

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING  
JANUARY 25, 2022**

**ATTENDANCE:** Marcus Brown, Co-chair; Rosalina Roman-Christy, Co-chair; Aikeem Boyd, Jorge Cruz, Michelle Lyons, Ernest Newton, Maria Valle

**OTHERS:** Council President A. Nieves, Council Member(s): S. Burns, J. Herron, T. Mack, M. McCarthy, M. Pereira, W. Simmons, R. Smith, & A. Vizzo-Paniccia; T. Gaudett, Mayoral Aide; Atty. M. Anastasi; Tamsyn Ambler, Gemeem Davis, John Hoiser, E. Martinez, Kate Spain, Peter Spain, Shaenna Taylor, MIV, Barbara, Call in User 1; iPhone, 203-209-1058, 203-384-0321, 203-673-7218, 203-880-5666, 203-913-2368

**CALL TO ORDER**

Co-chair Brown called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

**APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES**

- **August 24, 2021 (Regular Meeting)**
- **August 31, 2021 (Public Hearing)**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER VALLE MOVED TO CONSOLIDATE AND APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 24, 2021 REGULAR MEETING AND AUGUST 31, 2021 PUBLIC HEARING.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED WITH FOUR (4) IN FAVOR (ROMAN-CHRISTY, LYONS, NEWTON AND VALLE) AND TWO (2) ABSTENTIONS (CRUZ AND BOYD).**

**23-21 Proposed Amendments to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2.06 – Common Council, amend to add New Section(s): 2.06.080 – Legislative Aides for City Council; 2.06.090 – Legislative and Legal Counsel to the City Council and 2.06.100 – Budget Director for City Council.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ MOVED AGENDA ITEM 23-21 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF ORDINANCES, CHAPTER 2.06 – COMMON COUNCIL, AMEND TO ADD NEW SECTION(S): 2.06.080 – LEGISLATIVE AIDES FOR CITY COUNCIL; 2.06.090 – LEGISLATIVE AND LEGAL COUNSEL TO THE CITY COUNCIL AND 2.06.100 – BUDGET DIRECTOR FOR CITY COUNCIL.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER VALLE SECONDED.**

Council Member Mack said that the reason this was being proposed was to give the City Council some support. He said that as a freshman Council Member, he works really hard with a full-time job, a family and being a Council Member. He said that as an elected official, it is hard to cover

all the meetings. He said that the Council Members need the support to represent the residents. While this is not perfect, it is a place to start.

Council Member Brown asked if there was a City Attorney on the line. Atty. Anastasi said that he was present on the call via his cell phone.

Council Member Brown said that they would follow the Council Rules with two questions per person for two rounds. He added that he did not expect a vote at this meeting.

Council Member Newton said this was long overdue. The Council is still in the Dark Ages. While the Council is equal to the Mayor, they don't act like it. Hartford and New Haven have legislative staff that handle the business for the Council Members. Past Councils have not had the staff to do the research that the Council Members need and that is separate from the Mayor. They need staff that has some expertise in different areas. He said that he agreed with the fact that they need staff support, but did not agree with the items about the grandchildren.

Council Member Boyd said he felt that the item would help the Council but wished to know how it would be funded. Council Member Mack said that it would go through the legislative department. Council Member Brown said that the funding would be drawn from the Legislative Services line item. The Budget and Appropriations Committee would have to determine the salaries for the staff.

Council Member Valle said that this was long overdue and the Council Members desperately need this type of assistance. She mentioned Mr. Tom White who worked for the Council in the past. She does not want anyone to think that Mr. Boyer wasn't doing a good job. She thanked the Council Members and said that it would be important to work together on this.

Council Member Roman-Christy said she was looking at the page that referred to the People's Platform and wished to know where the People's Platform originated and how it became associated with the Council.

Council President Nieves said that the People's Platform was created from the data gathered by Gen Now, NAACP, Bridgeport Strong and other groups. The Council works on their own with only one aide unlike New Haven and Hartford. This is the most opportune time to do this because the work of the Council is more hectic than ever before. Many of the Council Members don't have social platforms and this would allow them to become informed. This is not a band aid, but an endorsement by the Council Members. The Council has the support of the Community.

Council Member Lyons said that the Council Members do need help. She has spoken to many different Council Members from other cities at the National League of Cities about how they operate their offices. She asked how they would be choosing the staff.

Council Member Mack said that in New Haven, the Civil Service vets all the applicants and they select three for the final choice. The Council President has the right to select the staff. Council

Member Brown said that the Council did not have to decide that right now. It could be handled through the ordinance.

Council Member Lyons said that the job description was listed on pages 6 and 7. Previously, she had not been in agreement with this, but she is particularly interested in the issues with the attorneys.

Council Member Pereira said that Council Member Brown had asked if there was a City Attorney on the call and Atty. Anastasi answered. She stated that Atty. Anastasi was not a City Attorney, but a 1099 consultant. Council Member Pereira said that she had a copy of his contract. She added that it was important to be accurate about what is being stated on the record.

Council Member Pereira said that for an organization that claims to be about transparency and honesty, this was called the Empower the Council Act but should be called the Bridgeport Generation Now Votes Act. It is known that this act was drafted by them. There are many people in this country, the state and national level in private companies and separate entities writing legislation on behalf of legislators. The people who should be writing legislation are those who are duly elected to legislate.

Council Member Pereira said that she was not necessarily opposed to everything in the act, but as someone who has a great relationship with her constituents, she has never had a constituent tell her they need five legislative aides or City Charter reform. She said that it was her best guess that this would cost half a million dollars with salaries, fringe and pension obligations.

In the resolution it says that in order to make decisions that are accountable, transparent, follow the rule of law, inclusive, responsive, efficient and effective, it requires all the staff. Council Member Pereira asked why they needed this ordinance so that the City Council Members would live and practice those principles. That is what she was questioning in the Whereas clause. She stated that she believes she lives by those principles and would like to know what the reasoning was for the resolution.

Council Member Mack said that in order for the Council to do their best by the City, they need support. He said that the support staff can do the research and assist with speeches. This will help with doing a better job for the constituents. He said that he did not have a problem with the title of the act and did not see anything wrong with the connection.

Council Member Pereira said that second clause speaks about the operation of good governance and requires that the Council have a co-equal branch of government and states that one branch cannot dominate or control the other. There is a clearly delineated co-equal form of government in the City Charter. The Mayor is the Executive branch and the Council is the legislative and appropriating body. The Mayor has veto power, but the Council can override that veto with 2/3rds vote, just like the State Legislature or Congress.

Council Member Pereira said that she did not agree that they were not a co-equal form of governments. They have a lot of dependence. The majority of the Council Members have a 97% voting record for approving every single thing proposed by the administration minus the

approval of minutes. That is a decision that each Council Member makes. She said that she did not think that the act would change that because they have to be accountable for their votes.

Council Member Mack said that they don't have their own attorney, which would be a major asset. There is no assistance with the budget. Having the staff to call with questions or other issues would be very helpful. The State government has their separate staff. The City Council deserves this as well.

Council Member Burns said that he basically endorses the proposal but there are matters that need to be worked out. He asked Atty. Anastasi about the legislative representation in regards to the Charter.

Atty. Anastasi said that the answer would have to be supplied by the City Attorney. This was just submitted to the Council on the 18th and has not yet been researched fully, particularly in terms of the Charter. He said that he was not authorized to issue an opinion. He said that he was on the call to listen to the Council Members' concerns.

Council Member Burns asked if there was much difference between having a City Attorney versus a Corporation Counsel. Atty. Anastasi said that he did not see much difference, but the question was whether the Charter addressed this. He said that he was sure that the City Attorney would be willing to present his opinions to the Council.

Council Member Newton said that he was in favor of this. He said that there were some staff that were good at legislative issues. He said that he took exception to the statement that when a Council Member voted in favor of an item, it was a rubber stamp. They were voting on things that were good for the City.

Council Member Newton said that he was not in favor of handling this through Civil Service. It is a Council issue and the Council should handle it. There is already \$90,000 in the budget for staff. There are some Council Members that don't have a job, however, many of the Council Members do and don't have the time to do the research.

Council Member Herron said that she was in support of adding staff, yet she pointed out that the Council Members decided to run for office and be busy.

Council Member Herron said that she wasn't sure that they need seven staff members. It will be important to make sure that they don't hire staff and then have to lay them off after three years. She wants to make sure that they have the funding for the long term because she does not want to raise taxes.

Council Member McCarthy said that in 2019, he had asked about legal representation. He said that the City Attorney works for the Mayor. It will be important to have an attorney that can explain what is in the best interest of the Council for the City. He added that it will also be important to have staff during the budget process for guidance.

Council Member Simmons asked about the line item details. Council Member Brown said that he and Council President Nieves had established the line item because they wished to establish a legislative staff. While they allocated the money, they did not hire anyone.

Council Member Simmons said that she had a lot of questions and Mr. Boyer has been very helpful, but that is a lot to put on one person. It would be helpful to have a legislative aide to help the Council Members.

Council Member Cruz said that he was not a rubber stamper, but would like to have his name added to the resolution. He thanked Council President Nieves and Council Member Mack for doing this work. It is time to have staff to help facilitate their decisions. He also thanked Ms. Martinez, the City Clerk; Ms. Ortiz, the Assistant City Clerk, along with Ms. Pettway and Ms. Williams for all their assistance.

Bridgeport is the largest city in the state but they are a laughingstock to others. Other Council Members are paid. It is important to keep an open mind. He repeated that he was not a rubber stamper, but wanted to add his name to the resolution. He supports it 100%.

Council Member Brown asked about Section 2.06.100(d) which says that Council Members shall not appoint nor recommend for appointment any member of the Democratic Town Committee or Republican Town Committee or any Town Committee that is formed or any employee of the City Council. He questioned the legality of this because the Constitution protects individuals under the First Amendment to run for office regardless of whether one is a City employee.

Atty. Anastasi gave his response, which included CGS 7:21 about employees serving on Boards and Committees. This issue would need to be considered and Atty. Anastasi said that he was not prepared to render an opinion.

Council Member Brown said that the individuals that they might hire will need to be flexible. He said that they should be able to have the meetings posted to YouTube.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked why the City Attorney would be giving the Council an opinion if they were going to hire their own legal counsel. Atty. Anastasi said that the City Attorney's Office represents all elected officials and represents the City, not the Mayor. He gave the details.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked how they would handle their own legal counsel, their own budget staff member and the research team. Atty. Anastasi said that there were issues that would involve the Civil Service provisions.

Council Member Roman-Christy said that she had a number of other questions but would be sending those concerns and questions to Council Member Brown.

Council Member Cruz said that the City Attorneys should not be hiring attorneys for the Council. It is time to step up and let the residents know that they are representing them. Council Member

Cruz said that he ran for the Council to make changes. It's time to change the Charter. The Council Members are not representing their constituents to the best of their ability.

Atty. Anastasi explained that when they hired accountants or legal counsel for the Council, it was in coordination with the Council and the Council made the final selection. It was not an adversarial process.

Council Member Lyons said one of her concerns was that when the Council has the chance to choose an attorney, the legal counsel should not be connected to the Mayor's Office or the City Attorney's Office. This is also true if they hire staff.

Council Member Pereira said that Atty. Anastasi's example that a Board of Education employee cannot serve on the Board of Education it would be a violation of State Law. A State employee cannot serve in the legislature. Regarding his interpretation about City employees serving on the Council, there are other legal minds that disagree with that opinion.

She said that the City Charter states that the City Attorney shall serve as legal counsel to every Board, Commission, officer and administrative agency. What it does not say is City Council. The Council is not a Board or a Commission. Collectively they are a Council, but individually the Council Members are officers.

Council Member Pereira then recounted an incident involving Atty. Liskov filing a CHR complaint against the members of the Council. Under State statute, the City Attorney has to provide legal representation in the Council's capacity as individual officers if they are being litigated for the CHR complaint. But there is nothing in the City Charter that says that the City Attorney serves as legal counsel for the City Council.

However, on page 2 of the resolution, the top Whereas clause states that all twenty members of the City Council serve on an unpaid volunteer basis without any support staff of its own when it is clear that this is not true. Mr. Boyer is paid staff that serves the City Council and the City Charter is clear that the City Clerk's Office's sole purpose is to serve the needs of the City Council as its record keeper along with other assigned duties.

The resolution also states that there needs to be a City Charter referendum, which Council Member Pereira agrees with wholeheartedly. She said that she believed that a City Charter Commission would be drafted and that the referendum would be done in 2024. There are many issues that need to be addressed in the City Charter.

Council Member Pereira said that she wished to comment on Council Member Brown's statement about the provisions restricting the Democratic and Republican Town Committee members. Council Member Pereira believes that is a violation of the First Amendment which is the freedom to associate when people are told that they can't do something strictly based on their party affiliation. Council Member Pereira said that Bridgeport Generation Now Votes should be included. They are a 501(c)4 political organization that spent thousands of dollars to elect Council Members who are serving today. If political parties are restricted, which could be unconstitutional, Bridgeport Generation Now Votes should also be included.

Council Member Burns said that the Committee had done a good job of discussing a number of points at the meeting. He said that his feeling was that it would be better to operate the legal counsel on an ad hoc basis since no one attorney could answer all the concerns in a variety of areas.

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BOYD MOVED TO TABLE AGENDA ITEM 23-21 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF ORDINANCES, CHAPTER 2.06 – COMMON COUNCIL, AMEND TO ADD NEW SECTION(S): 2.06.080 – LEGISLATIVE AIDES FOR CITY COUNCIL; 2.06.090 – LEGISLATIVE AND LEGAL COUNSEL TO THE CITY COUNCIL AND 2.06.100 – BUDGET DIRECTOR FOR CITY COUNCIL.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER ROMAN-CHRISTY SECONDED.**

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

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER ROMAN-CHRISTY MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER VALLE SECONDED.**

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

The meeting adjourned 7:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services