

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS  
COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING  
JANUARY 10, 2022**

**ATTENDANCE:** Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Jeanette Herron, Tyler Mack, Mary McBride-Lee, Matthew McCarthy

**OTHERS:** Council Member(s): A. Boyd, J. Cruz, M. Pereira, R. Roman-Christy, & R. Smith; Thomas Gaudett, Mayor’s Office; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Constance Vickers, Director, Legislative Affairs; Isolina DeJesus, Central Grants Director; Atty. John Stafstrom, Pullman & Comley, Bond Counsel; Acting Police Chief R. Garcia; Lt. Cotto; Acting Fire Chief L. Edwards; Deputy Chief J. Buck; Fire Car 1; Fire Car 3; Eneida Martinez, Barbara, Call-in User 1; Call-in User 3; Elector; iPhone, 203-414-0712; 203-581-5100; 203-880-5666; 381083245

**CALL TO ORDER**

Co-chair Newton called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. A quorum was present.

Co-chair Newton said Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia had an excused absence.

**APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES:**

• **December 13, 2021 (Regular Meeting)**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 13, 2021.  
\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE SECONDED.**

The following correction was noted:

Page 4, paragraph 9, line 1, please change the following from:

“a maximum of \$250 from the arena.”

To: “a maximum of \$250,000 in rent from the arena.”

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO AMEND THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 13, 2021 AS NOTED.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MACK SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 13, 2021 AS AMENDED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council Member Newton said that there were invited guests who had come to share information with the Committee. Council Member Burns requested that the Committee stay on topic.

**17-21 Proposed Approval of Additional Capital Project Authorization to the 2022-2026 Capital Plan and Approval of General Obligation Bonds.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED AGENDA ITEM 17-21 PROPOSED APPROVAL OF ADDITIONAL CAPITAL PROJECT AUTHORIZATION TO THE 2022-2026 CAPITAL PLAN AND APPROVAL OF GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MACK SECONDED.**

Council Member Pereira asked if only the item highlighted in bold type was the only amended item.

Mr. Nkwo said that the only change was the increase of \$3.5 million, which was the City's share.

Mr. Flatto said that this would result in an increase in the total City's share. He added that the construction should start in the spring or summer. He said that they would need to bond the remainder of the amounts as the time comes due.

Council Member Pereira said that on the bottom of the second page of the Capital Plan, there are a number of notes. It states that the construction of Bassick High School has increased from \$115 million to \$129 million. This was a \$14 million increase in the cost based on the purchase of 6 UB parcels that was not authorized by the Council and no money was appropriated for that.

She went on to say that "enrollment" was mis-spelled in the document. The document states that the increase in student enrollment is attributed to the relocation of the Classical Studies Academy students. She wished to know if that was referring to the Classical Studies Academy or the Bridgeport Military Academy. Mr. Nkwo stated that it was referring to the Bridgeport Military Academy.

Council Member Pereira reiterated that the State funds renovation projects are reimbursed at a higher percentage of close to 80% while this project would only be funded at approximately 69%. This is an increase of almost \$4.5 million. When Mr. Flatto went to the Council in 2019 for an additional \$1 million for increased costs, he did not mention that it was for land acquisition. It was not in the resolution or the minutes.

There is now a new balance of \$3.5 million because of two reasons: the \$6 million land acquisition which the City Council never appropriated funding for; and secondly, the school is being moved onto a Long Island Sound flood plain zone, which is a major cost factor.

Council Member Newton said that the reason that the price increase was due to cost increases for building materials.

Mr. Flatto said that the City believes that the State will reimburse the City at the higher rate and the bond resolution also assumes that they will receive the higher rate. He said that BOE had decided to include the additional students. The Committee must approve the Bond Resolution and the Capital Plan.

Council Member Burns said that the reference in the resolution speaks about Bridgeport Academy students. He asked if they should amend the language to the Bridgeport Military Academy. Mr. Nkwo noted that the Capital Plan mentions the Classical Academy, which should be changed to the Bridgeport Military Academy.

Council Member Mack asked if there was going to be an explanation of the document. Mr. Flatto gave Council Member Mack a brief overview of the Capital Plan and the Bond Resolution. He explained that as the project is completed, the City issues bonds and pays the debt service.

Council Member Mack asked about the debt service payment plan. Mr. Flatto said that they would be issuing 20-year bonds and the debt service was phased in to pay it over the term of the bond. He added that the State wanted the City to submit a new application due to the student increase and a reimbursement change on the part of the State.

Council Member Cruz said that he had the same issue with the approval of the purchase of the land in Executive Session.

He asked why the 300 additional students were included. Mr. Flatto said that the BOE Superintendent had decided to increase the student enrollment. Mr. Nkwo suggested that they may have increased the enrollment because the Bridgeport Military Academy was going to be in the same building.

Council Member Cruz asked what the status of the Bassick High School request was. Mr. Flatto said that there was a two-year window to start the project. Because the State wanted DEEP approval, the City was told to wait. Fencing was installed during that period, but construction was not started.

Council Member McCarthy asked for confirmation on the plan to only partially bond for the project. Mr. Flatto said that this was so. Last summer, they bonded \$8 million at a very low interest rate. He said that he and Mr. Nkwo were trying to keep the bond amounts low to prevent the City from having to pay too much interest.

Council Member Pereira said that she was not sure why Mr. Nkwo kept referring to paying the Diocese for the Classical Studies Academy. The building where Bridgeport Military Academy is located is owned by the City. The City refurbished it as swing space while school construction was underway. The Diocese has nothing to do with this issue.

Council Member Pereira said that when the City builds a new school, the enrollment increases because magnet school students often transfer to the new school.

Council Member Pereira asked when the Council had voted to include the cost of BMA into the new Bassick. Mr. Flatto said that the District is in charge of their educational specs and that is the number they presented.

Council Member Newton said that he believed that the BOE would have approved this, not the Council.

Council Member Pereira asked why the resolution was referring to \$16.5 million when the additional cost was \$14.5 million and in early 2019, the Council had authorized an extra million.

Mr. Flatto said that the Capital Plan is one part and the City has authorized bonding for the project for \$15.5 million so far. The \$16.5 million brings the total up to \$32 million.

Council Member Herron pointed out that the amount of money to renovate the second floor of the current BMA location was very expensive. Mr. Flatto said that he believes that the BOE would be responsible for covering the costs of that outfitting. Council Member Herron said that she was not comfortable with all the add-ons.

Council Member Newton said that it was his understanding that the BOE had approved all these changes. The Council's job is to help with the building of the school.

Council Member Burns asked what was happening at the State level regarding the funding. Mr. Flatto said that there have been discussions with the staff, the Superintendent and the State which sounded very positive. Discussion followed.

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO AMEND THE RESOLUTION ON PAGE 1, WHERE IT NOTES "THE ACADEMY STUDENTS" WHICH IS TO BE CHANGED TO "THE BRIDGEPORT MILITARY ACADEMY STUDENTS" AND IN THE CAPITAL PLAN IN THE NOTES WHERE THERE IS A REFERENCE TO "THE RELOCATION OF THE CLASSICAL STUDIES ACADEMY STUDENTS" WHICH IS TO BE CHANGED TO "THE RELOCATION OF THE BRIDGEPORT MILITARY ACADEMY STUDENTS".**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MACK SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION TO AMEND AGENDA ITEM 17-21 PROPOSED APPROVAL OF ADDITIONAL CAPITAL PROJECT AUTHORIZATION TO THE 2022-2026 CAPITAL PLAN AND APPROVAL OF GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE MOVED AGENDA ITEM 17-21 PROPOSED APPROVAL OF ADDITIONAL CAPITAL PROJECT AUTHORIZATION TO THE 2022-2026 CAPITAL PLAN AND APPROVAL OF GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS AS AMENDED.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS SECONDED.**

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

Council Member Newton said that the Committee had invited some of the staff to provide the Committee with information. He said that this was not a debate because the staff were invited as guests. This is for information purposes only.

• **Budget update from Central Grants Office.**

Council Member Burns said that Ms. DeJesus was on the call to give the Committee an overview of the various projects.

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER THE CENTRAL GRANTS INFORMATION REPORT AS EXHIBIT #01-10-2022-1.**

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

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

Ms. DeJesus greeted the Committee and displayed a spreadsheet on the screen. She reviewed the details of the various columns with the Committee.

Council Member Burns asked about the \$500,000 for the FEMA debris removal category. Mr. Nkwo explained that this was money that had already been expended to clean up after a major storm. He explained where the funding was drawn from and how it was reimbursed.

Council Member Mack wished to know if there were Emergency Funds set aside for this purpose. Mr. Nkwo said that they had tapped into the fines in the Blight account to handle the emergency clean up. There is also some back up funding in the Contingency Fund. Discussion followed about the Blight funding account.

Council Member Pereira said that there was nothing on the City website. She wished to know if they had been uploading the documents to the City website. Council Member Burns said that they had been exhibiting the documents and that the documents were sent to the Committee first.

Ms. DeJesus said that the next spreadsheet was for COVID reimbursements. They have to be submitted quarterly and there have been seven quarters submitted. The City has been reimbursed for the first quarter and they expect two more reimbursements soon.

Council Member Burns asked if the funding was coming from the Biden administration. He was told that this was correct. The discussion then moved to the details included in the various quarters.

Mr. Nkwo said that he had gone before the Council to request authority to expend the funding that they would be reimbursed for.

Council Member Pereira said that in the first quarter, there were about \$2.2 million in expenses. She asked if there was more funding coming from FEMA for the first quarter. Ms. DeJesus said that the City would not receive any more money from the Public Assistance program for the first

quarter. The Federal government allocated funding to the State to cover anything that was not allowable through Public Assistance.

A discussion followed regarding the amount that the State would reimburse the City for COVID costs. Council Member Pereira said that she remembered the request for costs associated with the Mayor's commercials. She asked if the City had received any reimbursement for those commercials. Mr. Flatto said that the FEMA funding was for disaster relief, and the Americares funding covered the communications, including the commercials.

Council Member Burns suggested that if Council Members had specific questions about specific projects, they should email the co-chairs.

Council Member Newton asked if Ms. DeJesus was in contact with Mr. Nkwo and Mr. Flatto about the various projects that were underway. Ms. DeJesus said that Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo try to keep her updated on the status of the various non-profit projects.

Council Member Newton asked that the Budget Co-chairs receive the updates. Ms. DeJesus made a note of this.

Council Member Burns asked what happened if funding was not fully expended. Ms. DeJesus said that this was why they monitored the funding so closely. They have not lost any funding that she could remember. There was a competitive block grant that ended up with excess funding, which they returned. Discussion followed.

Mr. Nkwo said that the Seaview Avenue corridor project was moving forward. Council Member Newton said that they should ask OPED to update them on the details for that project.

Council Member Cruz asked about the re-alignment of the Lafayette Circle. Mr. Nkwo gave the details.

Council Member Pereira said in 2020 there was an extensive discussion about the Seaview Avenue Corridor and how it would not be developed to connect into Remington Woods for development. She said that the document says that the Seaview Avenue Corridor will go to Lake Success in Remington Woods.

Mr. Nkwo said that there was no budget for the project.

Ms. DeJesus said that the name had been on the document for years and most likely had not been updated.

Mr. Nkwo said that was the name used when applying for the grant but Mr. Urquidi has the Master Plan showing the realignment.

Council Member Pereira said that the 90 acres of Remington Woods was in her district and she would not support this or any form of development. She said Senator Blumenthal has contacted

the U.S. Wildlife and the Department of Environmental Protection to assist making Remington Woods a permanent Federal National Preserve.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked for the status on the Chopsey Hill project, and two other projects. Mr. Nkwo said that it would be best to send the project questions to the Co-chairs because those were engineering questions. The Co-chairs will check with Mr. Urquidi about the status of the projects.

Ms. DeJesus displayed her last spreadsheet that had the remaining projects on it. Mr. Nkwo said that the best way to handle questions was to send them to the Co-chairs and they will check with the project managers to get the information.

Council Member Burns asked about the JAG and the COPS grants. He said that it would be important not to underfund the police. Ms. DeJesus said that it was the COPS funding that were the ones that they have to monitor regarding supplanting hiring issues. The JAG grants are for assistance.

Council Member Pereira said that the 2013 COPS grant would have expired in 2017. The Department has been understaffed for years. The funding has to be used for adding officers. She had several detailed questions about the amounts involved and what the basis was for expending any grant funding. She also wished to know why \$369,000 was unspent for the first grant which was followed by an overspent amount for the second grant.

Ms. DeJesus said that the 2015 grant in question was for school resource officers. The Department estimates what their salaries and fringe benefits would be. Typically, they do not hire as soon as the grant funding comes in because they have to recruit. They can only charge the estimated cost against the grant funding. This can result in excess grant funding. She gave the details. That particular grant is in the close out process and the DOJ has not finalized the paperwork.

Council Member Burns said that Ms. DeJesus was doing a great job presenting the grant opportunities to the Council. He suggested that those who were applying for the grants should be on the call. Ms. DeJesus said that she would make sure that the applicants were on the calls.

Council Member Newton said that he commended Ms. DeJesus on hiring the staff that she needed for her department.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she felt that this was good.

Council Member Newton asked Mr. Flatto to give a brief overview of the status of the ARPA. He explained that there were two documents that needed to be added as Exhibits.

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED “AN OVERVIEW OF ARPA” AS EXHIBIT # 01-10-2022-2.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MACK SECONDED.**

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

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED “A SUMMARY OF ARPA GRANTS” AS EXHIBIT # 01-10-2022-3.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MACK SECONDED.**

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

Mr. Flatto said that the first document was an informational summary for the Committee on how they develop the process for handling the ARPA funding. The second one had the details of the CARES Act funding. The funding flowed through the State and included the PPE equipment. He reviewed the details with the Committee. He noted that the School District would also be receiving a large amount of funding that was not included on the report.

The Mayor’s Office, OPM and the City Attorney’s Office have been working on the various American Rescue Act allocations.

Council Member Newton said that if the various organizations came in to display that they have implemented their projects, then the Council will release the funding for the later phases. Mr. Flatto said that this was correct.

Council Member Burns said that there was a very well publicized incident in New Haven where an employee had access to the funding. Mr. Flatto said that there were a number of checks and balances in place to verify that the work was being done appropriately. All the funding has to be documented.

Council Member Newton said that they had verified that the small businesses were performing their block grant projects and verified their existence as a small Bridgeport business.

Council Member Pereira said Mr. Flatto stated that the Council had approved the committees to distribute the ARPA funds. Those committees were created by the Mayor and it is important to remember there were two entire districts that did not have any representation on any of these committees. She said she would be sharing with her constituents that the administration felt that they did not deserve any representation. They need to remember that when the administration seeks to serve again. It is a disservice to the combined 30,000 constituents.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked she and Council Member Roman-Christy had asked to be appointed to the Committee and she wasn’t given her first choice but did get her second. Council Member Roman-Christy confirmed that this was so.

- **Review of current personnel numbers of Police and Fire departments.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT LISTING THE FIRE DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL REPORT AS EXHIBIT #01-10-2022-4.**

**\*\*COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE SECONDED.**

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



**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED “POLICE MANPOWER REPORT AS OF DECEMBER 17, 2021” AS EXHIBIT # 01-10-2022-5.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE SECONDED.**

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

Acting Chief Garcia greeted the Committee. She said that they have 327 patrol officers. There are 12 that were enrolled at the Academy.

Lt. Cotto said that the stats were up to date as of December 17th. Three individuals have separated within the 3 weeks since the chart was created. While they hired 12 officers, there were 53 officers who left either through separations or retirements. All the towns in Connecticut are struggling with the same issue. However, it is important not to lower their standards. Lt. Cotto said that they were hoping for a second class but expected it to be about 10 officers.

Acting Chief Garcia said that since they didn't offer entry level exams for many years, now they are dealing with large classes that are all up for retirement at the same time. It will be important to do active recruiting continually.

Lt. Cotto said that while they were about 100 officers short, the public was not at risk. The grant funding helps with special programs like Click it or Ticket.

Council Member Newton asked about Long-term military leave and long-term disability. Acting Chief Garcia said that there were officers who were deployed overseas for a year. Regarding disability, an officer has up to 18 months to recover from a work-related injury. There have been officers who have had to retire due to job injuries and they could not get clearance from their doctors.

Council Member Newton asked about whether civilians could perform some types of jobs since the Department was operating below capacity.

Acting Chief Garcia said that she was reviewing some jobs. She also explained that when there is an officer at a dirt job, that officer is not scheduled to work. It is outside overtime. These officers are also earning money for the City because the City charges the contractors for the officer's presence.

Council Member Newton said that there were some cities like New Haven that hired civilians to perform traffic duties on dirt jobs.

Council Member Burns said that he had received a few reports from the Police and Fire Department in the past so the Committee was aware of their status. He said that this was about financial issues.

Council Member McCarthy said that when an officer is out there on outside overtime, they are also accruing pension and benefits. He said that he had been told that it was about \$16.00/hr. for the City, but they may need to increase the charges.

Council Member McCarthy asked for details about the retirements and separation. He asked if they had tracked the number of officers going to other departments. Council Member Burns said that he had asked Labor Relations for the report. Lt. Cotto said that there were 27 individuals who had resigned and gone to other departments. Two returned to Bridgeport and there are a few more potential returning officers. Three officers were terminated.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she was concerned about the officer who resigned because he did not want to be an officer anymore. She said that it would be important to think about why the officers might not want to stay in Bridgeport anymore. She said that the City was losing good police officers and she would like to discuss this with Acting Chief Garcia.

Council Member Newton said that many officers were leaving because of the insurance. The younger officers are struggling with what they have to pay for insurance. This is part of the contract. Discussion followed.

Acting Chief Garcia said that she has exit interviews with the officers and Council Member Newton is 100% correct about the reason why the newer officers are leaving. Bridgeport is not the highest paying city and often the officers are single but when they get married, they struggle with the astronomical insurance costs. They can't afford it.

Council Member Newton said that discussions involving contracts really belonged in the Contracts Committee and the discussion needed to remain on track.

Council Member Herron said that she was glad that Council Member Newton brought up this as Contracts co-chair. The older officers are grandfathered in but after a certain amount of time, they pay the higher rates. The newer officers do not have insurance if they leave, while the older officers have grandfathered insurance. If the City doesn't rectify this issue, they will continue to have this problem. Bridgeport has the best training and the officers leave when they have completed their agreement.

Council Member Pereira said that there was a cost factor involved in this type of turn over. She strongly suggested that the exit interview not be done by the Police Chief. It should be done by Labor Relations. She said that she knows several officers who are due to retire soon and they are leaving because of the low morale. She said that when her daughter took the test, she failed the physical and was later asked to come back and take the physical again. This is lowering the standards.

Council Member Cruz said that he would not agree that officers were leaving because of low morale. He said that officers felt that while they were proud to join the Department, the insurance was too high. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to attract officers. He said that he did

not have a problem with the Chief or Lt. Cotto doing the exit interview because they need to know why officers are leaving.

Council Member Cruz said that he would like to see Mr. Nkwo and Mr. Flatto find funding to build a new police headquarters. It's time to talk about what the City can do for the Department.

Council Member Newton thanked Acting Chief Garcia for her time. He said that police officers are leaving departments all over the country. He agreed that the police headquarters was outdated.

Acting Chief Lance Edwards greeted the Committee and reviewed details about the Fire Department personnel. They are authorized for 295 positions. 264 of those are firefighters on the line. Each shift is bound by the Collective bargaining agreement and the maximum number of firefighters on call is 66. When they go below 66 firefighters on shift, the overtime goes up. They do not have a current hiring list. The Connecticut Fire Academy only has two classes a year. A firefighter who goes in August will not be ready until December. There are still a lot of individuals who want to be firefighters.

Council Member Newton said that there was a total of 264 sworn officers on the report. Acting Chief Edwards said that there were support staff like mechanics and others who do not accrue overtime.

Council Member Herron said that Acting Chief Edwards was doing a great job. She asked when they could start to do their own training. Anything in house is better than outsourced training. She asked if they could increase the number of female firefighters.

Acting Chief Lance Edwards said that the Department was at the national average for female fighters. The hurdle has been the CPAT exam. They were successful two years ago with a training program.

Council Member Herron thanked Acting Chief Lance Edwards for having the first woman administrator in their office.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that Acting Chief Edwards was doing a great job. She reminded everyone that the Fire Department was often there before the Police Department. Acting Chief Edwards said that he could not do his job without his Deputy Chiefs.

Council Member Newton thanked Acting Chief Lance Edwards for his time.

**• General Discussion re: Review of the Monthly Financial Report.**

This was not discussed at this time.

**ADJOURNMENT**

- \*\* COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- \*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE SECONDED.**
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services