

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
MAY 25, 2021**

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton Co-chair; Mary McBride-Lee, Matthew McCarthy, Jeanette Herron (6:06 p.m.)

OTHERS: Council President A. Nieves, Council Member(s): M. E. Brantley, M. Brown, E. Martinez, M. Pereira, R. Roman-Christy, & M. Valle; K. Flatto, Finance Director; N. Nkwo, OPM Director; C. Vickers, Legislative Affairs; Barbara, Erica Castillo, iPhone, 203-414-0712; 929-436-2866

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.

CALL TO ORDER

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

He stated that Council Member Cruz and Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia were not in attendance due to schedule conflicts.

76-20 Proposed Resolution regarding the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) Grant for the City of Bridgeport.

Council Member Burns said that they had been informed the City would receive \$110 million from the Federal Government ARP Grant.

Council Member Newton thanked everyone for attending and explained this was a special meeting that would start the discussion about how the money should be used.

Council Member Burns said that he had sent out a 150-page document from the U.S. Treasury. There are four categories that the money can be spent. It must be spent over a three-year period by 2026 and needs to be related to COVID.

Council Member Herron joined the meeting at 6:06 p.m.

Mr. Flatto said that this was an exciting opportunity for the City. He spoke about the 2008-09 stimulus funds which went to the states. This time, there were debates about sending the money directly to the municipalities rather than the states.

Mr. Flatto went on to give the Committee an overview of the aid. Bridgeport will be receiving approximate \$82 million in direct aid, which will be distributed in two phases. The first phase of \$42 million will be released in June and the second phase will be released a year later. There will be an additional amount that will be given to the State to distribute to the municipalities, but they do not have a firm timeframe on this. There was also a small portion of money to be distributed

to the counties. Mr. Flatto said that his calculation puts it at about \$27 million, which would bring the total to \$110 million. This will affect the FY22, FY23, FY24 budgets and conclude in FY25.

Mr. Flatto said that there was a one-page summary of the criteria that the funding can be used for and this was attached to the resolution. Some of the items that the funding can be used for includes lost revenue, and reimbursements for public health and safety. He pointed out that while these guidelines were developed by the Treasury, they could be expanded or reduced over time.

Council Member Newton asked about the reimbursement. Mr. Flatto said that he was guessing that there would be about \$8 million dollars. The City lost at least \$3 to \$4 million in revenue in the park fees category, and other associated fees through December of 2020.

Council Member Newton asked Mr. Flatto to clarify the fact that they are going to try to get the funding into the hands of the 501(c)3 organizations that are on the ground. Mr. Flatto said that it was included in the resolution.

Council Member Pereira said that the City had a surplus at the end of 2020 and it looks like they will have a surplus anticipated for 2021. Mr. Flatto said that they had a revenue shortfall, but that was created by the reductions in expenditures. This funding is for loss revenue.

Mr. Flatto said that they cannot use the funding for tax reduction, funding for pensions, debt service or contingency.

Council Member Pereira stated that these were Federal dollars. She said that there were people in trouble across the company that used the Federal funding for purchasing boats and planes and were going to jail. The Feds are already present in Bridgeport.

Mr. Flatto then gave a major overview of a second category including broadband use, storm water catchments, Sewer/WPCA infrastructure.

Council Member Brantley asked if the bridges would be included in the public safety portion. Mr. Flatto said that the guidance does not include infrastructure like that unless it was affected by COVID. If any of the guidelines opens up for that, they will re-consider it.

Council Member McCarthy asked for clarification on the homeowner repairs for weatherization. Mr. Flatto said that he should have put it in another category. He added that they did not have to allocate funding for all of the categories, but there is an existing program for homeowners.

Council Member Burns reminded people that this was legislation for the entire nation and CT does not have county government, so the City picks up some programs that might be done on the county level in other states.

Mr. Nkwo said that when he sets up the budget for these projects, it will have different categories in order to account for the various project expenditures.

Council Member Newton said that this will not be set up like the CDBG funding process. There will be public hearings and input from the communities about projects. As long as the proposed project fits into the category, they will consider it.

Council Member Herron said that they had been previously speaking about essential workers. Mr. Flatto said that the category was called Premium Pay and was basically limited to health care workers. There is a cap formula in the definition, which means many of the municipal employees would be over the cap, but the seasonal maintainer might qualify.

Council Member Herron said that she had contacted Mr. Flatto the day she found out about this funding and noted the Feds were going to be strict about the invoices. She said however, that she was not here to threaten the staff with Federal oversight.

Council Member Pereira said that there was a poverty digital divide and children should not have to sit in cars in parking lots to get access to broadband for homework.

Council Member Pereira said that the WPCA was a major issue and Senator Blumenthal told her he had spoken to Governor Lamont. Bridgeport has to put money towards the WPCA sewer treatment upgrade. It will be important to put funding towards the WPCA because the increase in the sewer rates will increase evictions and foreclosures.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked if the condos and co-ops would qualify for repairs under this grant. Mr. Flatto said that they would have to check, but the weatherization was included because of air quality.

Council Member Brantley asked if there was a cap on the age of an applicant for home improvement assistance. Mr. Flatto said that the act did not indicate an age limit but the City would have to follow all the existing legislation. Council Member Brantley requested they pay attention to that. Mr. Flatto said that the act does include underserved communities.

Council Member McCarthy asked for clarification on the approval process and how the Council would be involved. He said that the administration should be allowed to spend it as they wish to with proper oversight.

Mr. Flatto said that the act does not have any major requirement, but the City has a process in place. The act requires the Mayor and Finance Director's signatures. Mr. Flatto said that they would be breaking it up into major categories but would have discretion on the amounts allocated and produce the monthly reports.

Mr. Nkwo said that the administration is the ultimate authority in deciding the allocations. The Mayor will have to prioritize the projects. Discussion followed.

Council Member Newton said that he had stated there would be some work that needs to be done because they do not want to make applicants jump through too many hoops. He said that he hoped they could get the infrastructure bill that will help with the WPCA. However, he would like to see this made as simple as possible. He mentioned an earlier program that was too difficult for the applicants and those that did qualified have yet to receive their funding.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that while Hartford had opportunities to help Bridgeport, she didn't see them doing much for the City. She asked if the City had to be reimbursed for the projects. Council Member Burns said that the Federal Government was disbursing the money to the City directly. Mr. Flatto said that technically they were receiving the funding directly in order to spend it rather than spending the money and being reimbursed.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked about a homeowner who does repairs on their home. Mr. Flatto said that they would have to have documentation to show the Federal Government. They may not have to do the repairs and be reimbursed, but they would have to have documentation.

Council Member Brown said that the Rooster River was a major problem because of the amount of debris in the river. There was an attempt to clean it up in the past, but it would be a major project.

Mr. Flatto said that there was a phrase in the resolution about reducing the pollution in waterways. He said that he had spoken with Mr. Urquidi about this and the permitting for that type of project was very complicated.

Council Member Brown asked about the scaffolding at the front of 45 Lyon Terrace, which has been up for years. It has impeded access for disabled individuals. Mr. Flatto said that Mr. Nadrizny could give a better answer.

Mr. Nkwo said that the work on the building was completed.

Council Member McCarthy said that the last time that he was at 45 Lyon Terrace, the scaffolding was down.

Council Member McCarthy asked what would happen if the Feds decided a project was not eligible. He wanted to know if the City would have to pay the money back to the Feds. Mr. Flatto said that the Feds could claw the money back if they decided a project was not eligible.

Council Member McCarthy asked if they could earmark funding for a project like the Rooster River. Both Mr. Flatto and Council Member Burns said that the Treasury had not issued their final guidelines, but they have been quite clear about recovering the funding if not properly spent.

Mr. Flatto said that they would have to spend the first phase of money by December 24th.

He went on to speak about a third category for programs for the residents relating to mental health, domestic abuse or child welfare because there are residents who were impacted by COVID in these areas. The State has also announced a program for sending a staff member in to help educate families where there is a pregnant individual.

The Act also has provisions that could be channeled towards the Lighthouse programs in order to expand the programs including after school or summer youth programs. There is also job training program possibilities, small business relief, affordable housing development, children and child

welfare, social welfare/health home visitation and public safety crisis response needs due to COVID-19.

This list is the same for the State of Connecticut and the State government may decide to do a program that the Bridgeport residents could access, so the City could allocate funding to another area that the State does not address.

Council Member Newton said this was an overview but other things can be added to this as long as it fits into the categories. The Council will make sure that some funding will get into the hands of those who were struggling and did not receive CDBG funding.

Mr. Flatto said that the Act encourages the municipalities to partner with the non-profits to address various issues.

Council Member Pereira said there was nothing that applied to seniors. She said that she was seeing seniors who deteriorated from the isolation. There is also nothing that addresses residents with physical or mental disabilities. She said that they have a serious affordable housing crisis because they have lost over 1,000 affordable housing units during the last few administrations.

Mr. Flatto agreed and said that the seniors were seriously impacted due to isolation.

Council Member Brantley said that they should be paying attention these issues and there are families that are being evicted. She suggested they consider establishing a Fair Housing Department. The digital divide is critical because the children have been home for so long. They need to look at children outside and into overnight camps. The number of shootings in the City has increased in the past few weeks.

Council Member Brantley said that Council Member Pereira had brought up some good points about the needs of the senior residents.

Council Member Brown said that he would like to see people getting back into the workforce and mentioned The Work Place, which is a 501(c)3 non-profit has an 80% success rate in reintegrating disadvantaged individuals and other eligible candidates back into the workforce, along with Career Resources, which works with formerly incarcerated individuals.

Council Member Brown said that he would like to see the Renter Rebate Program expanded in the City, along with a program for the seniors and those in low income housing.

Council Member Brown also spoke about focusing on other groups that were impacted the most during COVID-19. He mentioned programs such as the Triangle Community Center, located in Norwalk, which helps with housing for those members of the LGBT community who find themselves homeless. He said that they should expand their mindset to include the homeless.

Mr. Nkwo reminded everyone that the projects would have to have substantial impact because the funding will not be reoccurring.

Council Member Newton said he hoped they would send the information to the Council Members to keep them updated on how the money will be allocated. The Council Members have to do their due diligence and contact businesses in the community to inform them the money is available.

Council Member Burns said that the Feds were giving the City \$110 million, which is a lot of money, but the City just passed a budget of nearly \$600 million. The ideas are great and everyone is concerned about their fellow residents, but they have to prioritize what they want to do and how to do it. Public feedback will be important. He said Council President Nieves had told him that Hartford had a Google doc available for public feedback. A public hearing for Bridgeport has already been discussed and he was open to other ways to obtain feedback.

Council Member Burns said that they had four years to implement these programs, but people were hurting now. The sooner these programs were up and running, the better.

The next meeting to discuss this will be on June 3rd and if the Committee can move to accept these funds at that meeting, the item could be on the full Council agenda for approval at the following Council meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

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

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services