

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 23, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair;
Mary McBride-Lee, Matthew McCarthy, Tyler Mack,
AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia (10:40 a.m.)

OTHERS: Council President A. Nieves; Council Member(s): M. Lyons & M. Pereira;
Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Acting Fire
Chief L. Edwards; Acting Deputy Fire Chief Jeff Cronin; Deputy Fire
Chief J. Buck; Scott Appleby, EOC Director; iPhone-DNPH80W00DXT;
203-209-1058; 203-880-5666

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Newton called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. A quorum was present. He noted that Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia and Herron had excused absences.

Council Member Newton said that this was a budget meeting and they were going to keep the discussion focused on the budget. Any issues about the department management should be done offline.

EOC

Council Member Burns directed everyone's attention to page 192. Mr. Nkwo then reviewed the details of the Personnel Summary.

Council Member McCarthy asked about a State certification that would increase the State allocations to the EOC. Mr. Nkwo said that they had looked into it and cautioned the Council that the requirements were expensive. He said that he had the analysis and would send it to the Committee.

Council Member Pereira said that if there was a new Mayor in 2024, she would recommend that Mr. Appleby be the only staff member retained because she found him competent.

Council Member Pereira asked about the \$19,000 increase for the Director of Emergency Services and wished to know the justification for this because it is over a 17% increase in salary.

Mr. Nkwo said that the current staff member had been in an "Acting" position for a long time and was not properly compensated. The staff member was in the union.

Mr. Appleby said that he was the Director of Public Safety and Communications. Mr. Nkwo said that the Director of Emergency Services was filled with an “Acting” staff member with the responsibilities of the position.

Council Member Burns said that the Communications position had not been funded for a number of years.

Council Member Pereira said that there was no Public Safety Director position listed in the budget. Mr. Nkwo said that the Director of Emergency Services had been filling the position of Public Safety Director. Discussion followed.

Council Member Pereira said that Mr. Amado was doing two jobs that were listed in the Charter, but was only being paid one salary.

Council Member Newton noted that the Charter was old and it is important to change with the times. He agreed with Council Member Pereira about Mr. Amado’s position. Mr. Nkwo reviewed the details.

Council Member Burns said that there were three vacancies in the Department. Mr. Appleby said that the three positions had been filled. There are six vacancies for the TCOs but they were looking to fill them in the next month or so.

Council Member Pereira said that this was the third consecutive years when they had six vacancies. She pointed out that there was the same number of positions vacant from year to year and wished to know if this was an indication that they did not need those positions. Mr. Appleby said that there were two factors, burn out and retirements. He said that right now, there were some TCOs that had been there for 20 or 25 years and the senior employees will be retiring. He said that he hoped to hire new staff that will stay as long.

Council Member Pereira said Mr. Appleby had proven that he runs a good department. She said she felt they could function without those six positions and they could reinvest the money elsewhere. She added that the US Constitution and the State Constitution were also old but they have to abide by them.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she objects to the idea that people could “do more with less” because that ends up with people going beyond the call of duty and that is unfair. She noted that Mr. Appleby had been filling two positions but only paid for one and this was not right.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that Mr. Appleby had done a very good job and she was very proud of him. She asked for clarification on one of the positions. Mr. Appleby said that it was for a 9-1-1 operator. Council Member McBride-Lee asked if it would be posted. Mr. Appleby said that it would.

Council Member Newton asked about the burn out rate. Mr. Appleby said that during COVID, the staff members ended up dealing with family members who were ill. People will step up to help out, but there comes a point when they say, “I can’t do this anymore.”

Council Member Newton said that they had expanded their roles because of the Police Accountability program that add social workers to the mix. He said that they should definitely consider keeping and filling those positions.

Council Member McCarthy asked about increases in the Operational Accounts on page 196. Mr. Nkwo reviewed the details with him. Mr. Nkwo said that with all due respect, Mr. Appleby was not a computer programmer and there had been a meeting the previous day about transferring the software line item to ITS.

Discussion followed about how the budget was set up. Mr. Nkwo explained that in the past the Committee wanted to know exactly what the cost was for each department, including general utilities. Mr. Nkwo said that he could run a special report on the cost break outs.

Council Member Newton said that he prefers the way that this is handled because transferring all the utilities to Public Facilities would overwhelm the staff member who would have to process all this.

Council Member Pereira asked about page 196 and mentioned that by eliminating the six vacancies, they could see significant savings.

Council Member Pereira said there were so many people that were tenured and noted that the longevity pay had increased sharply. Council Member Pereira said that she had a great deal of respect for the Director, but that it was clear to her there were savings that could be had by eliminating the positions.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia joined the meeting at 10:40 a.m.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she did not want to ever be in the position where someone calls 9-1-1 and there is no answer. There are lives on the line. It is very important to fill those positions.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT/EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS BUDGET REVIEW AS EXHIBIT 04-23-22-A.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Appleby then narrated his PowerPoint Presentation. He commented that he agreed with Mr. Nkwo about doing a return-on-investment analysis on the State certification. Bridgeport and Meriden are the two municipalities that do not have this certification and the State is really promoting this program.

Council Member Burns asked about the overtime. Mr. Appleby said that once they filled the vacancies, the overtime decreased.

Council Member Newton thanked Mr. Appleby and his staff for their hard work.

Council Member Lyons asked if the EOC records all the 9-1-1 calls. Mr. Appleby said that they are required to record the calls and store the recording for 18 months. He said that they do review problematic call recordings and work on improving the service.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that this is one of the departments like Police and Fire that should not be decreased. She said that the department is a great department. When she travels for NRC, this department is one that is highlighted.

Council Member Pereira asked if non-emergency calls are also archived for 18 months. Mr. Appleby said that all the lines that come into the Emergency Center are recorded. There have been incidents when emergency calls come into the non-emergency number.

Council Member Pereira said that she appreciated Mr. Appleby because he will always tell her that he will look into issues that he may not have information on.

Council Member Burns asked for an update on the Social Service unit. Mr. Appleby said that they were working with the Health Department on this project. The training is going forward. He added that Ms. Jackson-Shaheed already had the line item in her budget. Now it just a matter of working with the Fire, Police and Health Departments.

Council Member Burns said that he felt that Mr. Appleby had done an excellent job with handling the FEMA storm applications.

The discussion moved to the Capital Plan Requests. Mr. Nkwo pointed out that the Fusion Center was not hooked up to the emergency center and this was listed in the project. Discussion followed about how the request would be handled.

Council Member Pereira said that she does not feel that technology or vehicles should be part of a bonding package. She noted that there were some blind and/or mute residents and wished to know if the technology accommodates for this. Mr. Appleby said that each of the residents should have been provided with equipment and they would contact the service providers who would then contact the Emergency Center and coordinate through them.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED BRIDGEPORT FIRE DEPARTMENT FY2023 BUDGET PRESENTATION AS EXHIBIT 04-23-22-B.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Acting Fire Chief Edwards then narrated his PowerPoint presentation.

Council Member McCarthy thanked Acting Chief Edwards for showing up for the presentation. He said that he had a medical emergency recently and the Fire Department had responded. He thanked them for their assistance.

Council Member McCarthy asked that Mr. Nkwo include a total at the bottom of the page.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked what they would need to be fully staffed. Acting Chief Edwards reviewed the vacancies and said that they could use two more Fire Inspectors, but realized that he did not expect to be able to hire two more. Discussion followed about egress inspections.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked about the upcoming exams. Acting Chief Lance said that there was an upcoming lieutenant's exam scheduled.

Council Member McCarthy asked if there had been any consideration regarding a vacant lot next to one of the fire houses. He felt that they should be working on this to keep the station open.

Council Member Pereira asked Acting Chief Edwards how long he had been an Acting Fire Chief. Acting Chief Edwards said it had been since June 2020. Council Member Pereira said that this was "unacceptable".

Council Member Pereira asked about the expected retirements and the 18 current vacancies. She said that they were trying to add another Fire Captain after adding a Fire Lieutenant last year. Council Member Pereira wished to know how many vacancies they would have.

Acting Chief Edwards said that if they lose 20, it will take the staffing down from 248 to 220. If this happens, they will be at the absolute minimum required staffing level.

Council Member Burns said that the Budget and Appropriations Committee receives quarterly reports from the Fire Department and the Police Department. He then brought up the recent Fire Department Vacancies list on screen. It includes those who have recently left, employees that had 25 years of service and those who were on leave.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED CURRENT STAFFING VACANCIES AS EXHIBIT 04-23-2022-C.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Acting Chief Edwards said that they immediate create a vacancy any time the staff level drops below 62. When they are below 62, it increases the overtime budget.

Council Member Pereira said that for the purposes of the budget book, a vacancy is a position that is not filled but is budgeted for. She said that there were 18 vacancies in the book, three of

which were listed at the administrative level. She said that she was trying to determine whether the City would be looking at over 40 vacancies. Acting Chief Edwards reviewed the various positions with her. He said that there could be close to 40 vacancies.

Council Member Pereira said that on page 181, there should be significant decreases in MERF and Medicare because they would be filling high salary step positions with new staff at a lower salary step. This will affect the benefits also. However, the budget reflects a significant increase in MERF and benefits. There should be savings on the fringe and salaries.

In the 2020 budget, the City Council appropriated \$5,725,000 for overtime, but the Department only spent \$23,626. Council Member Pereira wished to know where the \$5 million dollars went.

Mr. Nkwo directed her to page 183 and reviewed where the line items were.

Council Member Lyons asked about the number of fire inspectors the Department needs. Fire Chief Edwards said that there was no municipality in the State that has enough Inspectors to meet the State mandates.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia reminded everyone that the budget book was created in January and the Council Members receive the books in April.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked if the City Attorney's Office was present for the meetings. Deputy Chief Buck explained that the City Attorneys do not attend the Committee meetings, but the minutes were forwarded to both the City Attorney's Office and the State Fire Marshal for legal review.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked about the salary differential for the staff who were in "Acting" positions.

Council Member Newton said that he takes exception when people imply that there were hidden agendas or conspiracies in the budget. He said that both he and Council Member Burns review the budget and understand it. That is also the reason why Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo are present to explain the details. While the Council Members may not like the format, it does not mean there is a hidden agendas or conspiracy underway.

Council Member Burns requested that they focus on budget questions.

Council Member Pereira said that the new Zoning regulations will allow basement apartments that don't have extra entrances and egress.

Mr. Nkwo then reviewed the Capital Budget Requests. Acting Chief Edwards said that they cannot continue to use equipment that was over 25 years old.

The discussion then moved to a parcel that was near one of the fire stations.

Council Member Burns asked if there was any possible way to combine the services. He was told that there had been some municipalities that had done this and it had worked out very well.

Council Member Pereira asked about the \$1,650,000 for fire equipment. She said that the CDBG funding ended up with excess funding in the Public Facilities Grant. She suggested that they consider that funding and noted that if there were funds that were not expended, it goes back to the CDBG for reallocation. Discussion followed about the details.

At 12:49 p.m., the Zoom call disconnected. Council Member Burns later stated that the meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services