

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 13, 2023**

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Mary McBride-Lee, Matthew McCarthy, Tyler Mack, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia, (6:15 p.m.), Jeanette Herron (6:30 p.m.)

OTHERS: Council Member M. Pereira; Ken Flatto, Finance Director, Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Thomas Gaudett, Deputy Chief of Staff; Barbara, 203-880-5666; iPhoneDNPH80GM0DXT

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES:

• January 9, 2023 (Regular Meeting)

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 9, 2023 REGULAR MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

• February 13, 2023 (Regular Meeting)

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 13, 2023 MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MACK SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**GENERAL DISCUSSION RE: REVIEW OF THE
MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT.**

Mr. Flatto said that they had covered most of the items in previous reports. He noted that on the revenue side, he had removed the sale of the airport as it does not appear to be likely to be concluded this year. He added that he had increased the forecast on the investments, which appears to be \$2.5 million higher than expected. Building Fees, Vital Records and Park revenues appear to be exceeding expectations.

Mr. Flatto said that the City was not sure what rate the State would set on car taxes. The Mayor's Budget overstated the amount, which has resulted in a projected \$6 to \$7 million

dollar shortfall. However, that has been offset by the unexpected increase in fee revenues. He said that they expect that as time goes on, they could end the year with a surplus.

Mr. Flatto said that the vacancy savings will be higher than expected due to the salary scale and the overall national difficulties in finding qualified individuals.

Mr. Nkwo said that State Representative Stafstrom had managed to find more State revenue for the City, but it did not cover the shortfall.

Council Member Newton said that the City needs to stop making financial projections on revenue like the airport when they don't know how many votes they have on the Council. This is not the way to do business.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that they have been talking about the golf course and she noted that lately the University has been using the parking lot for special event overflow parking like the fireworks. She wished to know where that was noted in the budget and whether the City was being suitably compensated. She said that the Council had not been told about it since the Parks Commission approved it.

Both Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo said that they were not aware of this.

Council Member Pereira said if there were set numbers from Sound on the Sound, regarding the revenue generated and asked about the fact that they had cancelled a second weekend. Mr. Flatto said that they had received approximately \$250,000 in fees from the revenue sharing. He said that he thought that it was booked where the Admission surcharges are. He will send the figures out as soon as possible.

Council Member Newton asked that the budget include what the tickets sale surcharge would be. Mr. Nkwo said that they could present the daily attendance and the ticket sales.

Council Member Burns said that they had been given some of the data points last month and they included the 5% revenue from Sound on Sound. He added that another aspect was the charges for the Police Department and Parks Staff Department. MERF was not included in the calculations. Council Member Newton noted that it was not Live Nation's fault that MERF was not included. Mr. Nkwo explained that the bill was generated at the Police Department and this will not happen again.

Council Member Pereira said that Public Facilities crews were responsible for set up, cleaning and break down. Mr. Flatto said that he believed they received three bills, ones from Police, Fire and Public Facilities. Mr. Nkwo said that they did not capture all the costs.

Council Member McCarthy said that Mr. Flatto had reported that he had separated out the information that Council Member McCarthy had requested. Mr. Flatto said that he had done the calculations and it was in the last report. Council Member McCarthy asked if

there were separate lines for the Arena and the Amphitheater. Discussion followed about the details. Mr. Nkwo asked for a list of the breakout he wished to see.

Council Member McCarthy said that the Departments had not asked Mr. Nkwo to send the bills because they didn't want him to include MERF. Mr. Flatto said that previously Police and Fire had never billed for MERF, which means this would be a new practice.

Council Member McCarthy said that many of the events are from non-profits that don't have large budgets. He also said that Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo should do a magic show since they had announced a \$4 million reduction in revenue but still had an expected \$3 million surplus. Mr. Flatto said that they had budgeted and forecast as conservatively as possibly.

Council Member Mack asked if the shovels in the ground would happen for Steel Point. Mr. Flatto said that the latest information was that they were going to start pulling permits and the project will be moving forward. Discussion followed.

The discussion moved to a line item showing the sale of City property. Mr. Flatto said that he did not recall what it was and would get back to the Committee on it.

Council Member Pereira asked about the Bassick Permit fees and she was shocked to hear that they were paying long term bond rates for a municipal building. She said that Mr. Flatto had stated that he would research these practices. Mr. Nkwo said that no building should be exempt and a large percentage would be reimbursed by the State. Council Member Pereira said that the taxpayers pay both City and State taxes.

Mr. Flatto said that the Building Fees are not reimbursable by the State. The fee is required by the Ordinance. Mr. Nkwo said that in the past there were some individuals were avoiding paying building fees, which is why that ordinance was created. Council Member Pereira said that this was a bad policy.

Council Member Mack said that the Airport was operating in deficit. He asked why. Mr. Nkwo said that the cost of health insurance drove the cost up. Mr. Flatto said that there were some very long-term leases with tenants and those leases have been renegotiated.

Council Member Mack asked how they heard about the environmental clean up that has to take place. Mr. Flatto said that they would have to speak with the Airport Manager to understand when they were told. He added that the area was capped.

29-22 Proposed Five-Year Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2028.

Mr. Nkwo said that he had sent out two spreadsheets to the Committee chairs. He reviewed the requests and removed projects that were not attainable or feasible. The recommended Capital Plan was \$104 million. Columns that have zero in the outlying years are ones that are not being recommended for funding. He added that among the recommended projects, there is at least \$40 million that the Committee could eliminate if they so desired.

Council Member Newton said that the Committee had scrubbed some bonded funds to apply for other projects, which saved the taxpayers money.

Council Member McCarthy asked for clarification on the documents that were sent. Mr. Nkwo said that he has sent the documents to the co-chairs.

Discussion followed about what amounts the Committee could reduce in 2024.

Council Member Pereira asked about the BOE section. She said that they had gotten over \$100 million for cooling, heating and ventilation. Mr. Nkwo said that last year, the BOE had agreed to absorb some of the costs. Council Member Pereira asked if they could go back to the BOE and ask them to handle some of the projects in their budget.

Council Member Pereira had some questions about the project details on a variety of items for the schools. Council Member Pereira said that there was a Maplewood School listed, which she believe is now the Classical Academy.

Mr. Nkwo reminded everyone that the City does not have jurisdiction or authority to ask the BOE about the construction. The City is only responsible for providing funding.

Council Member Pereira said that she believe that in the past, Council Member McCarthy has made a motion to include a new Police Station, along with a multi-level parking garage. Mr. Nkwo said that there was a discussion but it was later removed because they need to identify a location. The line item is still there.

Mr. Nkwo said that the Jetline parking garage line item was included in the budget.

Council Member Pereira asked where the line item was included. Council Member Burns indicated where it was. Council Member McCarthy said that he believed that they needed to put a dollar amount into the line item to show they are serious about them. He said that this was one of the magic show acts.

Council Member Newton said that he believed that Council Member Pereira and Council Member McCarthy had been correct that a dollar amount had been assigned. Mr. Nkwo said that when an amount is put in the outlying years, they have to put it in the current year. After the first year, everything is considered as a wish list and disappears at the beginning of the next year.

Council Member McCarthy asked Mr. Nkwo to send a copy of last year's amount. Mr. Nkwo said that there was a line item on page 545 that gives an amount.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that she had spoken with the Police Chief about different issues, including a new headquarters. The Chief will be working on the new station project. She noted that there was a property that was a vacant block that the City owns. There are also opportunities for grants for new police and fire stations.

Council Member Burns said that he has spoken with the Chief and also looked into MetroCog grants about locating one near Route 8.

The discussion moved to the increase in interest rates. Mr. Flatto said that it was unpredictable right now for the short-term rates. The long terms actually improved for bonds recently, but some communities are cutting back. He added that they had taken advantage by refinancing in the past.

Council Member Pereira asked about the Land Management Acquisition on page 7, which she had expressed concerns about last year. She said that she felt that the departments often use these accounts as slush funds. She asked if the \$4 million was for street paving.

Mr. Nkwo said that totally repaving would cost \$10 million and the funds would be drawn from a number of revenue sources. Discussion followed about the details.

Council Member Pereira objected to the fact that the funding for the Police Department had been removed the following year. Council Member Newton agreed. Discussion followed.

Mr. Gaudett said that at the presentation about paving, he may not have been clear enough that the paving funds would come from a variety of sources including LoCIP funding and bonding. The discussion moved to how the Council can adjust the Mayor's Recommendation Budget.

Mr. Nkwo reiterated that the safest way to handle this would be include a project in the first year so it is carried forward. Discussion followed.

Council Member Pereira said that while the Council supported the new Police Station, but with the new Chief, there has been a change in attitude. Things do not seem so volatile. She asked whether the Mayor supports the new Police Station. Mr. Flatto said that he thought that the Mayor was waiting for a new chief before working on the issue.

Mr. Gaudett said that there had been conversations with the State Representatives about this. He added that there were a number of issues that had to be clarified. Mr. Nkwo said that the Mayor did not have anything to do with the Police Station being in the Capital Budget.

Council Member McCarthy said that he agreed with Mr. Gaudett about the fact that the City would need both Federal and State funding to complete the station. Mr. Nkwo said that he could pencil in \$2.5 million for the Police Station.

Council Member McCarthy asked if the chairs had set the schedule for the Budget process. Council Member Newton said that they had not hashed out the full schedule yet. Council Member Burns apologized for not forwarding the spreadsheets that Mr. Nkwo sent. Council Member Newton said that he hoped that they would be able to hold the meetings in person rather than via Zoom.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Telesco Secretarial Services.