

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS  
COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
APRIL 21, 2022**

**ATTENDANCE:** Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Jeanette Herron, Mary McBride-Lee, Matthew McCarthy, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia

**OTHERS:** Council Member(s): A. Boyd, J. Cruz, F. Hodges, M. Pereira & M. Valle; T. Gaudett, Mayoral Aide; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Steve Auerbach, Atty. Mark Anastasi, Marilla Giacobbe, John Gomes, Assistant CAO; Linda Grace, Registrar of Voters; Janene Hawkins, CAO; Patricia Howard, Registrar of Voters; City Attorney Chris Meyer; Tamara Root, CAO's Office; Atty. Tyisha Toms; Barbara, iPhone-DNPH80W00DXT; iPhone-F17H820U0DXT; Call in User-1; 203-209-1058;203-257-2139,203-676-3501; 203-880-5666

**CALL TO ORDER**

Co-chair Newton called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

Co-chair Newton reminded everyone that this discussion was about the budget. Other Departmental matters should be discussed directly with the Department Heads.

**REGISTER OF VOTERS**

Mr. Nkwo said that there were six employees in the department and next year, there were no additional positions requested. Mr. Nkwo then reviewed the Appropriations Supplement.

Council Member Burns asked about the increase in ballot fees. Ms. Howard said that the only thing that they were in control of was the number of ballots they can order and they have reduced it to 80%.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked about Operational Expenses for poll workers. Mr. Flatto indicated where the line item for those workers was listed.

Council Member Pereira that her constituents had issues with registering and the office was not open on time. It happened with the previous Registrar of Voters and it is wrong to disenfranchise voters by delaying voters from receiving their absentee ballots.

Council Member Newton said that for reasons unknown, the Department of Motor Vehicles switched a large number of Democrats to Independents. It caused many problems across the City.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that if there is a problem in a Department, it would be important to discuss it with the Department heads rather than making a broad statement in the Budget meeting. She added that there were some of her constituents who discovered that they were not registered as Democrats.

Ms. Howard said that nine times out of ten, voters will come into the office and when they look at the card, the individual filled out the card at the Motor Vehicles. If someone is registered to vote with a party, they should not fill out the Motor Vehicles voter registration card.

If there is a problem about the Department's work, they should contact the Department head about the issue in the office so that they can make the changes.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that she was concerned that this was a Budget and Appropriations Committee meeting for the budget. There should not be other concerns discussed. Those issues can be addressed at another informational meeting or discussed directly with the Department heads during an appointment. Discussions are getting out of hand. The office does their job. If they need more help, they should ask.

Council Member Pereira said that her issue was about the budget. She said that she had started raising this issue about the DMV in 2018 and again in 2019. Council Member Newton said that if the issue has to do with the budget, then they can discuss it.

Council Member Pereira said that this department needs additional training to address problems. Mr. Nkwo indicated where the line item was for training on the spreadsheet. Discussion followed about the details about the grant funding was allocated.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that in the last election, if it wasn't for the Registrar of Voters Office, she would have dropped out of the race. They kept encouraging her and she wished to thank them. Ms. Howard said that Ms. Grace had helped those who needed it and having the temporary workers available was also a big help.

Council Member McCarthy asked everyone to stick to the budget.

### **CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE**

Council Member Burns directed everyone to page 80 of the budget book. Mr. Nkwo gave a brief overview of the spreadsheet.

Council Member Newton asked where the outside attorney line item was. NN indicated where it was in the Budget.

Council Member McCarthy asked if only the paralegals handle the FOIA requests. Atty. Bohannon said that there was an Associate City Attorney that is responsible for the FOIA compliance. They are looking for a paralegal to assist with this.

Council Member McCarthy asked if there was a breakdown of what the various attorneys handled. Atty. Bohannon said that Atty. Meyer is the City Attorney and oversees the entire office. Atty. Ouellette handles personal injury. Atty Bohannon said he himself was responsible for administrative duties, civil rights defense and labor matters along with occasional significant personal injury matters.

Council Member McCarthy said that he would like a listing of all the attorneys including the three outside contract attorneys. He said that he believed that this was 14 attorneys.

Atty. Bohannon said that at the end of the previous administration, they had 13 attorneys but were now down two attorneys from December 2105.

Council Member McCarthy said that every year, the Legal Services Line item and the Litigation Line item have large numbers. He said that people were wondering why that line item was so high. He asked if they could do as much in house legal work as possible to keep the amount down.

Atty. Bohannon explained that the City has developed trusted long-term relationships with competent outside trial attorneys. The City is receiving top level legal representation at a reduced rate because of the long-standing relationships.

Atty. Bohannon said that Council Member Pereira was correct in her statement at another meeting where she noted the City is being subjected to more and more civil rights lawsuits and have to pay out. It is a national trend. The City Attorney's Office is dealing with this by handling the conflicts early on. Discussion followed.

Council Member McCarthy said that there was a line item transfer from the Attorney's Office to OPED. Mr. Nkwo said that it had to do with a capital project legal service. Mr. Flatto said that there are times when OPED needs specialized legal counsel.

Council Member Newton asked about having an attorney to deal with environmental issues. Atty. Bohannon said that it depends on the case. Atty. Bohannon said that Atty. Pacacha had negotiated a number of environmental cases, but there are still times when outside specialized counsel are needed.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that people sue the City when something happens. Atty. Bohannon said that the State requires the City to defend employees in the performance of their jobs. However, they do not defend those who have engaged in willful misconduct. Atty. Bohannon then gave an overview of how this is handled.

Council Member Newton said that the Attorney's Office had originally represented the former Police Chief and former Personnel Director. When it was discovered they had violated the law, the City required them to return the cost of defense. That money was received and placed in the General Fund.

Council Member Pereira said that Atty. Bohannon had introduced himself as a Deputy City Attorney but there was no listing for this in the budget. Council Member Newton said that she had brought this issue up before. Council Member Pereira said that the position was not listed in the budget in the Personnel Summary. The Charter does not allow the City Attorney, the Deputy City Attorney or Assistants to be members of a bargaining unit. Atty. Bohannon is a member of a bargaining unit and this is a problem. Discussion followed.

Council Member Pereira said that she wished to be clear on her comments from the other night. Council Member Pereira said that she does not care about the national trend, she cares about the massive settlements including another one on the horizon that are related to Civil Rights violations. The taxpayers are paying 100% of those costs and settlements.

She said that she was totally opposed to any additional staff since it is the largest City Attorney's Office in the State. The only City Attorney's Office that is paid more is in Greenwich. The FOI issue has been created by the City Attorney's Office. There is no requirement under the Act to submit requests through the portal. She said that she refuses to submit requests through the portal because the statute says that an individual can walk into the office during normal business hours and any readily available records such as signed contracts, minutes, agendas or invoices should be available.

Council Member Pereira said that she had a copy of a memorandum that stated that the staff should not give anything directly to a City Council Member or the public. They have to contact one individual about the request. Council Member Pereira said that this contradicts the statute. She said that creating this portal was both bizarre and offensive to her. She said that she had been waiting for information on matters pertaining to the former Chief of Police and those had been deleted. She never received the documents. She stated she continues to file a number of FOI complaints and has a hearing scheduled for next week.

Council Member Pereira repeated that the portal issue is not required and they should just hand the individuals the records they request. She said that the records for a public agency must be kept in that public agency's office. It is all unlawful.

Council Member Pereira said that she could not wait until 2023 when the office issues will be addressed.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the personal property claims attorney and the personal property budget line as listed on page 85. Atty. Bohannon gave an overview of the two lines to the Committee.

### CAO

Council Member Burns directed everyone to page 128. Ms. Hawkins gave a brief overview of the organization chart. Ms. Hawkins then narrated a Power Point Presentation. She said that they were trying to fill the vacant positions. A number of employees have left for other positions and still others have retired.

Council Member Burns then asked about the Police/Health Department partnership, which Ms. Hawkins reviewed with him. Council Member Burns said that he had wished they had been included in the discussions. Ms. Hawkins then said she would forward him the report from the group that they were using as a model for the program.

Council Member Newton asked for confirmation that the funding was allocated for the vacant positions. Mr. Nkwo said that they had funding allocated.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the vacancies and the reasons for some of the positions. Ms. Hawkins said that she would prefer to discuss this offline.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked about the arrangement with Mr. DeCarlo. Council Member Burns said that Mr. DeCarlo was working with him and that there would be very minimal cost.

Council Member Pereira said that the documentation says that they hired a Deputy Director of Health, but there is no listing for a Deputy Director of Health in the current year's budget. This is unlawful. There never was an approval or appropriation of money for a Deputy Director of Health. Hiring for that position is problematic.

Council Member Pereira added that all the Special Project Coordinators need to be eliminated. She stated that the Democratic Town Committee Chair's niece had been hired for one of the positions. Council Member Newton said that the question was not appropriate. Council Member Pereira said that she could not wait until 2024 when there is a new Mayor.

Council Member McCarthy asked if there was a plan to handle the mass exodus from the Police Department. Ms. Hawkins said that they were working hard to recruit and train officers. Presently, they do not have a good Police Department image. There are many factors including the benefits and qualifications.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the performance reviews for the staff. Ms. Hawkins said that it was up to the individual directors to evaluate their employees along with Personnel. Council Member McCarthy asked if the employee reviews should be mandatory. Ms. Hawkins said that she felt that it may be necessary because growth is important. However, it is important to remember the employees are union members and there are contracts in place.

Council Member Newton said that when he was first on the Council with Mayor Paoletta, the question was asked about the number of 480 officer to fully staff the Police Department. That question has never been answered. He added that they also have to consider what is going on across the country with police officers. He also noted that under the previous administration, there had not been any new police officers hired.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that there had been several police training classes during the previous administration. She said that the staffing number was not part of the national number, but she asked at the National League of Cities and was told that no one knows where that staffing number came from.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that having the reviews could be included in the union contracts, but it has to be done when a new contract is being negotiated.

Council Member Cruz spoke about his frustration regarding the efforts that they made to fund the Police and Social Services partnership program. He spoke about the homeless population that are now in the street. It is time to get serious about this issue.

Council Member McBride-Lee said she would like to see the Deputy Director of Health position filled. She said that she would like more information on the move into the new building. Ms. Hawkins confirmed that the Deputy Director position had been filled.

Council Member Burns said that as a former teacher and a union member, if the union wanted to let a problematic member go, they found a way.

Council Member Burns said that they had spoken with the ITS Director at the previous meeting. He asked if they were moving to measurable outcomes. Ms. Hawkins said that they were and spoke about the key indicators and the use of a dashboard. It is critical to move forward with the technology.

Council Member Burns said that this was wonderful to hear. He added that when there is measurable data, it can be used to deal with problematic employees.

Council Member Newton asked if the vacant positions were ones that were tested. Council Member Newton said that it would be good to know which positions were tested or which ones were appointed.

Council Member McCarthy said that he was still hearing about issues with the Building Department permits. Ms. Hawkins said that they had scheduled a meeting about this with the Acting Director, OPED and others.

Council Member McCarthy said that the BOE had done an RFP for a company to come in to evaluate how they are doing with Special Education. He wished to know if they would be doing something like this in the Building Department. Ms. Hawkins said that they were actually in the process of working on this.

Council Member Cruz thanked Council Member Newton for attending CCAR (Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery) because it encourages everyone.

Council Member Newton thanked Ms. Hawkins for her time and attention

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED UNION STEPS AS EXHIBIT 04-21-2022-A.**

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

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

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED REGISTRAR OF VOTERS PRESENTATION AS EXHIBIT 04-21-2022-B.**

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

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

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED CAO'S PRESENTATION AS EXHIBIT 04-21-2022-C.**

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

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

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED CAO VACANCIES/FILLED POSITIONS REPORT AS EXHIBIT 04-21-2022-D.**

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

Council Member McCarthy asked if the document would be forwarded to the other members. Council Member Burns said that he thought he had already sent it.

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

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED ITS PRESENTATION AS EXHIBIT 04-21-2022-E.**

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

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

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

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

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services