

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
JOINT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT
AND CONTRACTS
SPECIAL MEETING
OCTOBER 13, 2021**

ATTENDANCE: **Contracts**
Matthew McCarthy, Co-chair
Jeanette Herron, Co-chair
Jorge Cruz
Ernest Newton
Avelino Silva

ECD&E
M. Evette Brantley, Co-chair
Scott Burns
Rosalina Roman-Christy
Mary McBride-Lee
Eneida Martinez

OTHERS: Council Member(s): M. Pereira & M. Brown; Thomas Gaudett, Mayoral Aide; Constance Vickers, Legislative Aide; Atty. John Stafstrom, Artspace; Tom Gill, OPED Director; Bill Coleman, OPED Deputy Director; Atty. Ron Pacacha; Atty. Mark Anastasi; Barbara, Jim Koplik, Live Nation Connecticut; Howard Saffan, Live Nation; John Hosier, Jordan Wolowitz, Founders Entertainment; Tom Russell, Founders Entertainment; Call in user 1, Call in user 2, 203-209-1058

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair McCarthy called the Joint Committee Meeting of the Economic and Community Development and Environment Committee and Contracts to order at 6:47 p.m.

A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF JOINT COMMITTEE MINUTES:

• **July 13, 2021 (Special Meeting)**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE JULY 13, 2021 SPECIAL MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

City of Bridgeport
Joint Committee on ECD & E
and Contracts
Special Meeting
October 13, 2021

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JULY 13, 2021 SPECIAL MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

92-20 Proposed Resolution Authorizing an Affordable Housing Tax Incentive Development Agreement for the Reads Artspace Affordable Housing Development.

Council Member McCarthy said that this was tabled earlier. Mr. Coleman came forward and said that Atty. Pacacha, Atty. Stafstrom, and Mr. Gill were also present on the call.

Mr. Coleman reviewed the details from the previous meeting regarding the number of units, and the fact that the City wished to be relieved of the two surface parking lots that were encumbered with an 83-year ground lease. He noted that at the time, they still needed to hear back from CHAFA. CHAFA has not made a definitive statement as of this time. CHAFA had asked if the City would consider lowering the rate. Mr. Coleman said that he was presenting this to the Committee.

Council Member Herron said that since CHAFA had not issued a definitive statement, the City would be in a precarious position. Mr. Coleman said that the Artspace would be in the precarious position since they would be taxed at the normal rate by the City. Mr. Coleman said that he believed it would help the City.

Atty. Pacacha said that without authorizing a clear resolution to lower the taxes on the parcels, the City would be obligated to pay the full tax amount. Atty. Stafstrom said that his clients had been informed about this and he believed that this item was included in the next CHAFA agenda.

Council Member Newton asked what would happen if CHAFA was not in agreement. Atty. Stafstrom said that if CHAFA does not accept the deal, then the client would not receive the tax incentive and would lose the deal. He added that he thinks CHAFA now understands that this is the best deal that the City would give Artspace.

Council Member Burns said that he felt Artspace was a positive influence downtown. He asked if the parking lots were taxable and whether they would be taxable as one lot or two. Mr. Coleman explained that currently, there was no tax revenue from the surface lots because of the land lease on the property. He added that he thought the two parcels were both a quarter of an acre and would most likely be redeveloped on a small scale. Mr. Coleman then spoke about the air rights that a developer might consider.

Council Member Silva said that the City does not receive any taxes from the Artspace. Mr. Coleman said that they do not get tax revenue from the surface parking lots, but they do receive tax revenue from Artspace.

Council Member Silva asked if the tenants would be at risk if the deal falls apart. Mr. Coleman commented that the project was facing some financial instability. He said that CHAFA could foreclose on the building but did not foresee that happening.

Atty. Stafstrom said that the current level of taxes does not make the financial model work. He explained that Mr. Coleman had requested that to get the tax abatement, they would have to give up the two surface parking lots. The reason that the City gave the original lease was because the City wanted to see this happen downtown.

Council Member Silva said that when he finished his art degree, he looked into living there, but ended up going in another direction. However, he would not like to see the City lose this project.

Council Member Cruz said that he was pleased with the Artspace. He had looked at the parking lots and felt that they were ugly. They also don't generate revenue for the City. He asked what would happen to the underground parking for the Artspace. Mr. Coleman said that they had structured the agreement to ensure access to the parking. He said that he did not expect the City to get into a situation where they would no longer have access to the parking. Atty. Stafstrom reminded everyone that when the project was developed, CHAFA and the City had required one parking space for each unit. Those requirements have changed over the years and Atty. Stafstrom said that Artspace was comfortable with the number of parking space underneath the building. Discussion followed.

Council Member Brantley asked Atty. Stafstrom if he would be comfortable moving forward with the plan without CHAFA's approval. Atty. Stafstrom said that a positive vote would help Artspace move forward. He also noted that if they don't they would not get the surface parking lots back under City control.

Council Member Pereira asked a procedural question about Atty. Stafstrom's recent donation to two City Council Members' campaigns. She asked what the ability would be for the Council Members to vote on this item impartially.

Atty. Anastasi said that the Federal Government had made it clear that campaign contributions were not bribes. However, lobbyists have requirements.

Council Member Martinez said that Council Member Pereira had accepted a campaign contribution from Atty. Judah Epstein.

Council Member Pereira said that she had been looking at those two parking lots and they were regularly filled with cars. She said that the City would give generous tax breaks to any developer who worked on the parcels. She said that the residents saw some of their taxes goes up over 50% and wanted to know where the tax break for the residents.

Council Member Brantley requested that the question be moved.

Atty. Anastasi explained that a motion to move the question could only be used when discussion was exhausted.

Mr. Coleman stated that they could not project how a developer might handle the lots. He noted that they would do an RFP.

Council Member Newton pointed out that Council Member Pereira had not said anything about how Atty. Epstein had foreclosed on houses when she accepted his financial support.

Council Member Herron said that tax breaks have changed over the past six years. Developers don't get 30 or 40-years tax breaks. The City can't keep fighting progress. They do want to lower taxes and have lowered the tax breaks. If they don't start bringing progress to the City they will lose their finances.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM 92-20 PROPOSED RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING AN AFFORDABLE HOUSING TAX INCENTIVE DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT FOR THE READS ARTSPACE AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ SECONDED.**

Council Member Martinez said that she was not on the Committee and would be voting on the Council floor. She said that she had recused on certain things in downtown. She echoed what Council Member Herron had just stated. Council Member Martinez said that she was against the amphitheater, but now that she had seen the crowds there and how it is bringing people to the City, she supports it.

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM 92-20 PROPOSED RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING AN AFFORDABLE HOUSING TAX INCENTIVE DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT FOR THE READS ARTSPACE AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

125-20 Proposed Resolution Authorizing a License to Bridgeport Music Festivals, LLC to conduct a Music Festival in a Portion of Seaside Park for a Term of Years.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED AGENDA ITEM 125-20 PROPOSED RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A LICENSE TO BRIDGEPORT MUSIC FESTIVALS, LLC TO CONDUCT A MUSIC FESTIVAL IN A PORTION OF SEASIDE PARK FOR A TERM OF YEARS**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ SECONDED.**

Mr. Gill said that Mr. Saffan, Mr. Koplik and Mr. Russell were on the call. He said he would defer questions to them at this time.

Mr. Saffan said that he was hearing people talk about tax breaks and building Bridgeport up and felt that the Committees would agree the Amphitheater is doing that. He added that Mr. Wolowitz had come to Bridgeport and was interested in starting up another music festival.

Mr. Koplik of Live Nation said that he had been doing promotions for many years and that when Mr. Wolowitz mentioned having a festival, he was very pleased. Now they are talking about holding two potential festivals.

Mr. Saffan spoke about the Governor's Ball, a recent festival, in New York City that was very successful. Mr. Russell said that one of the reasons they were so successful running the festival in New York was because they spend a great deal of time working with the City, the Police Department and various other safety agencies on it. The events are planned with the attendees in mind.

Mr. Russell said that the reason that he had gotten involved with the Governor's Ball was because he had attended the Gathering of the Vibes at Seaside Park. He said that he could answer questions about security and other similar festival aspects.

Council Member Newton thanked Mr. Saffan and Mr. Russell for bringing more excitement to the City. He said that he had not seen that level of excitement at an event as he did at their shows. He said that when Isaac Hayes had been brought to Seaside Park along with other performers, they put Bridgeport on the map. He said that they deserve credit for packing the house.

Council Member Brantley wished Mr. Saffan and the rest of the group the best since they may be bringing the Vibes back to Bridgeport. She spoke about how phenomenal it was and could not stress enough what joy they brought to the City.

Council Member Burns said that he loves the idea of the proposal and was looking forward to some of the performers that may be coming. He also thanked Atty. Pacacha for answering his other questions.

Council Member Burns said that there was a statement in the documents about the Superintendent of Parks, but Bridgeport does not have one. He added that the Parks Commission would be reviewing the contract before the Council Committees.

Atty. Pacacha said that it was his understanding that the Parks Board wanted a copy of the contract. He said that they normally don't approve contracts. Apparently in the past, they did not receive copies of the contract for concessions.

A discussion followed about the Park Superintendent. Mr. Saffan said that whoever is responsible for the parks is the person they will work with. Atty. Pacacha said that Council Member Burns had suggested that they designate the head of the Parks and Recreation as the appropriate individual. Atty. Anastasi said that it can be cleared up.

Atty. Pacacha said that he was making notes on the changes that need to be made.

Council Member Roman-Christy said that she was happy to hear that they would have a festival at Seaside Park. She said that they should have a five-year contract to start with and then sign a second one if it goes well.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked about some of the details on page 5. Atty. Pacacha said that if they exercise both five-year renewals, the contract would equal 20 years.

Council Member Roman-Christy said that \$100,000 payment to the City should be changed to \$150,000. Mr. Saffan said the investment that they would be making would be between \$7.5 million to \$10 million per festival. However, the festival is weather dependent and it usually takes at least 3 years to break even. He then reviewed the City amounts that were based on attendance and what the festival covers in terms of fencing, security and various other aspects.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked if it was a twenty-year contract. Mr. Saffan said that it was a ten-year contract. Mr. Gill explained that this contract was similar to the one for the arena and the amphitheater.

Council Member Cruz said that he could not emphasize the level of excitement that the City was experiencing with these new events. When he was growing up, the only thing he saw at Seaside Park was the amusement park. He asked if Bridgeport doesn't take this opportunity, someone else will. He thanked Mr. Saffan for bringing all these people to Bridgeport. When the Vibes were playing, they took over almost 90% of the park. This is two weekends in September.

Council Member Cruz asked about the RFID technology in the wrist band. He asked if they had any idea where the attendees were in the park. Mr. Russell said that once they scan in, they know if they are in a VIP area.

Council Member Silva said that he would be supporting this and was pleased with what has been done already for the City.

Council Member Herron said that she has been to the Governor's Ball and participated in the event. The amphitheater was the best decision they had ever made. People came from Texas for one of the events. She said that she supported this project and they need to move the City forward.

Council Member Pereira said that Mr. Saffan donated \$1,000 to Council Member Newton and [inaudible]

Council Member McCarthy asked Council Member Pereira if she had a question.

Council Member Pereira said that on page 7, the Park Board had said that based on the minutes from the Park Commissioners [loss of call]

Mr. Saffan said that Council Member Pereira said that Mr. Labrador and another Commissioner had seen the contract and Council Member Pereira was lying.

Council Member Pereira said that this was outrageous. She reiterated that the City Charter gives every aspect of the Parks management over to the Park Commission.

Atty. Pacacha said that it was his understanding and years of experience on working on contracts for events and concessions for the Park Commission. Once they approve it, they turn over the contract to the City Council and the City Attorney's Office for review and approval.

Atty. Anastasi said that the first thing was that the Charter does state that the Commission has the care of the parks. However, that does not necessarily mean they have to approve the contract. He said that he was sure that Atty. Pacacha was correct about how they had turned the contracts over to the City in the past. However, if the Parks Board expects to get it back, it shouldn't matter who votes on it first. They were committing dates annually for the entire duration of the contract. Atty. Pacacha reviewed the process and said that the Parks Board would be part of the process.

Council Member Martinez said she was not on the committee and could not vote in Committee. She said that the only excitement the Park has seen in years was when the Vibes were here and the Puerto Rico Parade. She thanked Mr. Saffan for being generous and her vote was not based on his donation, but on his contribution to revitalizing the City.

Council Member Brown asked who gets to decide on the five-year option. Atty. Pacacha said that the promoter would elect to renew but the City does have the ability to decline the renewal. He said that he had been to the amphitheater and downtown was packed on the days of events.

Council Member Roman-Christy said that when she first asked her questions about the contract extensions, she wanted to be clear on what she was voting on. She said to Mr. Saffan that he had brought a lot of attention to the City. She will be supporting this issue.

Council Member Burns asked about presenting this contract to the Parks Board. Regarding Subsection 5C, involving sales of tickets to Bridgeport residents, he had questions. Mr. Saffan said that they strived to give Bridgeport residents a discount. However, that is not possible through Ticketmaster. However, they have worked out something with the City administration.

Mr. Saffan said that he had met with Mr. Labrador and Mr. Cotto and reviewed the contract page by page. Mr. Gill said that he was at the Park Board meeting and spoke about the need for securing dates for the duration of the contract. He then read a section of the minutes from that meeting and stressed that the City Council would be approving the contract once the Parks Commission established the dates. Council Member Burns said that it would be good to have a public meeting about this.

Atty. Anastasi said that there were three possible scenarios, the Parks Board needs to say that the Parks Board defers to the Council or the Parks Board wants to approve a contract or not. Discussion followed about the wording of the Parks Board motion.

Atty. Pacacha said that there was enough ambiguity to go before the Parks Board for clarification. Council Member McCarthy asked if they voted to approve the contract subject to the Parks Board approval. [Loss of call]

Mr. Saffan said that it was his understanding that the Parks Commission currently does not have a quorum. The Chair of the Parks Commission would most likely be the point person.

Council Member Newton asked why the Parks Board approve the date when they were expecting to approve the contracts. The Parks Board approves the dates, but not the contracts. He said that they need to approve the contract.

Atty. Anastasi said that he generally agrees with Council Member Newton but the Charter says the Parks has control, but the motion in the minutes includes final approval the City Attorney, The Council and the Parks Board. They have the care, custody and control of the parks.

Council Member Newton asked for clarification. Atty. Anastasi said that they have the Charter control and they have the care, custody and control of the parks. Historically they have not.

Council Member Pereira said that there were no reference to the 10 years with two five year options in the information. She added that there was a lot of information in the packet contradict what Mr. Saffan had stated in this meeting. She said that if there was a discrepancy in the ticket sales, the City would lose money. They will sell cannabis and alcohol there. She said that she was on the corner of Hanover Street during the Vibes and the neighbors hated it.

Mr. Saffan told Council Member Pereira said that on page 14 it lists the 10-year term with the five-year options. He added that both Stamford and Norwalk had contacted him about having the festival there. He added that when the festival information was compiled it was over a year ago and the costs had increased.

Mr. Russell said that the audience at Vibes had a good event with an unruly crowd. He added that the New York City Council President had lauded them on handling the audience. This event will be completely different from the Vibes audience.

Council Member Brown said that he was confused why the Council would be willing to give the control of finances to a Parks Board to dictate to them how much revenue they should be getting from the Ticket sales. The Council is the authority on contractual agreement and the Parks Board is not elected.

Council Member Cruz said that this discussion was dragging on unnecessarily.

Council Member Herron said that she was in agreement with Council Member Cruz and the Parks Board does not have a quorum. The Council is the sole authority when it comes to contracts. She said that she agrees with Council Member Cruz because he agrees that this is beneficial. The Vibes was ugly and horrible. Holding the hostage was wrong. This was being done with class and safe. Cannabis is now legal, so they can sell it.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she did not want Mr. Saffan to go to Stamford or Norwalk. She said that Council Member Brown had already said everything she wanted to say. She said that the Council should not give up their authority to a Board.

Council Member Burns said that there was one more detail point about Detail B, which suggests it has been shown to the Parks and the Police. He asked if they would be able to review the contract. Atty. Pacacha said that they had not developed the licensing plan completely. He gave the details and said that they could share the site plan with the Council Members.

Mr. Russell said that they will be signing up performers, contractors, discussions with the Police, Metro North and the ferry. As the conversations evolve, they develop the plan and present it a month before the event to the various agencies which indicates the egress, port-a-potties, and a variety of other things. The goal is to have a safe and enjoyable event.

Council Member Burns asked if there was any urgency to pass the item. Mr. Russell said that the success of the event depends on booking performers and bands. Booking for 2023 has already started. They need artists and vendors. Mr. Koplak said that there were 15 shows books for 2022 for the amphitheater. He said that the longer they wait, the fewer entertainers available.

Council Member Brantley asked how someone would apply to become a vendor at the festival. Mr. Russell said that they hire a professional concessioner called Spectrum that works very well. There will be a link to the concessioners when the website is launched. They want this event to be Bridgeport centric.

Council Member McCarthy said that he was against giving additional money to the amphitheater and outspoken against Mr. Saffan. He has had no political contribution or tickets given to him. However, this idea will put Bridgeport on the map as an entertainment venue. He was not originally for the term of the contract but has changed his mind. If they want to extend, it means that they are doing well and the City is benefiting.

Council Member Newton said that Bridgeport has a golden opportunity to move forward and bringing people together for a good time. Bridgeport is not the only rodeo in town. There are some who will never be for development, but it is important to make forward progress. They have to encourage businesses to come to Bridgeport and that will help lower the tax rate.

Council Member Newton requested that the question be moved.

Council Member Pereira said that someone had mentioned ticketed parking. She wished to know if they would keep the revenue from the parking that was located on City property like Seaside Park. Mr. Russell said that the point is to maintain control of the number of people that they expect to arrive by vehicle. Typically, the egress to and from festivals is the most challenging. Having ticked parking is very helpful in this area. They have discussed a variety of locations for parking including utilizing the Amphitheater and the University of Bridgeport.

Council Member Pereira said that there was an extra cost for parking. Mr. Russell said that it would be included in the tickets and others would have additional parking charges.

Council Member Pereira stated that in relation to the Boards and Commissions, the powers were given by the voters of Bridgeport that ratified the City Charter. If they have that power, it was the voters of Bridgeport who gave them that power.

Atty. Pacacha said that Council Member Burns had asked a number of items that would be difficult to add tonight. He suggested that the Committee approve the licensing agreement with the understanding that the clarifications will be made before it is presented to the Council.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ACCEPT THE CONTRACT AS PRESENTED WITH THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT THERE WILL BE ADJUSTMENTS AND UPDATES MADE WHEN IT IS PRESENTED TO THE FULL COUNCIL.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BRANTLEY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BRANTLEY**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services