

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
APRIL 18, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: Marcus Brown, Co-chair; Jorge Cruz, Michelle Lyons, Ernest Newton, Aikeem Boyd (5:30 pm.)

OTHERS: Council President A. Nieves, Council Member(s): M. Pereira, T. Mack, M. McBride-Lee & M. Small, T. Gaudett, Mayoral Aide; Constance Vickers, Director, Legislative Affairs

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Brown called the Public Hearing to order at 5:23 p.m. A quorum was present.

The following is a summary of the comments made by the public at the meeting.

Proposed Amendments to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2.06 – Common Council, amend section 2.06.070 – Office of legislative services and 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. [23-21]

Ms. Gemeem Davis of 33 Cottage Place came forward and said she was present in support of the City Council Act. She thanked Council President Nieves and the Co-chairs of the Ordinance Committee. Ms. Davis said that this item was proposed in the People’s Platform to provide the Council the support that they need with legal aid and an independent legal analyst and legislative aides for the 20 Council Members. They need a strong, independent Council and the Council has suffered at the hands of the administration. She said that there was no independent, professional staff to provide assistance to the Council for the budget. A City as large as Bridgeport needs a professional staff dedicated to supporting the Council, along with an independent fiscal analyst. The staff will ensure that they have independence for generations to come. It is up to the people and the voters to protect and strengthen democracy in Bridgeport.

Ms. Dione Dwyer came forward and said that she was a member of a grassroots organization and lived in Park City Community housing located at the P.T. Barnum complex. She added that she was a member of the Bridgeport Coalition. She is in favor of the Legislative Act. The Council lacks resources.

Council Member Boyd joined the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Ms. Dwyer said that the staff would assist the Council with expertise and help with materials. She said that they will assist with drafting ordinances and provide expert advice in regards to the budget. The Mayor’s Office has too much power over the Legislative Branch, which is why she is in favor of the Act.

Mr. John Marshal Lee of Beacon Street came forward to speak and said that he hoped that the Council was serious about being open, transparent and honest about the procedures in the City. The Council has limited the Public's ability to speak due to COVID. If the Council can't hear the residents' opinions they can't make decisions. Often it depends on who has an opportunity to communicate. If the Council doesn't receive the requested opinions from the Legal Department, they have to move forward on an item without knowing whether it was accurate or legal.

Mr. Lee said that he remembered an incident 10 years ago when there was a problem with stipends and the legal aide. He said that the administrative aide does not follow the statute. While the staff may cost more money, the Council will have more information when they attend Committee meetings. They will be able to ask for reports from OPM or other departments.

Mr. Lee said that he was strongly in favor of this item. The Council is the last oversight for the City.

Council Member Pereira came forward and said that she was opposed to Agenda Item 23-21. She said that they had heard lobbyists and the drafters referred to New Haven as a model. Council Member Pereira contacted New Haven's Legislative Affairs Director. There are 30 Aldermen. The City Clerk's and the Town Clerk's offices are together similar to a number of other towns. Neither office provides any direct service to the Aldermen. The only thing the City Clerk does in reference to the Council is ensure that when an ordinance is passed, it is codified into the City's records.

Council Member Pereira said that the City Charter states that the City Clerk's role is to specifically serve and support the City Council. The Charter allows the Council to expand the role of the City Clerk and increase the staff via ordinance. There is already a City Clerk, a Deputy City Clerk, a Legislative Aide and two Typist IIs that serve the 20 member Council. In addition, there is a 1099 consultant that provides all City Council minutes. In New Haven, the Legislative Offices does all the minutes themselves. They don't have an outside 1099 service.

The proposal to create two separate public agencies that solely support the Council is duplicative and a waste of precious tax payer financial resources. In speaking with the New Haven Legislative Affairs Director, he explained that there is a total of 10 staff members in three different silos. Silo 1 is supporting the work of the Committees and researching legislation, creating and drafting ordinances, creating agendas and meeting notices and drafting summary minutes.

Silo 2 has three staff members that focus on constituent work, responding to emails, organizing community meetings and events.

Silo 3 is focused on the 30 member legislative body, including press releases and fully transcribe the minutes of the full Council meetings. All nine staff members are tested on Word, Excel and flyers.

Council Member Pereira outlined the New Haven hiring committee process. The director position is the only untested position.

Council Member Pereira then went on to speak about the almost 20,000 Bridgeport public school students who are almost 50% Hispanic and 38% black. They are only budgeted for \$2 million. She stated that it equates to about \$103 per student. However, the proposal is for an additional \$472,000 plus or minus for 20 Council Members, which equates to an additional \$23,624 per Council Member. There is one Tree Warden, one Sidewalk Permit Inspector, one Zoning Enforcement Officer, 11 full time employees to maintain 42 parks and hundreds of acres along with no Director of Parks, although the Charter requires it since Bridgeport is the Park City.

There is a smoke and mirrors budget with \$14 million dollars included in AARPA funds and the sale of the airport and that will disappear by the end of 2024. There was another \$2 million which the Mayor will find. In the 2025 budget, the City may face a \$20 million dollar cliff, but they are seriously considering adding about a half a million dollars in personnel, traveling fees and outside consultant fees.

Where are the Council's priorities? Council Member Pereira said that her constituents care about the things that impact their daily lives, such as taxes, school budgets, pot holes, sidewalk repairs, garbage removal, ATVs and dirt bikes. The vast majority could care less about doubling the Council's staff. That is not what they want to talk to the Council about.

Council Member Pereira said that the Alderman's Budget for the ten staff members, including MERF, health care and fringe also included a \$2,000 stipend with the Council President receiving \$2,400. They have \$20,000 for travel and lodging. The outside consultants is another \$270,000 including the redistricting. Their budget is about \$1.2 million, but the legislative office has been in existence for 51 years.

The City Clerk's 2023 budget is \$514,487. With the Legislative Department, it will add a Special Projects Coordinator that is required to start at \$75,000. That is problematic. The unaffiliated ordinances says legislative aides maximum is \$47,486, but they are budgeted for \$52,000. That is not in line with the ordinance. She listed a number of other expenses, such as travel and lodging and outside consultants. The Fiscal analyst has been removed, which Council Member Pereira discovered earlier in the day. With all of the costs factored in, it would be more than \$700,000. This would mean there would be over \$1 million in expenses for both the City Clerk's Office and the Legislative Department with overlapping support.

Council Member Pereira said that for all those reasons, she would not be supporting this resolution. The recent iteration is 10 times better than the previous proposal, but she pointed out that there is a reference where the Council "shall appropriate sufficient funds to appoint up to five legislative aides" and this is problematic. Regardless of whether these positions are filled or not, the Council must appropriate funding for up to five legislative aides. It will be codified in the ordinance. It should be changed to "may appropriate sufficient funds".

Council Member Pereira said that the New Haven Legislative Department Director was willing to speak with any Council Member about New Haven's department.

Council Member Brown asked if there was anyone else present who wished to address the Committee on this item. No one came forward. He repeated the question two more times.

Hearing no response, Council Member Brown closed the hearing on the Proposed Amendments to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2.06 – Common Council, amend section 2.06.070 – Office of legislative services and 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 at 5:45 p.m.

Proposed Amendments to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 12.16 – Street and Sidewalk Use Regulations, amend Sections 12.16.245 – Permit to Use City Streets and Sidewalks for the Shared Mobility Program and 12.16.250 – Miscellaneous Acts Prohibited. [36-21]

Council Member Brown asked if there was anyone present who wished to address the Committee on this item. No one came forward. He repeated the question two more times. Hearing no response, Council Member Brown closed the hearing on the Proposed Amendments to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 12.16 – Street and Sidewalk Use Regulations, amend Sections 12.16.245 – Permit to Use City Streets and Sidewalks for the Shared Mobility Program and 12.16.250 – Miscellaneous Acts Prohibited at 5:47 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Council Member Brown closed the Ordinance Public Hearing at 5:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services.