employment. There are also issues regarding housing for the returning clients and those who have been released on bail but not been to trial yet.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that there was a vacant position. Mr. Bloodworth said that he was the only one in the office and was looking for a quality candidate. There were some interns but they finished up.

Council Member Newton said those who are released from prison are ready to work. He said that he had placed candidates and there are issues. The returning residents need to be re-programmed and learn how to keep the job. Discussion followed about the issue of background checks and entrepreneur opportunities.

Mr. Nkwo asked if one of the City Attorneys would be able to work on expunging records. Mr. Bloodworth said that he was working with Quinnipiac about having interns.

Council Member Cruz said that he was in support of the extra help because they were doing great work. He said that the system only provides the returning resident with a paper copy of their mug shot that only lasts 30 days. He said that Mr. Bloodworth was a breath of oxygen, as was Council Member Newton.

Mr. Nkwo asked if the funding was available to purchase bus tokens. Mr. Bloodworth said that he was working with the transit company to handle the token cost.

Council Member Pereira said that last year, there was a significant increase in the budget and that funding included the vacant position. Mr. Bloodworth said that they had not been able to fill the position because of COVID.

Council Member Pereira asked why the Personnel fringe benefits costs were reduced. Mr. Flatto said that MUNIS program builds a projection based on a number of variances, such as marital status, and other details.

Council Member Herron said that the details regarding benefits should be left private. She said that she had been supporting MIRA from the beginning and Mr. Bloodworth has done a fantastic job despite of COVID. She thanked Mr. Bloodworth.

Council Member McCarthy asked about Quinnipiac Law and how they had formed a relationship. Mr. Bloodworth said that he had worked with them in the previous position and his previous supervisor had a great relationship with the Parole Board.

Council Member Burns asked what other municipalities were doing. Mr. Bloodworth said that Hartford has a Welcome Home Center and New Haven is working on it. He also talks to his counter points that run other programs in the other cities.

Council President Nieves asked for details regarding the Welcome Home program and the various connections that were established with clients before they were released.

Mr. Bloodworth said that they did have someone who was connecting with clients but that was stymied due to COVID and the contractor's agreement expired last June. He is working on this with the Department of Corrections and facilitating an agreed upon drop off location rather than right in front of the North Avenue prison.

Council President Nieves asked if they would be working with women and youth that were returning. Mr. Bloodworth said that they would work with any returning resident.

Council President Nieves said that she was all for the Welcoming Center but just wants to clarify what kind of Social Services would be needed.

Council Member Newton said that there was a program were the clients who were due to be released in 6 months were receiving training before they were released. Council Member Newton said that Mr. Bloodworth had posted his vacant position in February.

Council Member Cruz asked Mr. Bloodworth if they had researched potential sites. Mr. Bloodworth said that he had.

Council Member Burns said that it was time to get to work on the budget.

Council Member Newton said that he wanted to thank everyone on the Budget Committee for taking this seriously. He and Council Member Burns will be presenting some information to the Committee from the various sources such as the BOE, activists, and general public. The Committee has listened to everyone's concerns about the budget and Capital Plan. There were no back room deals or conspiracies. This is a committee of seven, not 20.

Council Member Newton said that they had received a text claiming that they could not do this, but when he served in the legislature, 151 people did not have input on the Committee matters. It is the job of the seven members of the Committee to deal with this.

Council Member Burns gave a brief process overview that would produce a mill rate. They also have to make a decision on what do to about the vehicle mill rate because the State capped it at a lower level than the City had. There are considerations for politically sensitive departments like the BOE and the Police Department. COVID has impacted virtually every department and the Committee needs to think long term. He said that if the Committee has funded a position, that means they feel the position should be filled.

Council Member Burns displayed a list of positions that could potentially be unfunded. Council Member Newton reminded everyone that the Mayor can still veto the budget and there needs to be consideration when the Committee talks about unaffiliated positions. Some of those positions have to follow the State guidelines.

Discussion followed about the salaries associated with the vacant positions.

Council Member Pereira asked if this spreadsheet was sent to the Council in advance and posted on the website. Council Member Burns said that it was his worksheet. Council Member Pereira

said that it may not be in compliance with the Governor's guidelines. Council Member Burns said that if they were in person, he would be writing on a chalk board.

Council Member Pereira asked if they were allowed to make proposals. Council Member Burns said that in order to do so, they would have to submit something by Saturday.

Council Member Burns then discussed two positions for Civil Service. Council Member Herron said that they should consider a personnel examiner. She said that they need the position for transparency. Council Member Newton agreed. He pointed out that the third party test company was involved in the problem.

Council Member Newton said that all the Council Members have been allowed to submit their suggestions or thoughts to the Co-chairs. The Co-chairs told everyone what do to and after that, it was up to the individual. Everyone received the budget when the Mayor presented the budget.

Council Member Burns said that Mr. Amado has done a great job in moving staff out of Acting positions. However, it is important to keep in mind, there is no Personnel Director at this time. The process is in place and moving forward.

Council President Nieves said that there had been many concerns that have come out of the Civil Service issues. It will be important to make sure that they get it right. The two positions and the new Personnel Director should put them back on the right track.

Council President Nieves said thanked Council Member Burns and Council Member Newton because they had managed to handle the information and get it to the Council, so that they are not meeting for 8 or 9 hours. It will be important to remember that they need to consider 2023.

Council Member Newton said that Council Members can submit their ideas, but only Committee members are the only ones that will be voting to approve the various suggestions. All submissions will be discussed and the Committee Members will decide how to proceed.

Council Member McCarthy reminded everyone that they were already in the process of hiring a new Personnel Director and they should be allowing the new Director to decide what they need.

Council Member Pereira said that the two Civil Services positions needed to be protected to prevent political appointees. If the positions are added, they must be Civil Service positions.

Council Member Burns displayed a spreadsheet indicating potential list of reductions that he had compiled as a starting point.

Council Member McCarthy said that when the BOE asked for \$6 million, he knew that they couldn't do that, but suggested they meet them halfway.

Council Member Newton said that the City would never catch up with 20 years of neglect, but they were planning on allocating \$2.6 million to the BOE. The BOE has a history of putting surplus funding into their benefits. Council Member Newton said that the Mayor flat funded the

BOE but the Council has added to the BOE allocation every year. While he wishes that they were just concerned with the BOE, but they have other responsibilities.

Mr. Nkwo said that the BOE would be receiving \$1.5 million this coming year and again they would be getting another \$1.5 million the following year. Discussion about the details followed.

Council Member Cruz said that he was seeing a number of unaffiliated positions that were not bringing results for the City. He cited a Tree Warden and the Mayor's Liaison.

Council Member Burns reviewed some Revenue Considerations and other anticipated expenses or shortfalls. He added that right now the Mayor's budget was at 43.8 mills.

Council Member Newton said that not every resident owns properties, but more people own cars. They were recommending reducing the vehicle mill rate from the Mayor's proposal of 45.0 to 43.5.

Council Member McCarthy said that the Mayor's budget reduced the Golf Course allocation, which he would like to increase. He also had some suggestions about the potential billboard revenues.

Council Member Pereira said that the car reduction mill rate would be only \$7,000 for the entire City. Mr. Flatto said that he would estimate it between the \$10 to \$15 dollar range. Council Member Burns said that he had read that there were 70,000 vehicles in the City.

Council Member Pereira said that the BOE was supposed to get money that the Governor cut. She said that they were funneling money illegally to the Lighthouse. Council Member Burns said that this was not correct. A discussion followed about the details.

Council Member Burns continued his overview of the suggested reductions. He noted that the Police Department had reduced their overtime.

Council Member Burns said that OPED had informed them that they have some money that they could give the NRZs. He indicated where they could decrease the Police Department and redirect the funding to Social Services.

There was a suggestion for reducing the Lighthouse Transportation by \$500,000 and redirecting the funding elsewhere. Council Member Newton pointed out that the reason that they were not adding it to the MBR was because they want the money to be used in specific areas. Just as the City cannot tell the BOE how it spends its allocation, the BOE cannot tell the City how to allocate its funding.

Council Member McCarthy asked if they could reduce the Legal Services line more. Council Member Newton explained that the City does not know if it would be hit with a lawsuit. Council Member McCarthy said that the department has a heavy budget and the figures come from the City Attorneys. Council Member McCarthy said he does not believe anything that the department tells him.

Council Member Burns reviewed the figures with the Committee. Council Member Newton said that he wished they had attorneys that could handle anything, but they don't.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked the elimination of the Legislative Liaison from the City Clerk to Legislative Office. Council President Nieves said that they were in discussions with the City Clerk's Office. Council President Nieves has done some research through CCM and there is only one person handling the requests for 20 Council Members where other Cities have 14 staff members for their elected officials.

Council Member Newton said that the reason it was included was because they don't have a person that is solely responsible to the Council. It is time to move the Council into the 21st Century. He said that they were hoping to have two staff members.

Council Member McCarthy said that he agreed that they need someone doing press releases for the Council but pointed out that there is a communications department. Council Member McCarthy said that he felt this was a nepotism position.

Council Member Burns then reviewed some potential Expenditure Increases Considerations with the Committee.

Council Member Newton said that they were trying to address the community needs, the BOE needs, the constituent needs and the needs expressed by the public. He said that it was a starting point for the Committee and on Saturday they will have other ideas to consider. It is time for the Budget Committee to do its job.

Council Member Newton thanked everyone for their time. Council Member McCarthy asked if they would be caucusing on Friday. Council Member Newton said that he was not planning on a caucus tomorrow but they may have to caucus on Saturday.

Council Member Burns reminded everyone that they need to vote on the Capital Budget.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED BAC CHAIRS RECOMMENDATION AS EXHIBIT # 04-29-21-A.
** COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ SECONDED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY MOVED TO ADJOURN.
** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services

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