

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS  
COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
APRIL 28, 2022**

**ATTENDANCE:** Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Jeanette Herron, Tyler Mack, Matthew McCarthy, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia

**OTHERS:** Council Member(s): J. Cruz, J. Herron, M. Pereira & R. Roman-Christy; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Lisa Farlow, Assistant Purchasing Agent; Marie Heller, Department on Aging Director; Ebony Jackson-Shaheed, Health and Social Services Director; Veronica Jones, Tax Collector; Amy Lehaney, Deputy Director of Health, Tammy Papa, Youth Services Director, Larry Robinson, Veteran Affairs Director; Patty Ulatowski, Archives & Records Director; Call in User-1; iPad-GG7F9Q19C0R6Q19C; iPhone-DNPH80W00DXT; iPhone- F17H820U0DXT

**CALL TO ORDER**

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. A quorum was present.

Co-chair Newton thanked everyone for attending. He reminded everyone that the discussions should be respectful and focused on the budget.

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed greeted the Council Members and then narrated a PowerPoint presentation.

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES 2022-2023 AS EXHIBIT 04-28-2022-A.**

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

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

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed reviewed the Health Department 2021-2026 Five Year Service Indicators including completing the accreditation, community education, vaccinations, and a department re-organization.

She then displayed a slide listing the various departments which are: the Communicable Disease Clinic, Environmental (Housing Code/Anti-blight, Lead, Weights and Measures) Public Health Emergency Preparedness, Social Services (Youth Services, Aging, Disabilities, Veterans) and Vital Records. She reminded everyone that the Health Department is a regulatory agency.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed then listed the 2021-2022 Major Accomplishments including grants received, the addition of social work positions, establishment of a research division and vaccine program.

The next topic presented was the 2021-2022 Increased Revenue. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the department had received just over \$400,000 in vaccine reimbursement and this money is going directly into the General Fund. They expect there will be a total of \$900,000 in vaccine reimbursements.

Council Member McCarthy asked for clarification on the blight fines. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the Hearing Officer can determine the actual fine but they do not have a fixed percentage amount of that fine which is returned to the City.

Council Member McCarthy said that if the City is expending funds to clean up a property, the City should be putting a lien on the property for the cost of the clean-up. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the process was complicated and suggested Council Member McCarthy come in and speak with Ms. Gains about this.

Council Member McCarthy said that he felt that the blight fines being included in the revenue should be removed. Discussion followed.

Council Member McCarthy asked if there was data that shows what the Housing Officers do on a daily basis. Council Member Burns suggested that they wait until the portion of the presentation on the Housing Code comes up.

Council Member Newton asked if they should consider an ordinance that would set a guaranteed 50% cost recovery on blight fines. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the Department does put liens on properties and said that she would send the information to Council Member Newton.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that in the past, the City had placed liens on properties after several notifications had been sent. Some of the fine money went into the General Fund, but another portion of the funds remained in the Blight account. Council Member Herron said that it had taken several attempt to have a blighted property taken care of in her District.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed then spoke about the request for the Public Health nurse, because it became evident during the pandemic that the Department needed the position. She said that they had to pull several school nurses in to help with the vaccines.

The discussion then moved to the Youth Services. Ms. Papa said that she was coming up on 29 years of service with the City and that it would be important to have a Deputy Lighthouse Director position ready to go.

Council Member McCarthy said that he did not see these positions in the budget. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed explained that it was her first year doing this and they had listed the requests in another section that was not reflected in the budget. Discussion followed.

Council Member McCarthy asked Ms. Jackson-Shaheed if she will be doing job reviews with the staff. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she had a schedule for job reviews for her staff.

Council Member McCarthy said that he had been told that there were political appointments in Public Facilities and was also told that there were political appointments in the Health Department. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she was not aware of any political appointments in her department.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked if the social workers would be placed with the Police Department or the Health Department. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they would have the Task Force duties as well as other social work duties like case management. Details are still under discussion.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked if the funding for the positions had been allocated already or if they were requesting funding for those positions. Mr. Nkwo said that the positions were listed under Health and Social Services on page 402 and were funded.

Council Member Cruz said that there were two candidates for the position and he wished to know why the Hispanic candidate was not selected. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she had chosen the candidate that she felt was the best qualified.

Council Member Cruz said that he was disappointed that the Hispanic candidate was not chosen. He stated that Ms. Jackson-Shaheed was not making an effort to hire diverse staff. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they do have several staff members who speak multiple languages and they do pay attention to diversity.

Council Member Pereira asked about the first position and the details of the salary. Mr. Nkwo reviewed the details with her and he noted that part of the salary is from grant funding.

Council Member Pereira said that there was a Deputy Director of Health being spoken about and she did not see it in the budget. Mr. Nkwo said that he had reached an agreement with the Supervisor's Union regarding this position. It is listed on page 353 under Environmental.

Council Member Pereira said that this was not the job title and wished to know why it does not match the budget listing job title. She said that if there was a specific title in a Union MOU, that was the title that needed to be in the budget. Mr. Nkwo said that the previous employee that had filled the position was a certified sanitarian and that was why they were listed in the Environmental Health Department.

Council Member Pereira said that she felt that they were shifting titles and not being clear. Mr. Nkwo said that the administration had decided to fill the position after the budget had been assembled. Council Member Burns asked that the job title be changed. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she would like to see the position moved to the Administration section of the budget.

Council Member McCarthy asked why they had so many different departments with one or two employees. Mr. Nkwo explained that in the past it created confusion with the Department of Aging, Weights and Measures and Veterans all listed in the same Department.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that the division of the Departments was needed because the State and Federal government require that level of record keeping for grant funding.

Council Member Burns asked about the surveillance software and the costs associated with it. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that one package was statistical software for data and the other software program was for communicable diseases.

Mr. Flatto said that it took a lot of work to set up the data for the Federal Government for the vaccine reimbursements.

Council Member Newton said that they had asked Mr. Nkwo to make the budget simpler and reduce the page flipping. Mr. Nkwo said that the Committee was going out of sequence and the budget was laid out sequentially.

Council Member Pereira asked about the personnel on page 338. Council Member Pereira asked about the part time designation for the Vital Records Clerk. Mr. Nkwo explained that the staff member works as the Vital Records Clerk and as the Archivist. Ms. Ulatowski said that they were already up to 94% for revenue for this year.

Ms. Ulatowski said that there had been an increase in marriage licenses because New York State has made it difficult to get a marriage license so people are taking the train into Bridgeport to get the licenses and get married in Bridgeport.

A question was asked about the storage of the archives. She said that there was a facility in Stratford where the records could be stored. There was a recent flood on the lower level that barely missed the archives. She said that she was the only archivist and was the only one that had training, so they had requested her to create a succession plan.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the cost of the transferal project. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that there had been a grant for digitizing the land records.

Council Member Pereira said that the documents in the Archives must be preserved and the area has light bulbs dangling from wires. She asked if there was money for preserving the records. Mr. Nkwo indicated where the funds were available.

Council Member Pereira said that currently, they make appointments to view the documentation. She wished to know how someone would have access to the material if they were moved to Stratford. Ms. Ulatowski said that they would use the same type of appointment process.

The discussion then moved to the reimbursements for the vaccines.

Council Member Pereira asked about the increase in the salary for the Nurse Practitioner. Mr. Nkwo said that the nurses' contract was approved after three years and this was the accumulated increase.

The Committee then reviewed the appropriations and Environmental Health on page 252.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked about the location of a catering hall and the poultry license. Mr. Nkwo said that there were three levels of licenses. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she would get back to Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia with that information.

Council Member McCarthy asked if the revenue from the cannabis sales would be place in this category. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that if it was a food item that was edible, it would go in this category. Mr. Nkwo said that he had no problem with the revenue being included in this category.

Council Member Pereira asked about the poultry licenses. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed asked if these were at residential properties. She said that she was not issuing poultry licenses. Council Member Burns said that the previous administration had made it possible for individuals to have up to four chickens.

Council Member Pereira asked why the sanitarian was broken out into two budget lines. Mr. Nkwo said that there were different classifications. Council Member Pereira said that she had worked with unions before and that she had never seen the same position being listed in multiple bargaining units.

The discussion moved to the Housing Code Department. Mr. Nkwo noted that the Special Project Manager had been transferred to the Public Facilities.

Council Member McCarthy said that they were looking for places where they could save money. He asked if there were any positions that they could eliminate without harming the department. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she did not think they could eliminate any of the positions. She explained that they have employees that were filling three jobs. They are trying to cross train the staff so that an employee who was a lead inspector, could also be qualified to do anti-blight inspections or housing code inspections in the same trip.

Council Member McCarthy asked if they have data on what the individuals were doing. He said that he sees Toters left on the street, or blight as he drives around the City. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed explained that the residents have 24 hours to remove the Toters from the street and Council Member McCarthy may be seeing the Toter in that 24 hour period. Right now they only have one person handling Toters for the entire City. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they are trying to be more efficient with their resources.

Discussion followed about sending letters to those who put items in the Toters that were not allowed and this letter would be followed by fines.

Council Member Newton said that there were probably hundreds of houses with additions done without permits. He said that the Housing Code Department could generate more revenue.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that the Housing Code inspectors were authorized to go to court if there was an issue. She also asked if there were staggered hours. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they do not have staggered hours. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia requested they look into this.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked if the Department still had the authority to enter residences. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they need to have the permission of the landlord.

Council Member Herron said that in her previous renting experience, she felt that the Health Department was a bare bones department. They need more housing code inspectors.

Council Member Pereira said that in the 2020-2021 budget, they had increased the budget by 100% but there was very little increase in the revenue. She said that she did not believe the Health Department was responsible for illegal renovations because it should be under the Building Department.

Council Member Pereira said that the Toters inspector should be under Sanitation. She said that there were areas where the Toters were left out all week. It makes the area look terrible. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed agreed and said that she was willing to speak with Public Facilities.

Council Member Pereira said that when they have to send staff to clean up a property, that cost should be charged back to the Public Facilities. She asked whether an appeal officer could reduce or waive the fines. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that this was so. Council Member Pereira said that she felt that they should be able to get back the cost of the man power that it took to clean up the property.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that basically the Health Department is the administrative arm and the Public Facilities staff actually does the labor.

Council Member Pereira said that if the lien is waived, it is the Public Facilities Department that loses the income.

Council Member Burns cautioned everyone to be careful because he was aware of a situation where an abusive blight call had been made.

Council Member McCarthy said that he did not see a line item for housing code violations or blight violation fines. Mr. Nkwo said that there was a revolving fund in Blight where the fines went so that they would have funds to clean up the next property.

Council Member McCarthy asked Ms. Jackson-Shaheed if she was happy with the output for this department. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she would prefer to evaluate each employee on an individual basis.

Council Member Newton said that Public Facilities and the Health Department work together and there is a very specific process that has to be followed in order to allow the Blight crew to go onto private property.

Council Member Pereira said that she had not gotten an answer to her earlier question about how much revenue was being generated through the Housing Code Inspections and in Blight. She said that they have to account for the revenue. Mr. Nkwo indicated the line item where the funds were.

Council Member Pereira said that there was someone in the Health Department that has over 30 units of rental properties. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed replied that if there was an issue, they would follow the same process that they would do for anyone else. Council Member Pereira said that the tenant was afraid of retaliation. It is highly inappropriate to have to report their landlord.

The discussion moved to lead prevention. Mr. Nkwo then gave an overview of the department.

Council Member Newton pointed out that there were staff in Public Works along with other City employees that own properties in the City.

Council Member Burns said that the consensus was that this was a well-run department.

The discussion moved to Persons with Disabilities. Council Member Burns asked if the staff member reports to Ms. Jackson-Shaheed. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the staff member report to Veteran's Affairs.

Council Member Pereira asked what the Human Services position did. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they would like to dissolve the position and move the employee over into the Social Services department. Discussion followed.

Council Member Pereira said that Bridgeport has a massive number of elderly and disabled residents and the department is only a part time position. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that this was one of the positions that they were looking to reorganize.

The Committee then reviewed the Department of Aging and the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Council Member Pereira asked why they did not merge the Department of Aging, Persons with Disabilities and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Nkwo stated that the separation was established to fulfill grant requirements. Council Member Pereira said that they never did this at the Board of Education.

The next Department that was reviewed was the Lighthouse Program. Mr. Nkwo then gave a brief overview of the program. Ms. Papa said that there were no new positions in the department. She said that the Youth Service Bureau (YSB) position would move over to the Social Service Department. She said that she does not have the social service expertise to help with the calls from families about youth at risk that have been referred to the department. Many times, the families or the youth have multiple issues.

Council Member Pereira said that Ms. Papa was asking to have the Special Project Manager moved from the grant funding to the regular Social Service department. Council Member Pereira then went on to say she had an issue with the fact that the Lighthouse Program had taken in over \$1 million in parent fees but she never saw it in the revenue lines.

Council Member Pereira said that she wished to know why the Lighthouse Program was getting referrals. She said that she was on the BOE for eight years and had never heard about this before. Ms. Papa said that the YSB was supposed to be the hub for referrals. The schools don't refer the students to her until they have exhausted their own resources. Often Ms. Papa said that she has to refer students to the Juvenile Review Board (JRB) or other resources.

Council Member Pereira said that the national average was over 200 students per social worker, but Ms. Papa mentioned that she has 30 students and is requesting a social worker to assist handling this.

Council Member Newton said that he felt that Ms. Papa was moving in the right direction and it was important to have people who could identify trauma and things like substance abuse for the police officers.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed then gave an overview of the Social Work Department that would include specialties like trauma, domestic abuse, incarceration and a variety of other skills. She said that the social workers will be working on follow up and case management. As the social workers become more skilled in their role, they will accompany the police officers on calls. Discussion followed.

Council Member Newton said that there had been a situation where an individual had accompanied an officer on a call. Council Member Burns said that the individual was a State employee, not a City employee.

Council Member Pereira said that she was told the program was going to be based on the Colorado model where the social worker was dispatched instead of a police officer. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed then reviewed the models that a consultant had produced for the Police Department. The consultants gave the City a listing of four or five models with a recommendation of which one would work best for the City. She said that the model will eventually result in the social workers going out on their assigned calls without the police, but not in the beginning.

Council Member Pereira asked for clarification on last year's budget where there were five positions, but it appears that there are now seven positions. Discussion followed.

### **FINANCE DEPARTMENT**

Council Member Burns directed everyone to page 32. Mr. Flatto said that he had a short presentation.

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED CITY OF BRIDGEPORT FINANCE 2022-2023 AS EXHIBIT 04-28-2022-B.**



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

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

Mr. Flatto then narrated his presentation. He introduced his staff members and gave a brief run down on the various departments as outlined in his PowerPoint presentation. He said that it was appalling to him how often Bridgeport is short-changed when Federal funds or State aid is appropriated.

Mr. Bill Gaffney addressed the Committee regarding the Grand List. He said that there were many people who were moving to the City. However, they are losing an appraiser by the end of the week. He said that he needs at least 3 full time people, but the work is getting done. He noted that there were a number of towns and cities that were looking for a Tax Assessor.

Mr. Flatto said that when the reassessment was done, the assessors had picked up on a number of residences that had work done without permits. They have photos and they are working on dealing with these problems.

Council Member Burns said that the Committee had heard from the public about the school budget and the information showing how Bridgeport was short changed. He also highlighted why Bridgeport does not have the money to give to the schools.

Mr. Flatto said that he had heard that the formula that the State was using for the Free Lunch program was not correct and that there may be more funding coming to the program.

Council Member Burns said that sports betting was coming to Connecticut and the Tribes will be operating those venues. Mr. Flatto said that he thought there would be a website operated by the Tribes but he would try to find out more definitive information on it.

Council Member Burns asked about the Port Jefferson Ferry revenue. Mr. Nkwo indicated where it should be in the budget. Mr. Flatto explained that this was the result of a recent court settlement.

A discussion followed about a historical position in the Treasurer's Department that may be swapped out for one in Accounting.

Council Member Pereira asked about the Debt Service Line. Mr. Flatto said that the State had changed the way that the payments were made for school construction. Now the figures in that line was the interest on the debt from Steel Point.

There was a brief discussion about the Print Shop. Council Member Pereira asked if there was another city that had a staffed print shop. Mr. Flatto said that the Print Shop also handles all of the BOE materials, which takes up about 60% of their work.

Council Member Pereira asked if the Council Members wanted flyers, could they have the Print Shop do the work. Mr. Flatto said that copies could be charged to their stipend cards.

The discussion then moved to the Purchasing Department. Mr. Flatto said that there would be some minor changes in the Ordinance for the Purchasing Department for greater efficiency and clarity.

Council Member Pereira said that changing the contracts from a three year term to a seven year term is not a minor change. Mr. Flatto said that the City Attorney had made that recommendation.

The discussion then moved to the PILOT programs. Council Member Pereira asked for a break out of the amounts of the tax breaks, including the Read's Arcade.

Council Member Burns asked about filling the Tax Assessor's position. Discussion followed.

Council Member Pereira said that the 3% cannabis rate sounded like a tax and should be included in this category. Mr. Nkwo said that he had read the law very carefully and placed it according to the State legislation.

Council Member Pereira asked about the clerical assistant position, which was allocated two years ago. She said that the position had never been filled. If the assistant had been filled, the assessor could have been out in the field.

Mr. Flatto said that there was no changes in the Treasurer's Department other than the potential move of a position to Accounting, which was previously mentioned.

Council Member Pereira asked where the Personal Property Tax revenue was. Mr. Flatto said that it was part of the Grand List this year. Mr. Flatto said that they were trying to be aggressive with chain stores and big box stores.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER MACK SECONDED.**

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

The meeting adjourned at 10:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services