

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 6, 2022**

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

OTHERS: Council Member(s): A. Boyd, J. Cruz, M. Pereira, R. Roman-Christy, M. Small & R. Smith; Tom Gaudett, Mayoral Aide; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Michelle Muoio, Sikorsky Airport Manager; Paul Catino, Public Facilities; Steve Hladum, Parks; Aaron Curry, Garage; Craig Nadrizny, Acting Director, Public Facilities, 203-209-1058; 203-275-5313; 203-414-0712; 203-860-5666

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. A quorum was present. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia was not present due to a schedule conflict.

GENERAL BUDGET DISCUSSION

Council Member Burns said that the increase was small. He said that they would have to work hard on the Budget.

Council Member Newton said that there were some Council Members who did not like the changes that he and Co-chair Burns had made. However, there are only 7 people on the Committee. Those who have questions should submit them to the Co-chairs.

Council Member Newton said he hoped that the Council Members would not be disrespectful. Those Council Members who are not on the Budget Committee can submit their questions and they will be given the information.

Council Member Burns displayed Mr. Nkwo's spreadsheet on the screen. He said that the Chairs had received this earlier in the afternoon.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER THE SPREADSHEET TITLED OPM FY 23 MAJOR VARIANCES OVER \$20,000 AS EXHIBIT 04-06-2022-1.
** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

Council Member McCarthy asked for this spreadsheet to be sent out to the Committee. Council Member Burns said that he would send it.

Council Member Pereira asked if all the Council would be receiving the documents. Council Member Burns said that he would send it to everyone.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Nkwo then gave a brief overview of the general variances and explained that any variance that was below \$20,000 would not be included. Those will appear in the line items in the main budget.

Mr. Nkwo then gave a line by line explanation of the various departments that displayed significant variances including increases in the conveyance taxes, Seaside Park/Beardsley Park Check Points, Building Permits and the Fairchild Wheeler Golf Course.

After reviewing the revenue decreases and increases, Mr. Nkwo said that there is a net increase of \$7,023,641.

The discussion moved to the details of the Seaside Park Rental for the Sounds Music Concerts. Council Member McCarthy asked if the City would receive 5% on the ticket sales. Council Member Burns said that this was so.

Council Member Pereira said that there was price of ticket for the Sounds Music Concert that was not posted and people have to contact the vendor to find out the cost. She had concerns about the amount that the City was receiving.

Council Member McCarthy said that he was concerned that they were putting \$10 million in the budget from AARPA funding because it will not be available in the coming years.

Mr. Nkwo then reviewed the Expenditure Increases with the Committee Members. This included City Wage increases, The Library mill rate increase based on the Grand List, Police and Fire Overtime Budgets, Social Security, and several accounts for the City Attorney's Office.

Council Member Newton asked about the security during events at the Amphitheater. Council Member Burns said that the Police Department is responsible for security outside of the Amphitheater while the security inside the venue is the responsibility of the event presenters.

Council Member McCarthy had concerns about the Unused Vacation Payouts for Active Employees. Mr. Nkwo said that it was the money that officers would receive if they retire. Council Member McCarthy said that 30 Police Officers could retire and it would be a major payout. Mr. Nkwo reviewed the details with him.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked about the Police Officers who were retiring because of the cost of insurance. Mr. Nkwo said that the officers that were retiring were the older officers who have a closed insurance contract plan. The younger officers are the ones that have issues with the insurance.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked about longevity. Mr. Nkwo gave a brief overview of the details of the longevity agreement with the Committee.

Council Member Herron said that if the City is in contract negotiations, there should not be any discussions about what should be included or excluded since it might hinder the negotiations. Council Member Newton agreed.

Council Member Pereira asked if there was a \$500,000 increase in police security for the amphitheater. Mr. Nkwo said that he believed that was accurate. Council Member Pereira said that the taxpayers should not pay for security for the amphitheater.

Council Member Pereira asked about a potential BOE insurance change. Council Member Burns said that they were not trying to dissect the figures now, but simply get a general overview of the numbers.

Council Member Newton said he thought that moving the landscaping from OPED to Public Facilities was a wise move. He added that the City Attorney's Office has 14 attorneys but the department has their own legal services.

Council Member Pereira asked about the Travel Account, which Mr. Nkwo said he believed was for the Council Members to travel to conferences. She asked if the stipends would remain and pointed out that the Travel Account was for \$40,000 in addition to the stipends. Mr. Nkwo said that this was the Mayor's Proposed Budget and Council could amend it as they wished to.

Mr. Nkwo explained that the Police Narcotics Department had moved from their former location into a City owned property, so the rent on the former location was no longer being paid out.

Mr. Nkwo noted that in 2016, the City bonded for police cars, but had not used those funds yet. Discussion followed regarding the police vehicles and the bonding for the vehicles.

Council Member Pereira stated that she was against bonding for vehicles. Mr. Nkwo said that the bond had been approved by the previous administration during a time when the City did not have any money for police vehicles. Council Member Pereira asked if they could get a copy of the bond approval.

CAPITAL BUDGET DISCUSSION: PUBLIC FACILITIES.

Mr. Catino then presented the Public Facilities Capital Budget. He explained that there were three or four City parking lots that were in desperate need of repaving. In the past, the paving allocation was focused on paving streets. There are parking lots at Seaside Park that need attention, as does the Visitor's Lot across from City Hall.

The discussion moved to the Public Facilities Equipment, some of which is quite expensive. Mr. Nadrizny said that some of the vehicles are from the 1990's.

Mr. Catino said that City Hall had suffered some major damage from Storm Ida on the bottom floor. Both the Morton Center and the Raphola Taylor building need roof repairs. Mr. Flatto said that he had been working on insurance claims. Mr. Catino said that if they do receive funding from the insurance, there are items such as the handicapped ramp, and the façade at Lyon Terrace that are in need of repair.

Council Member Pereira asked about the paving line item being dedicated for street paving rather than culverts or intersections. Mr. Catino said that the first line item was usually viewed as for street paving, which is why they are setting aside a separate line item for parking lots, and other paving issues. He added that paving also includes milling, pot holes, crack sealing and curb cuts.

Council Member Pereira asked if anyone had spoken with the State about getting funding for the Taylor Center roof. Mr. Nkwo said that he had not asked about it.

Council Member Newton said that the Taylor Center is supposed to be managed by the City as per the initial agreement when the facility had been signed over to the City.

Council Member Newton asked whether the funding for the parking lots at the larger Public Facilities building was from the paving line item. Mr. Catino said that he would check but believed that it was part of the construction costs. Council Member Newton said that there were also LOCIP funds that had been designated for street paving.

Mr. Catino said that there was a project for a truck wash that will allow them to remove the salt from the trucks. It had been designed, but then was shelved. The grease pit for the wash has already been constructed.

Ms. Muoio then spoke about the Airport, which might be sold in the coming year. She said that there were some needed repairs to the fire suppression system that were part of a contractual agreement.

Mr. Nkwo said that he would like to put the cost in to the Operating Budget so they don't bond for it and pay for it for years after the airport is sold.

Council Member Newton asked if the City would be able to recoup some of the cost when the airport is sold. Ms. Muoio said that there was a "claw back" clause in the agreement.

Council Member Herron said that the City was working on becoming an entertainment location, but they had lost their hotel. She expressed concerns that there had only been one party who was interested in purchasing the facility. Discussion followed.

There was discussion about the status of the Perry Memorial Arch at Seaside. Mr. Hladun greeted the Committee and explained that the arch was being assessed. It actually is a building and the roof area now is leaking. There are also pests inhabiting the structure and the drains need attention. Once the roof is repaired the pointing can be done.

There is a brick interior with the granite stones attached to it. Some of the stones are showing cracks and are a safety concern.

Council Member McCarthy asked if the work needed to be done this year or could wait until next year. Discussion followed and it was the general consensus that the repointing could wait until next year so outside grant funding could be researched.

Council Member Pereira asked if the arches were on the State Historic Registry or the National Historic Registry. Mr. Hladun said that it was on the National Registry. Council Member Pereira said that being on the National Registry may have more opportunities for grants.

The discussion then moved to the Police Department parking lot that the City rents across the street from the Police Station. Many of the Council Members expressed their concerns that the Police Department needs a new building, so investing money in purchasing the lot only to move the station in a few years would not be a wise financial move.

Council Member Cruz asked why Winfield Park was not on the list for Capital Projects. He was told that funding has been designated for upgrading the park already.

Mr. Nkwo cautioned everyone that sometimes grant funding requires matching funds from the City.

Council Member Burns asked about the Rooster River project. Mr. Flatto said that he could give an overview, but Mr. Urquidi, the City Engineer, would be able to address it in more detail.

Mr. Urquidi said that they were looking for a scoping grant from FEMA in order to study what they planned to do, which is the step before designing the project. This is the kind of funding that the City needs for this type of project. It is important to take the preliminary steps in order to be eligible for larger grant awards. Mr. Urquidi said that they had worked on two other projects, like Ox Brook. Discussion followed.

Council Member Pereira said that they had skipped over the Beardsley Zoo. Council Member Burns said that they had removed the Beardsley Zoo items. Council Member Pereira said that people had been outraged that the Zoo had received funding for the tiger exhibit, but the schools had not gotten more money.

Mr. Nkwo said that the departments ask for funding. He pointed out that the outer years were more like place holders. Also, Mr. Nkwo said that he put the funding requests in for the Committee to review.

Council Member Pereira said that her district has experienced major flooding in 2015, which was seven years ago. Mr. Urquidi said that he could not speak to the funding matters because he had submitted bonding requests. Mr. Nkwo said that the City has been requesting bonding funds, but they have not gone out to bond.

Council Member Pereira said that the Mayor and Atty. Meyer had promised to work on the flood. In the last 24 months, people have lost water heaters, and other utilities. You can't make promises to the people that you don't keep.

The discussion moved to the Old Town Road re-alignment. Mr. Nkwo said that no one seems to really know what it was and he would like to take that project out. Mr. Flatto said that the re-alignment was initiated by Trumbull.

Council Member Newton said for the record that he supports the Zoo and it is the only zoo in Connecticut. Many children visit it, even during COVID. Council Member Burns said that they would be hearing from the Zoo Director.

Council Member Herron said that they have started breeding animals in the Zoo. They are saving wildlife there, so she is also supporting the Zoo because it is an educational facility.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services