

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JULY 11, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Scott Burns, Co-chair; Jeanette Herron, Matthew McCarthy, Tyler Mack, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia Mary McBride-Lee (6:25 p.m.)

OTHERS: Council Member(s): F. Hodges, M. Pereira & R. Smith; Eric Amado, Personnel Director; Andre Forde, Labor Relations Director; Lance Edwards, Acting Fire Chief; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Newton called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES:

• June 13, 2022 (Regular Meeting)

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE JUNE 13, 2022 REGULAR MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JUNE 13, 2022 REGULAR MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED WITH FOUR (4) IN FAVOR (BURNS, MCCARTHY, MACK, VIZZO-PANICCI) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (HERRON).**

Council Member Newton said that the Committee had requested some Department Directors to come before the Budget and Appropriations Committee to update the Committee on pending contracts.

PERSONNEL DIRECTOR ERIC AMADO AND LABOR RELATIONS DIRECTOR ANDRE FORDE TO PRESENT ON POTENTIAL BUDGETARY IMPACT OF NEW CONTRACTS AND PENDING HIRES WITH POLICE, FIRE, AND OTHER UNIONS. IMPACT OF INFLATION MAY ALSO BE DISCUSSED.

Mr. Amado introduced Mr. Forde, who is the new Labor Relations Director.

Mr. Forde said that he would be focused on building new relationships with the union leaders and senior management. He added that Mr. Amado's leadership has proven that team work was the key to good management.

Council Member Burns said that the Committee wished to be updated since there were two service contracts coming up, along with ASFME. He also expressed concerns about the projected inflation and pending hires.

Council Member Newton said that the Committee should not be discussing contracts details since negotiations may be underway. When the contracts are ready for approval, the Committee will be able to ask questions. Council Member Newton said that everyone should be respectful to one another.

Council Member McCarthy said that they could not get an idea of what the upcoming contracts would be like without details. Council Member Newton said that they were just looking for general information and an overview of the upcoming contracts.

Council Member Herron said that she would be very cautious about discussing any numbers. She suggested that OPM could inform the Committee what their projections were.

Mr. Amado said that both he and Mr. Forde appreciate the opportunity to discuss the contracts with the Committee, but he would be speaking only in generalities. He said that the agreements have been working well. There have been some conversations with Police and Fire, and some portion of LIUNA. Negotiations are underway for some of the contracts. The Fire contract is in arbitration along with NAGE and the various stakeholders involved in that contract along with AFSCME. The communications will be sent to the chairs to keep them updated.

Some general topics are COLA, benefits and cost sharing. Mr. Amado noted that the City had migrated to the State plan but the savings had not been realized as expected. A number of years ago, the City started with cost sharing and the percentages have increased over the years. There has also been some discussion regarding resetting the cost share percentage back to the original 25%.

Mr. Amado spoke about the CCM report regarding wage increase arbitration awards and gave the Committee an overview of recent increases in other Connecticut municipalities along with the negotiated wage increases for those municipalities. The key to the entire formula is affordability, and it is important to remember that many of these increases are retroactive.

Council Member McBride-Lee joined the meeting at 6:25 p.m.

Council Member Herron asked about the cost sharing and a potential roll back to a reset in terms of retaining employees. Mr. Amado said that there were some non-monetary returns that the City should expect for decreasing the cost sharing.

Council Member Newton announced that Council Member Hodges, Council Member Pereira, and Council Member Smith were also present.

Council Member McCarthy said there was an election year coming up and he was concerned about 2024. He was also concerned about the retroactive pay. He said he hoped that they were not stalling this out because of the upcoming election.

Council Member Newton said he did not want the unions to think that they were trying to negotiate any of the contracts. Council Member McCarthy said his concern was the budget.

Mr. Amado said the best practice would be to engage in timely and appropriate negotiations and follow the schedules that had been previously agreed upon. There is no intent to stall any contract and no one has contacted him regarding that.

Mr. Amado said it would be important to execute contracts as quickly as possible in order to retain employees and avoid retroactive payments. It's not fair to the employee or the City. He added it was difficult to try to calculate what the inflation rate was a few years in the past and even more difficult to project the potential inflation rate.

Council Member Newton said the City administration was aware that these contracts were coming up and have put money aside for these agreements.

Council Member Burns said that he wanted Mr. Amado and Mr. Forde to get the contracts back on schedule. He asked about an amount set aside for affordability. Mr. Amado suggested not pursuing that information at this time. Council Member Burns agreed.

Council Member Burns asked if there were any issues on the non-monetary side that they should consider. Mr. Amado said attracting employees was something that the City should consider. He explained he tells the unions that they were not looking to make money off of the employees, but pointed out there have been changes in what employees are looking for from the administration.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that many people come to Bridgeport for training or learning how to teach because if a teacher can make it in Bridgeport, they can make it anywhere. However, the other municipalities offer more money. Bridgeport needs to have something to offer people. She pointed out that when she retires, she'll have to reduce her insurance because she can't afford to keep the insurance she has.

Mr. Amado said he believed that one can do more with less if they attract good employees. He explained there has been research on competitive salaries. However, the BOE negotiates their own contracts. He gave some examples of how the department could shift some of their focus to the areas that the younger employees are interested in.

Council Member Newton said if they brought on 25 new police officers, but 25 officers leave, the City has not gained any ground. He asked how the City would catch up in terms of staffing. He said they would like to get ahead of the curve.

Mr. Amado said it was a good question and said it would be a community effort in terms of culture. This isn't the union vs. the Council or the unions vs. the Mayor. They all need to work

together rather than attacking one another in social media, daily interactions or in the news. It is important to be cautious in terms of what non-residents are seeing in terms of working in Bridgeport. It will be important to promote diversity and inclusion. This is where investing in what the younger employees are looking for rather than the established benefits will help. He noted that Bridgeport cannot accept lateral moves.

Council Member Newton said that Bridgeport was always in the dark ages in terms of Hartford and New Haven regarding the terms for police and fire.

Council Member Burns said that the younger generation seems much more mobile than some of the Council Members who have been on the Council longer. He asked if there were any ideas that should be considered for attracting new employees. Mr. Amado said it is important to consider investments into the current staff. He said one potential idea had been that since Bridgeport wants their department directors to live in Bridgeport, there may be some consideration given to potentially offering housing.

Council Member Herron said that she was pleased that they were talking about lateral hires. She said that the City had lost police. They will never catch up with the numbers until they increase the number of recruiting classes. This is something that needs to be discussed with the City.

Council Member Newton recognized Acting Chief Edwards as being present.

QUARTERLY PERSONNEL UPDATES ON PUBLIC SAFETY.

- ** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ADD A DOCUMENT FIRE MANPOWER APRIL, MAY JUNE 2022 AS EXHIBIT 07-11-2022-A.**
- ** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Acting Chief Edwards said that there were 25 firefighters retiring at the end of the month. He said that he had been working with Mr. Amado on this. Acting Chief Edwards gave an overview of the current and upcoming vacancies as listed in the Exhibit 07-11-2022-A.

Council Member Burns asked about the retirements and the number of new firefighters. Acting Chief Edwards said that currently they were 28 positions short. He said that he had plans to hire 20 with the next recruitment. The vacant 28 positions would work out to \$78,000 in overtime.

Council Member Burns asked how the staffing was since they were hard hit during COVID. Acting Chief Edwards said that once every two to three weeks, someone comes down with COVID.

Council Member Herron thanked Acting Chief Edwards and said that he was doing a great job. She asked if there were promotions in line. Acting Chief Edwards said that they had just promoted some firefighters and expected to promote more.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that once a year, the Fire and Police come to her school. Her principal was very happy to know that the firefighters would come because the students need to see the firefighters when there isn't an emergency going on. She thanked them for the great job they were doing.

Council Member Newton asked if there was a time limit for disability. Acting Chief Edwards said that it is determined by the illness, but it is not indefinite leave.

Council Member Newton thanked Acting Chief Edwards for coming and giving his presentation.

Council Member McCarthy asked if the Fire Department allows for lateral transfers. Acting Chief Edwards said that they would have to apply and take the test just like any other candidate.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER THE DOCUMENT TITLED POLICE MANPOWER APRIL MAY JUNE 2022,**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

It was noted that there was no one from the Police Department on the call. Council Member McBride-Lee said it was concerning that there was no one from the Police Department present. Council Member Newton said Council Member Burns had sent out the notification to everyone.

Council Member Burns said the point of these quarterly reports was to update the Committee on the staffing. He said that if the Police were present, it would be great, but the report was more just for information.

Council Member McBride-Lee said for the record that she was disappointed that when the Police should be in attendance, they are not. She said she was disappointed about this since the Police Department was in the state that it was.

Council Member Newton agreed and said the Police should be present out of respect.

Council Member McCarthy said for the record that he was also disappointed the Police were not present and noted that the Police Chief had failed to show up during the Budget process. He added that the Mayor should fire the Police Chief.

GENERAL DISCUSSION RE: REVIEW OF THE MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT.

Mr. Nkwo said there were positives and negatives for the Budget. He gave an overview of the tax payments and said that the permits were doing well. He reviewed the variety of revenue sources including the golf course, which is still running strong post COVID. Bridgeport was short changed by the State.

Council Member Burns asked about the property taxes and noted that during the last few years, they have come in over budget. He asked if they had outside experts to provide the City with projects for estimating the amounts.

Council Member Newton said the Mayor's budget flat funded the BOE and there had been some discussion about finding about \$500,000 for them. He said they have not narrowed this down yet, but the Committee has to keep their commitment to the BOE. Mr. Nkwo explained the Mayor's Budget had increased the amount of the BOE funding. He gave the details.

Council Member McCarthy said he thought the Council had stated they would not approve any line items transfers after the Council's budget was voted down. Council Member Newton gave a brief overview of the details. Discussion followed.

Council Member Herron said she was concerned about the Council's budget but now she was hearing that there were negotiations going on behind closed doors. She said she was not going to vote in favor of any increases since they worked so hard on the Council's budget but it was voted down. Council Member Newton said there were no back room deals, but they had a few things that they had included in the budget which would have helped everyone. Discussion followed.

Council Member Burns clarified that he had not be privy to any discussions regarding funding to the BOE. He added they had never actually voted on the budget. The regular procedure was not followed and the Council did not vote on the budget.

Mr. Nkwo said that he had just run the Police OT and they were already over budget. He then reviewed the process for this.

Council Member Pereira stated that her hand was raised. Council Member Newton said that Council Member Pereira was not allowed to speak. Council Member Pereira stated that she would see them in court.

ADJOURNMENT

- ** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- ** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services

City of Bridgeport
Budget & Appropriations
Regular Meeting
July 11, 2022