

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 16, 2022**

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

OTHERS: Council Member(s): A. Boyd & M. Pereira; T. Gaudett, Mayoral Aide; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Lt. M. Cotto, Police Department

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Newton called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. A quorum was present.

Council Member Newton said that they would be discussing the Police Department. He said that they had set the schedule and they had been informed that Acting Police Chief was not available. He added that there will not be any discussion about settlements.

Co-chair Burns said that Lt. Cotto has submitted a presentation. Council Member Burns said that Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia would not be in attendance due to religious observance.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

Mr. Flatto said that the budget had been fairly stable for the Police Department. Lt. Cotto said that Acting Chief Garcia had made a prior commitment that she could not break. Lt. Cotto said that they had requested to change the date. He said that there had been a rumor that Acting Chief Garcia does not work on week-ends, and that is untrue. Lt. Cotto explained that he was calling in while driving, and was not prepared to make a presentation.

Discussion followed about rescheduling the Police Department review.

Council Member Burns said that for the last two years, the Police Department had come in under budget. He reminded everyone that the Police staff was very low. Council Member Burns said that Mr. Amado had shared some of the staffing reports for Police and Fire.

Mr. Flatto said that there were two factors that were driving the PD budget. The vacancies have offset the overtime. He then gave an overview of the Police pension plans.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that they should be more responsible and someone should be present to represent the Police Department but since there wasn't, the Committee should move forward on the budget issues. Discussion followed.

Council Member McCarthy said that they had scheduled this and the Police Department knew that this had not been rescheduled. It is just another poor reflection on the leadership.

Council Member Herron said that she agreed with her colleagues because the Council Members were all volunteers and they were present.

Council Member Pereira said that the budget book shows 85 vacancies, but the later amount was over 110 when Lt. Cotto and Acting Chief Garcia met with the Public Safety Committee. Council Member Burns displayed a spreadsheet from Labor Relations.

Mr. Nkwo said that there were 423 officers budgeted. Council Member Pereira asked if that was just officers or included the administration and non-sworn staff. She said that the previous year, there were 69 vacancies. Mr. Nkwo explained that the PD does not consider candidates in the Academy as officers as they were not sworn in.

Council Member Pereira said at the Public Safety meeting, there were 110 vacancies, but there were no Academy recruits added on.

Lt. Cotto said that there was a Community Police engagement that the Acting Police Chief was at and she is tied up in a religious ceremony. He said that he was directing traffic and did not have any of the paperwork available.

Council Member McCarthy said that he was present at the previous Public Safety meeting and recalled the 110 vacancies. He said that they should notify the Mayor that the Chief was at a Police Community meeting that was more important than the budget.

Mr. Nkwo said that Civil Service had verified that there were 335 active positions as of March 1st. He reviewed the other figures. Council Member Newton said that they have heard that they need 450 officers for years, but they had never been able to be fully staffed.

Mr. Flatto left the meeting due to a fire alarm at 10:36 a.m.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that they should just proceed with the budget and move forward.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT REGARDING THE POLICE MANPOWER 2022 AS EXHIBIT 04-06-2022-A.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT SUBMITTED BY LT. COTTO THAT WAS TITLED BPT POLICE BUDGET PRESENTATION AS EXHIBIT 04-06-2022-B.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Nkwo displayed a spreadsheet that showed the cost for 10 police cars. He explained that they had mentioned in the past that a police car cost \$75,000, but this spreadsheet showed it costs about \$44,000.

Council Member McCarthy asked about attrition in the Police Department. Mr. Nkwo reviewed the figures with him.

Mr. Flatto rejoined the meeting at 10:43 a.m.

Council Member McCarthy asked when they could start unfunding those vacant positions. Mr. Nkwo said that when the City takes a grant from the DOJ, the headcount cannot go under the minimum staffing for two years after the end of the grant.

Council Member Pereira asked for the DOJ grant paperwork. She added that they are not supposed to use the money unless they had all the positions filled. She said that there were 43 patrol officer vacancies last year, but now there are 48 vacancies. That means they lost 5 more officers. She said that she did not believe anything that was being said today because the COPS grant was supposed to provide extra officers. This budget is very problematic.

Council Member Newton said that when he was on the Council in 1981 they did not have a full complement back then.

Mr. Nkwo said that the Civil Service Department had certified a number of officers, and there were 12 recruits in training.

Council Member Pereira said that she would pull the minutes from that Public Safety meeting and there were 110 vacancies but now they were claiming that there were 85. She reiterated that last year, there were 69 vacancies that would never be filled. There was a lot of savings in the budget because they were never going to hire 69 or 85 or 110 officers.

Council Member Burns noted that the latest report showed that there was 17 officers on leave.

Mr. Nkwo then reviewed the Police Revenues in the Budget book.

Council Member Pereira asked about the revenue that came in during the pandemic compared to the current revenue. She asked if they make revenue on the outside officer work. Mr. Flatto said that it was usually \$2,000 to \$3,000 in revenue. Discussion followed.

Council Member Pereira said that there was a 2015 Ordinance to fine dirt bike riders. She said that she was shocked to see that there were no fines collected from dirt bike riders. Mr. Nkwo said that there were liabilities involved. Discussion followed.

Council Member Burns said that he had been in touch with the Acting Chief and she was just finishing up at the Community event and recovering from a medical procedure. She is willing to meet with them at another time.

Council Member McCarthy said that the Council should be able to charge the outside companies whatever they want to cover the cost. He also wished to know what happened in 2020. Mr. Flatto said that the last three months of 2020 were in the pandemic and there was no work going on. This also caused a lag in billing and payment, so a job in January or February might not be paid until June or July. Discussion followed about the outside surcharge.

CAPITAL DISCUSSION/GENERAL BUDGET DISCUSSION

Council Member Burns displayed a document titled 2022 OPED BOND FUNDING.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT AS OPED BOND FUNDING 2022 AS EXHIBIT 04-16-2022-C.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council Member Burns said there had been concerns about the funding for the gateway to the South End that had not been touched yet. He then reviewed the other figures with the Committee members.

Council Member Newton said that they need to know what projects were underway like the Civic Block. Mr. Flatto suggested that they contact OPED and ask for documentation.

Council Member McCarthy said that it was disturbing that they had money sitting there that the City was paying interest on. He said that they were requesting more funding this year.

Council Member Pereira said that they had asked for \$1 million for acquiring properties, but they had not purchased any properties. Discussion followed about the amounts that were bonded and the amounts that had not been spent.

Council Member Pereira said that this was problematic and the Council has the right through the Charter to redirect funding to pay down debt. Taxpayers are paying interest on that money.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked about the current status of the Capital Request for OPED, which Mr. Nkwo reviewed with her. She said OPED had been good in her area.

Council Member Newton said that they should have OPED come back to give an explanation.

Council Member McCarthy said that he would like to see every project other than Remington Arms and the Lafayette Circle moved out at least a year.

Council Member Newton said that he does not know what was on the drawing board and what wasn't, so they should have OPED explain it. Discussion followed.

Council Member Burns asked about the negative amount in Land Management. Mr. Nkwo reviewed the details.

Council Member Pereira said that she was not opposed to Capital Funding for major projects. She said that she felt that this was a slush fund. She would rather have OPED come to the Council and they can justify it. She said that she wanted to be responsible for taxpayers.

The discussion then moved to the Capital Budget.

Council Member McCarthy suggested that they look at establishing a Friends of Seaside Park group that could look into the Perry Memorial Arch and research possible grants. He said that the project could wait for a year. Council Member Newton replied that he had been told that the arch was in such poor condition, they did not want to wait. Council Member McCarthy said that he wanted to see the safety report on the Arch.

Mr. Flatto said that because the State had not come through with some of the funding for Bassick, they would have to cut this list. Council Member Newton said that Mr. Flatto should sit down with OPED and discuss this issue.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked about the Trumbull Garden Improvement Project. Mr. Nkwo said that this was in a prior year.

Council Member Pereira said that there were a number of projects listed in the Capital Funding that were questionable. She said street paving was in the bonding. She asked why the LOCIP funding was not being used for paving as they have in the past. She also had concerns about the ITS replacements for telephones and computers because she did not remember any discussions on this. She asked if anyone would be presenting on the WPCA budget.

Mr. Nkwo said he could present information about the ITS request. He said that this was an indication of needs and not necessarily a request for bonding.

Council Member Pereira said that they had funding from AARPA money. Mr. Flatto said that they only can use the money for cyber security.

Council Member Newton pointed out that many of the reasons that the roads are so bad was because the utilities come in and rip them up after they have been paved. It will be important to hold the utilities accountable for this.

Council Member Pereira said that they had torn up her streets and then they patch it with asphalt and it needs to be paved completely. She had been told by Mr. Urquidi that they will be going on a tour to look at the streets and what needs to be done.

Council Member McCarthy said that they were working on the ordinance requiring the companies to go curb to curb rather than just the area they dig up.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the \$8 million that the City had to bond for Bassick. He suggested that they consider doing a TANS to cover the money. Mr. Flatto said that he was not sure when the State would release the funding. The discussion moved to the details of bonding \$8 million followed by an additional \$16 million for the construction.

Council Member Pereira asked about the Federal Major Infrastructure Bill. Mr. Flatto said that they have been recommending projects, but he did not see any paving on the proposed list. Council Member Pereira said that they had received \$110 million and pointed out that there was \$75 million that had not been assigned yet. Mr. Flatto said that it was for a three year period. Mr. Gaudett said that it was actually about \$34 million over the three year period. They have allocated \$8 million for the WPCA project. He then continued to give a brief overview. Mr. Flatto said that he was planning on giving the Committee an update on this after the budget had been completed.

Council Member McCarthy asked how the Committee was planning to fit the Police Department into the schedule. Council Member Newton said that they were trying to figure it out. Council Member McCarthy said that they should be there at the April 30th meeting and they could present at 4 p.m.

Council Member Herron said that they should not do anything but deliberate and move forward. She said that they had conflicting stories about why Chief Garcia could not be there.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that if Chief Garcia couldn't come, she should have sent someone to represent the department. She agreed about the conflicting stories about why Chief Garcia could not be there.

Council Member Newton said that he agreed and they should move on.

Council Member Pereira said that it was frustrating with the Police but a very productive meeting to review the Capital Plan. She said that she had asked for a number of documents that she had not received, such as the CDBG breakout.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Telesco Secretarial Services