

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
DECEMBER 13, 2021**

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Jeanette Herron, Tyler Mack, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia, Mary McBride-Lee (6:17 p.m.), Matthew McCarthy (6:17 p.m.)

OTHERS: Council President Aidee Nieves; Council Member(s): Marcus Brown, Jorge Cruz, Maria Pereira, Rosalina Roman-Christy & Wanda Simmons; Constance Vickers, Legislative Affairs Director; Thomas Gaudett, Mayoral Aide; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Barbara, WINNER, Call in Use 1; iPhone; iPhone; 203-880-5666

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. A quorum was present. He called the roll and welcomed the new members to the Committee. Council Member Burns said that Council Member McCarthy would be joining the meeting later.

Co-chair Newton requested a moment of silence in memory of Council Member M. Evette Brantley and also Council Member Brown and his family who suffered a recent loss.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES:

• **October 12, 2021** (Regular Meeting)

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED THE OCTOBER 12, 2021 MINUTES.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.**

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia explained that she had not been present at the meeting, so she would be abstaining.

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF OCTOBER 12, 2021 AS SUBMITTED PASSED WITH TWO (2) IN FAVOR (HERRON, NEWTON) AND TWO (2) ABSTENTIONS (VIZZO-PANICCIA, MACK).**

REVIEW COMMITTEE PROCEDURES AND POSSIBLE POLICIES.

Council Member Burns said that they had started receiving the monthly budget reports during the last Council cycle. He asked the Committee members for their thoughts.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that she felt that it was a very good idea because then the Committee Members would be aware of developing situations.

Council Member Newton said that it was helpful having the Board of Education input.

Council Member Burns said that he would like to receive regular reports from the Public Safety Committee.

Council Member Newton said that they would like to have regular updates on the vacant positions that need to be filled. Mr. Nkwo said that he could provide that information.

Council Member McBride-Lee and Council Member McCarthy joined the meeting at 6:17 p.m.

Council Member Burns requested an update on the bonding situation once or twice a year.

Council Member McCarthy said that he would like to have a semi-annual updated status list on capital projects. Mr. Nkwo said that he could provide that information.

Council Member Herron asked if they could track some of the funding that they had reallocated, such as the Police funding to Social Services. Mr. Nkwo said that he could provide the status of that funding to the Committee chairs.

Council Member McBride-Lee reminded everyone that the departments can spend the funds as they want to, so she wants to ensure that the funding goes to where it was supposed to go.

Council Member Pereira said that she was troubled by Mr. Nkwo remarks about reappropriations and that he informs the Chairs when that happens. The Council was six months into the year and the City Charter states reappropriations from one line to another line requires City Council approval. The Charter says there were specific department heads can reappropriate funding within their department. The Council has not received a single document regarding any reappropriations to different line items in the last six months.

Council Member Burns said that he had conversations with Mr. Nkwo about this and the funding that was reallocated to the Social Services Department had not been reappropriated. This has been monitored very carefully. Nothing has been reappropriated in any way.

Mr. Nkwo said that it was important not to comingle the statement that Council Member Herron had made with his comments. Council Member Herron said that the Council will reappropriate funding, not the Committee. Council Member Herron had simply inquired as to whether the funding had been kept. None of that money has been spent. OPM does not appropriate funding. The funding was designated for a specific use.

Council Member Herron said that she wished to make it very clear as to what she had said. Council Member Herron stated she had said “we allocated for a specific purpose” that the

Council approved unanimously. She has never intended to tell a Director who to hire, or fire and does not micromanage departments in the past and will not do so in the future. The Council wants these services to be provided in the City and they will be watching the process carefully.

Council Member Pereira said that they were almost 6 months in to the year and funding had been moved from one line item to another. Last year, there was a list of over 100 examples and 76 of them were a violation of the City Charter.

Council Member Pereira said there was not a unanimous vote for the police budget agenda item. Five Council Members voted against the item.

Council Member Newton asked Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo about the departments that have the authority to move funding from one line to another line item. Mr. Nkwo said that there were five categories that are presented to the Council. He does not authorize transfers that would require Council approval.

Council Member Cruz said that he was dissatisfied that not one Social Service employee was hired when they had approved funding for those positions. He said that what he was hearing was that the staff were transferring employees into the open positions and leaving the other positions vacant. The staff is not making a concerted effort to hire Bridgeport residents. This is like the staff is playing games with the Council.

GENERAL DISCUSSION RE: REVIEW OF THE MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT.

Council Member Burns recognized the staff members on the call including Mr. Flatto, Mr. Nkwo, Ms. Vickers and Mr. Gaudett.

Mr. Flatto then presented the monthly financial report and identified the information in the various columns for the Committee members. He explained that the Department expense reports are sorted into the five basic categories that Mr. Nkwo had mentioned which include Personnel Services, Other Personnel Items (Benefits, etc.); Operational Expenses, Other (Debt Service and other items). Items in these categories cannot be transferred from one category to another without Council approval.

Mr. Flatto reviewed the revenue items with the Committee. He gave a brief explanation regarding the Debt Service Reimbursement, which included the bond issuance by Steele Point in September.

Council Member McCarthy asked for clarification on the Steele Point bonds. Mr. Flatto reviewed the details of reimbursement and noted that the funds were from the last 10 years. This has also been submitted to the auditors for verification. Discussion followed about using the funds for debt service.

Council Member Newton asked about offsetting Police Department overtime. Mr. Flatto explained that due to the COVID reimbursement, they were able to offset the OT. This year, the same amount of funding was not available. Discussion followed about the new American Rescue Act and other potential funding.

Council Member Mack asked for clarification on how the monthly reports were created. Mr. Flatto explained the process he used to compile the data for the report.

Council Member Pereira repeated that they were six months into the year and this was the first time she heard about the \$6 million. She wished to know when they were made aware that there might not be a payment. Mr. Flatto said that he had mentioned the projected shortfall in September or October report.

Council Member Pereira said that there was a scheduling conflict with the Planning and Zoning Commission or Zone Board of Approval. She said when a massive amount of funding was being discussed, an email should be sent to all of the Council Members.

Council Member Cruz said that they were anticipating the receipt of close to \$9 million dollars. Council Member Cruz asked if they could use the extra funding to lower the mill rate for the residents. Mr. Flatto said that they include the funding during a budget year. However, they could consider it for the coming budget year. He added that the contingency fund was now over 5% for the first time in years.

Council Member Newton said that the Co-chairs hoped that the items were all on the table. He said that from what he was hearing, it appeared that the Council would be able to help the residents.

Council Member Burns said that they have been receiving revenue from the Amphitheater, and the Amphitheater appears to have been very successful. He asked about the ticket revenue. Mr. Flatto indicated where it was in the budget and noted that they had already received the quarterly payment. Discussion followed.

Council Member Pereira said that the City was guaranteed a maximum of \$250 from the arena. Any excess revenue would have to be placed in the maintenance fund. She asked for clarification on Mr. Flatto's statement regarding the fact that the Amphitheater had already exceeded their expected revenue. Council Member Pereira said that excessive funding would have to be placed in the maintenance fund.

Council Member Pereira said that there was a municipal tax on the ticket sales and wanted to know how much revenue the ticket sales had generated.

Mr. Flatto indicated where the funding for the maintenance and where the ticket sale surcharge was located on the report.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked for clarification about the Steele Point revenue delay. Mr. Flatto said that the Christoff's had hoped to release their bonds a number of years ago, but they were not able to do so. The payment was reimbursements for the infrastructure that the City had installed. The City will receive \$400,000 a year in property taxes when the Special District is operating.

Council Member Newton said that Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo need to change the format to a simpler format. He said that he would want the report broken out so that all the information on the Amphitheater was shown under the Amphitheater heading rather than flipping from page to page and department to department.

Council Member Pereira asked if there was \$400,000 projected in tax revenue from Steele Point this year. She was told that this was so.

Mr. Flatto said that the first \$400,000 goes towards the City. The rest of it will go back into the Special District to help with development.

Council Member Pereira said that the purpose of any development has to be mutual benefit. She said that she could not wait until 2023. She spoke about the taxpayer's burden since the 90's with a very small return. This is social capitalism where the middle class takes on the burden of investing in all the developments, but when the profits come in, it goes to the developers. She added that she would be sending a list of information for the upcoming items.

Council Member Newton pointed out that the contract was signed in 2013 and he could not speak about what the previous Council did then.

Mr. Flatto gave a brief overview on the expenses. He noted that there was a number of vacancies in the Public Safety department. There will be savings from the vacant positions, but the City will have to back fill the positions.

Mr. Flatto said that there was \$1 million dollar for contingency that he hoped to hold until the end of year.

Mr. Flatto noted that the BOE should be receiving some funding from the Federal Government, which should help them.

Council Member Newton asked what Mr. Flatto thought about the budget. Mr. Flatto said that he was hoping for a healthy year. Discussion followed about the revenue areas and shortfalls, including the \$6 million State funding that had not been disbursed.

Council Member Pereira said that there had been 69 vacancies in the Bridgeport Police Department last year. She asked what the current number of vacancies were in the Department. Mr. Flatto said that he did not know offhand. Discussion followed about the increases in police overtime.

Council Member Pereira asked when the City Council had approved appropriating more funding to increase police overtime. Mr. Flatto said that it would be considered Personnel costs and had been approved by the chairs. She repeated that the City Charter states that there were only limited situations where line-item transfers were allowed without Council approval.

Council Member Burns summarized that he would like to receive regular cycle of reports on Public Safety in terms of personnel status; a semi-regular discussion with the Board of Education on their budget status and regular updates on bonding status.

Council Member Newton said that when Mr. Flatto or Mr. Nkwo sends them information, the chairs will forward it to the Committee members. If Committee members wish information, they should send the request to the Chairs. The Department heads have been instructed that all the information must go through the Committee chairs.

ADJOURNMENT

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

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services