

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 14, 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, F. Hodges, M. Pereira, R. Smith & M. Valle; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Eric Amado, Civil Service Director, Monty Miles, Benefits Manager; Sandra Ferreira, Human Resources Manager; Constance Vickers, Director, Legislative Affairs; Barbara, iPhone, 203-880-5666

CALL TO ORDER

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

Co-chair Newton said that the department staff was present to speak about their budget. He said that discussion and questions about contracts and negotiations would not be allowed. There are negotiations underway. He also reminded everyone to be respectful.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET, FY 2023-2024 FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION OFFICE, LABOR RELATIONS, AND BENEFITS AS EXHIBIT 04-13-22-A.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED ANNUAL COST OF MAINTAINERS, I & II AS EXHIBIT 04-13-22-B.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council Member McCarthy said that Mr. Amado's presentation was always very well presented but respectfully requested that he just hit the key points.

Mr. Nkwo then reviewed the Review Summary on page 92.

Council Member Newton asked what the Personnel Trainee was. Mr. Amado said that it was where an individual with light Human Service skills would be entered. Council Member Newton asked about the salary. Mr. Nkwo said that he would check into this and report back to the Committee.

Council Member Pereira said that this position had a \$16,000 increase and was vacant. Mr. Amado said that it had been filled. He said that the salary increase appears to be a typo and Mr. Nkwo would be checking into this.

The Committee then moved to page 95 including police training and exams. The recommended amount should cover the costs for the Police and Fire exams.

The Committee then reviewed page 98, which has the benefits and the personnel summary. They are requesting two part time clerical assistants.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the fringe benefits for the retirees. Mr. Nkwo reviewed the details of the retirees health insurance. Ms. Miles said that there were three classification for retirees: under 65, 65 and over and Connecticut Partnership. The premium for the over 65 class was \$43,000.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked for clarification on why the amounts went down for the Clerk A classification. Mr. Amado said that the Clerk As were for the Civil Service Department only. He gave the details.

Council Member Pereira said that there are several departments that have their own payroll clerk. She said in the School District they only have one payroll clerk, and this is also true with corporate America. She said that she had never seen anything like this and pointed out that

Mr. Amado said that the Charter Chapter 17 has Civil Service [30:00] The Civil Service Payroll Clerk oversees the other payroll clerks for accuracy and inputting the information. The separate payroll clerks are usually in large departments like Public Works.

Mr. Flatto said that the departments oversee their time management, but the Civil Service oversees all the changes like marital status, etc.

Council Member McCarthy said that the amount of finance positions in the City is very high and he agrees with Council Member Pereira.

Mr. Nkwo said that they were supposed to get a savings from the Medicare Plan, but the costs went up by \$500,000. This should have been offset by the saving from the Medicare Plan.

The Committee then reviewed Labor Relations on page 106.

Council Member McCarthy said that there was one person handling the Labor Relations and Personnel. He asked why one person was able to do one job but now they need two people to do one job.

Mr. Amado said that he was covering two jobs, but it would be difficult to find a candidate as Deputy Director for Labor Relations if they don't have enough staff. There are many employees

and many contracts to negotiate. A Deputy Director would bring the technical expertise to the position. Discussion followed.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked for clarification on the two positions that Mr. Amado was covering, which Mr. Amado provided.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked if Mr. Amado was paid for covering both positions. Mr. Amado said that he was not being paid for both positions.

Council Member Newton said that he agreed with Council Member McBride-Lee about Mr. Amado. He asked if Mr. Amado keeps track of performance reviews. He said that he had heard of City employees who never had a review after years. He said that he knew for a fact that Bridgeport does a poor job in review.

Council Member Pereira asked if Mr. Amado had anything to do with the Board of Education unions. Mr. Amado said that they did not.

Council Member Pereira said that there was a request for an 11% salary increase for the Labor Relations Management position.

Mr. Amado listed the various unions that the City Attorney's Office handles. Mr. Amado said that they were considering reorganizing the Labor Relations and the increased salary was part of that to attract candidates. The job responsibilities for the position was very large.

The Committee then moved to page 109.

Mr. Amado then narrated the information contained in Exhibit 04-14-22-A for the Committee.

Ms. Miles said that there were quite a few anticipated retirements. Some retirees had benefits from other positions and a few retirees passed away, which is why the payout had decreased.

Mr. Amado said that one of the major tasks was to give exams for the Police and Fire. He said that they are now giving more frequent exams for those two departments.

Council Member Burns asked if the Police Accountability Bill had any effect on hiring. He said that there were three times as many applicants for firefighters than police officers.

Council Member Pereira said that the only people who should be concerned about the Police Accountability Bill are the ones that are breaking the law. She mentioned the former Police Chief, who is currently in jail, and the Colorado Avenue incident.

Council Member Pereira said that Acting Police Chief Garcia had said that she was conducting exit interviews, which Council Member Pereira felt was not proper. Mr. Amado said that his department was ready to engage with the Police Department in handling the exit interviews.

Council Member Newton said that Bridgeport was not the only City that had lawsuits against their Police Department. He asked if there were any ideas on how to protect the City. Mr. Amado said that he wants to see how many officers are disqualified during the hiring evaluation and the appeal system. He said that the Habits and Conduct or the Psychological evaluations were a good indication of the success of the officer in the job.

Mr. Amado then gave an overview of the FY 21-22 Accomplishments as outlined in the report.

Council Member McCarthy asked what the status was on the search for the new Police Chief. Mr. Amado said that the Mayor had authorized them to move forward with personnel search. He now has a very short window to give the exam and said that they should be able to start the testing process in June.

Council Member McCarthy asked what the timeframe was for submitted the three names to the Mayor. Mr. Amado outlined the process and explained that it would be hard to put a hard date on it because there was a 30 day review period. He would be pleased with having it done in September.

Council Member Newton said that if they reduce the costs for the Police, the other departments will be asking for the same reduction. Mr. Amado said that all the unions have been requesting some type of relief for the health insurance costs. The negotiations are still to come.

Council Member Pereira asked about the hold on provisional employees. She said that there was about 20 BOE employees that had been Provisionals for year. When the test was given, most of them failed and then the Civil Service Commission created a curve and only 4 of the employees were let go.

Mr. Amado said that he would have to go back to look at the numbers. He said that he did not know how they would create a curve.

Council Member Burns asked what steps were taken to insure the integrity of the Police Chief exam. Mr. Amado said that there had to be a proper job analysis to insure the integrity. There were some community forms, but there was no record of those results being incorporated into the exam process. He added that having a take home exam was not acceptable. Transparency is critical and nothing is secret. This will be done pursuant to the Charter. The exam will be held in a secure venue. Previously, the information was given to the candidates and the assessors were contacted by the candidates.

Council Member McCarthy asked why there was \$19,000 decrease in the Human Resource Manager on page 98. Mr. Amado said that there had been an issue in the past but the current employee was not at that salary because it was a higher step. The previous Human Resource Manager was at that level, but the new manager will have a pay increase because the individual is on a lower step. Discussion followed.

Council Member McCarthy said that he was smelling something fishy because the allocated salary was at \$126,000 but the individual was not making that amount. Mr. Amado said that he did not understand how they budgeted for the first step salary class. He explained that it made no sense to budget Maintainer II & III at Step 1 because they are past that pay grade.

Council Member Newton said that they should have community meetings about the new Police Chief, so there is community input, like New Haven did.

Council Member Newton said that there were employees that were receiving salary increases based on their step level. He asked why they don't have a review.

Mr. Amado said that the first step for the Police Chief process was to have a community meeting in English and Spanish.

Mr. Amado said that every employee must go through a probation period. He said that it sounds like they are asking for a review for the steps. This would be a union issue. He said that they have been working on including an evaluation before an employee moved to the next salary step. However, the reviews will be subject to grievance.

Council Member Newton asked about Mayoral appointees. Mr. Amado said that any Civil Service employees and others had probation reviews. He went on to give the details and said that the department heads have the authority to deny a step increase.

Council Member Burns asked if there was technology to follow up on check ins. Mr. Amado said that they were working on technology abilities for training and other aspects of employment.

Ms. Miles then gave an overview of the Benefits Department. She said that they have been working on the Medicare Advantage Plan, which will save the City \$3 million dollars over the next three years. She said that they were looking at ways to reduce the costs of insurance.

Council Member Burns asked about a CT State Comptroller retirement and how this affected the health insurance. Ms. Miles said that the plan was still being worked on.

Council Member Pereira asked why the BOE have a significantly larger amount in the CT Partnership Plan. Ms. Miles said that this was about the retired employees and they are not in Anthem.

Ms. Miles then reviewed the benefits that the retirees receive in the City benefits and on Medicare.

Council Member Burns asked how the retention was working. Mr. Amado said that they do not receive complaints about the health care, but receive complaints about the cost of the insurance. He added that they were working on adding more benefits such as taking classes at the local colleges.

Ms. Miles said that Connecticut Partnership Plan requires routines physicals and other evaluations. There is a \$100 per month charge for non-compliance. Ms. Miles said that there were a number of City employees that were currently non-compliant.

Council Member Pereira asked how the tracking was done. She said that they were fining people who do not get cholesterol screens or other medical tests. Council Member Pereira said that she was terrible about technology and felt it was unfair to expect employees to manage their own health care through technology.

Mr. Flatto said that the State actually send letters through the mail. He said that an ounce of prevention to head off a serious illness would be important.

Mr. Amado said that he has been receiving the letters as he has not had his physical yet. These are preventative measures that reduces the cost of insurance.

Council Member Pereira said that this was micromanagement. She said that she did not agree with this. Ms. Miles said that there are waivers for certain circumstances. Council Member Newton said that people had no problems signing up for their stimulus checks. Discussion followed.

Ms. Miles then displayed a slide showing the Worker's Compensation and Risk Control summary.

Council Member Burns asked if the Worker's Comp claims were down. Mr. Nkwo said that the Worker's Comp numbers increased minimally.

Ms. Ferreira said that she was the Human Resources Manager. She displayed a slide listing the accomplishment that the Department has attained. She said that there had been a high number of employees leave and they were able to create an exit interview. It is important to have someone outside of the Department head conduct these interviews.

Council Member Newton said that last year, the Budget Committee had eliminated a position not knowing that someone had been hired. He said Mr. Nkwo told them that they had to go forward with the hire because they would be sued. He added that there were too many people that have to sign off on a hire.

Ms. Ferreira said that the position that was filled happened before she moved into her position. She then spoke about how the work flow happens. The communication happens before it comes to Human Resources. Council Member Newton said that the Committee would have never have eliminated the position if they had known the position had been filled. Discussion followed.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked if the Police Officers had received the exit survey. Ms. Ferreira said that they have not done this yet, but was willing to do so. However, she said that having a high number of officers retire after April 1st but before June 30th was typical. Officers want to take advantage of their pensions and work elsewhere.

Council Member Pereira asked if the Human Resources was familiar with the Maryland Governor removing the requirement for a college degree for City employment. Mr. Amado said that they were working on doing deep dives into skills and recognizing when a college degree is not relevant. He outlined the steps for changing minimum requirements. They are reviewing job qualifications regularly. Discussion followed.

Council Member Pereira said that she was open to it, but felt that they should still be tested for positions so someone does not get a job based on who they know.

Council Member Pereira asked if they were doing exit interviews at the Police Department. Ms. Ferreira said that they were not. Council Member Pereira said that if there was a 10% departure rate, it was a red flag. Ms. Ferreira said that they were working on retention and perks. She said that working with universities to provide tuition discounts will be a good incentive. Discussion followed about competitive and non-competitive classifications.

Council Member Burns said that what the Committee was hearing that the Department was moving in the right direction for retaining employees.

Council Member Pereira asked administration assistant salary increase listed on page 106. Mr. Amado said that the position was a union and there is the ability to increase the hours from 35 to 40. The amount of time and effort that the individual is putting is justified. Council Member Pereira asked why it was not noted in the bullets on the bottom of the page.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that as long as Mr. Amado has worked both jobs, he deserves whatever he asks for.

Council Member Newton thanked Mr. Amado and his staff for the excellent presentation. He said that he hoped they would be able to get a permanent Labor Relations Administration Assistant because it is not fair to have him filling two positions. Since Mr. Amado has taken over the department, they can see the results since he is including the Council in some of the jobs.

Council Member Lyons said that she agreed with Council Member Newton and thanked Mr. Amado for his hard work. She congratulated Ms. Ferreira also.

Council Member Burns asked about the Labor Relations Director position and displayed a page showing the department head salaries. He said that the position would be the fifth highest in the City. This position has been difficult to fill.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services