

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT**

**CITY COUNCIL**

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 2021**

**6:00 P.M.**

This meeting will be conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Council Member Burns called the Public Speaking portion of the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

130<sup>th</sup> District: **Scott Burns, Matthew McCarthy**  
131<sup>st</sup> District: **Jorge Cruz, Denese Taylor-Moye**  
132<sup>nd</sup> District: **Marcus Brown, M. Evette Brantley** (6:50 p.m.)  
133<sup>rd</sup> District: **Jeanette Herron, Michael DeFilippo**  
134<sup>th</sup> District: Michelle Lyons (6:50 p.m.), AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia (6:50 p.m.)  
135<sup>th</sup> District: **Mary McBride-Lee, Rosalina Roman-Christy**  
136<sup>th</sup> District: **Avelino Silva, Alfredo Castillo**  
137<sup>th</sup> District: **Maria Valle, Aidee Nieves**  
138<sup>th</sup> District: **Maria Pereira, Samia Suliman**  
139<sup>th</sup> District: **Eneida Martinez, Ernest Newton.**

A quorum was present. Names that are bold type responded during the roll call.

Council Member Burns then provided instructions on how to raise hands in the meeting and use the mute function. Each person will be given 3 minutes. There will be an online survey for the public to express their opinions.

There will be funding given to the Board of Education and funding for the City. The guidance from the Federal Government has given out some general categories including: infrastructure involving water, sewer and broadband; community services and lost revenue. Youth services, workforce development, mental health and domestic violence services, community health and wealth, small business assistance, broadband infrastructure, water and sewer infrastructure.

Council Member Newton then read a list of different categories. He said that it was the goal of the Council to get the money into the hands of the 501(c)1 organizations.

**Ms. P J. McCreanor** came forward to speak about the former drop in homeless facility that allowed the homeless access to showers, laundry services, mental health support and a variety of other resources. She spoke about the former homeless hotel and said that they need more advocates. They need mobile crisis units because people are hurting and need people who are advocating for them.

**Mr. Brandon Clark**, a Bridgeport resident, said that \$13 million would be going to the Board of Education. There had been a great deal of trauma, including job loss, gun violence, drug abuse and a variety of other traumas. He asked what they hoped to achieve, who were the ones that suffered. Those who are closest to the pain should be the ones with the most power. There must be accountability for the money. The City Government should have the same kind of accountability as the Board of Education does. He said that allowing people to speak for 3 minutes before the decisions are made is not collaborating. His organization will be having 101 meetings before deciding on how to use the money.

**Mr. Devon Brown**, CEO of Unicorn Ink, said that the Fitness Gym serves the needs of the Downtown residence. He named a number of local gyms and said that this would provide wellness for everyone. He thanked the Council for their time. He said that a community wellness would be a major benefit for the residents.

**Ms. Callie Heilman**, the president of Bridgeport NOW. She said that the American Rescue money was a major benefit for the City. She said that in the advocacy work that they did with the legislature focused on projects that could be sustained beyond the two years of the funding. She encouraged them to consider capital projects because in two years, the funding will stop.

Ms. Heilman said that she supported the broadband infrastructure because it was clear during the lock down that everyone did not have access. She also said that investing in the sewer upgrade would be important because it stop the bypass events that close the beaches.

Ms. Heilman said that she would like to have the City Council to continue to provide the public with meaningful channels of access.

**Ms. Beth Lazar** of Main Street in Bridgeport. She said that she agreed with Ms. Heilman about the sewer program because it is old and broke. They should replace the system rather than try to patch it up. [Loss of audio]

Ms. Lazar said that she also agreed with the issues around homelessness and the mental health issues because during the lockdown, there were many people who struggled with depression. There should be a mobile mental health unit available 24 hours a day.

**Mr. Noah Gutbaum** of Bridgeport Neighborhood Trust spoke about their housing projects and the fact that they reserve some of their housing for the homeless. He wondered if there was an oversight that housing was left off the listing. A major portion of the residents' experience housing burdens. There is such a shortage of clean, affordable housing. Homelessness services also need to be addressed. There is a housing crisis here which needs to be addressed.

Council Member Burns reviewed the instructions for speaking and how to mute and unmute devices.

**Ms. Gemeen Davis** of Main Street, and the Co-director of Bridgeport NOW. She said she would support the use of the money for the water and sewage upgrades. When there is an overflow event, Seaside Park becomes a problem. She added that having high speed WiFi would be important because some people did not have access to broadband. She said that she would advocate for the mobile Crisis team and a social service unit in Bridgeport. These would need long term funding. She said that the downtown area has been desolate for a while and there needs to be some public art projects.

**Ms. Andrea Spires**, the Director of Community Impact For United Way Coastal Fairfield County then spoke about the non-equity issues and racial justice. They serve with the Workforce Council and the Early Childhood Council. They are proposing the City partner with them to address the various systems underlying the issues. This includes pre-natal visiting and looking at long term systemic changes.

**Mr. Stephen Nelson** of Second Stone Ridge Cooperative located near Trumbull Gardens requested immediate relief. Recently there have been a number of shootings at Trumbull Gardens and the bullets have hit their units. They are asking for some type of wall to protect the residents of this low-income housing cooperative. He explained that the shootings were being done by outsiders. He said that they would like to partner with Bridgeport Police Department regarding putting cameras on the property.

Mr. Nelson said that Second Stone Ridge has 190 units and a number of the residents are elderly. They have updated the Community facility, but they need some assistance paying for a wheelchair lift.

Mr. Nelson said that he was a Senior advisor for Color that Thought and that they were trying to bring services up at Trumbull Gardens. They have requested a splash pad in Trumbull Gardens because everyone else has one.

**Dominie Kerner**, a mental health advocate, said that some of the funding should go for the youth because they need programs to keep them busy and out of trouble. Her main goal was to get the youth on track and make them successful.

**Mr. Meszoros**, the NAGE president, thanked the Council for their time. He said that he was at the news conference in March when Jim Himes spoke about the Federal funding. He said that there was money for the first responders who worked during the lock down. He then spoke about how they received stimulus checks while working from March until today. He said that the Nutrition Center had handed out food to the kids, the secretaries who processed paper works and the others who continued to work through the entire pandemic.

*Council Member Lyons, Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia and Council Member Brantley joined the meeting at 6:50 p.m.*

**Ms. Lorraine Gibbons** of the Cardinal Sheehan Center spoke about the youth voice perspectives. She said that she was always hearing from people that they needed youth programs. She spoke about how she and John Torres heard from the high school students. The students would like health and wellness programs, and leadership programs starting in grades 6-9 and through high school. Ms. Gibbons said that she would agree with the use of cameras outside the building would be helpful, particularly as there was a shooting outside the Sheehan Center. There is also a job training program, but they need to compensate their youth. She said that she was pleased to see these various areas up for consideration.

**A resident named Shante** suggested that they have a two-point approach. She mentioned programs in the past that were effective but closed due to lack of funding. She said that they need to address inequities and systemic issues. There are many needs and very little time. Having broadband across the City would help the businesses and families. Partnering with Goodwin and Housatonic would be excellent.

Ms. Shante said that she also supports the housing initiatives.

**Ms. Taesha Smith** spoke briefly about how the funding should be allocated for the youth. The audio faded in and out. She spoke about riding dirt bikes and making music. Some of the parks, like Newfield Park, are now unsafe. The kids are the future and they are not giving the children opportunities to succeed. There was three people murdered yesterday and one of them was only 21 years old. She suggested seeing what Westport and Stamford was doing with their public housing. Working on the sewer is fine, but the youth need help. As a mother of two 14-year-old boys, their life expectancy is between 13 and 21, and she is not okay with that because they could be killed just walking down the street,

**Ms. Casey** of Laurel Avenue, who is a member of Generation Now, said that she was pleased with the fact that the meetings were available on Zoom because people could attend who might not be able to go to City Hall. She thanked Ms. Smith for her words. Ms. Casey was looking to see the funding to address the inequities that COVID showed. There are many areas they need to work on as a community such as public safety and welfare. The Community is supporting addressing root problems such as housing, food anxiety, addiction services, mental health support and a variety of things. She said that she also supported addressing the sewer system. Ms. Casey said that she was really missing the skate park and would like to see another skate park or recreational center for youth. Finally, she would like to mention she was against having more cameras and surveillance in the City. The new cameras that were installed have not reduced the violence and the punitive system. If there are spaces for people to gather safely, they won't need cameras. The cameras don't result in justice for the people involved.

**A member the Public Facilities Union**, thanked the Council for their time. Ron said that he represents the essential workers who followed the CDC guidelines while picking up the garbage, cleaning the streets, plowing the streets and taking care of the parks. He said that they would appreciate having the Council look at the essential workers receiving premium pay. They don't have the opportunity to work from home. He gave a shout out to Council Member Taylor-Moye and Herron for including the premium pay in the resolution

**Mr. Harry Bell**, the director of Color a Positive a Thought, encouraged the Council to think about how to curb some of the violence. Many of the kids want the opportunity to work but can't leave their block. He said that he hoped that they would invest in community policing where the officers have a relationship with the residents. Having grass root programs is critical.

**Rev. Stanley Lord** said that he agreed with Mr. Bell's statements about providing jobs for the youth in their communities. He said that even with the COVID money, there were businesses that applied that never received the funding. This is a problem. He wished to know how this program would be different.

**Ms. Judith Edwards** said that the money should go to [loss of audio]. She added that the money should go to the youth and she supports the use of video cameras. The Shot Spotter brings the police to the shootings quickly and the cameras have helped with identifying the perpetrators. The money has to be audited to make sure that it goes where it should. It is time to think about the community.

**Ms. LaToya Johnson** of Edmond Street, a leader of a non-profit that helps children who have lost parents due to gun violence. [Loss of call]

**Ms. Christine Baptiste-Perez** of Dupont Place said that the funds should be spent in supporting the long-term improvements such as the broadband technology, sewer systems, and a variety of other issues such as blight. If cameras are making the community safer, she would support that because it would make Bridgeport safer.

**Ms. Taesha Smith** asked for some community events because the police don't know how to deal with some of the residents. While Community Police would be nice, it would be good to have some introductions or a way to identify those who may be struggling with mental health issues so this will not end up in a violent confrontation. With the lack of trust, the community won't call the officers when they need them and the police won't interact with the community.

**Dr. Ralph Ford** said that some of the suggestions are no-brainers, because they are sustainable. They need to address distressed neighborhoods. By setting aside some of the funding, the neighbors can come up with solutions to address the problems. He thanked the Council Members for their time.

**Ms. Teresa Wilson**, Executive Director of the VIP program, said she has been in Bridgeport for 25 years. She said she was born and raised in Bridgeport and has offices on Lafayette Blvd. A majority of her staff are alumni of her program. They believe in preventions and have taken gang members to colleges and those individuals have gone on to college. She mentioned that there were some students who can't go from one side of town to the other. Travel broadens their vision and it works. The children need to be exposed. She was in favor of all the other infrastructure proposals. There are single moms who need assistance and the VIP program is there for them. They have expanded their student eligibility from 9th grade down to 6th grade.

**Ms. Johnson** rejoined the call and reminded that there were two murders in the last 24 hours. There needs to be more grievance counsellors and there is a need for a building for counselors. People are complaining about the dirt bike riders but they need to have a safe place to ride. The basketball programs have to be on both sides of town. Some kids are afraid to go to the other side of town. They need affordable housing and to help the kids stay out of trouble.

**Mr. Kenny Gadson** of Bridgeport said that it was a lot of money that was coming to the City. He wants to make sure that the money was strategically distributed and it should not go to the status quo programs. There are many programs that are starting up and don't have the funding. When programs close at 5 o'clock and the trouble starts later. There need to be safe haven programs. He spoke about how he could see the site where the young lady was shot the other day and people are coming to his home for safety at 2 and 3 in the morning. The young men need to have strong male leadership role models or real models. He spoke about all the negative forces that the kids are experiencing from their environment, their nutrition, and their video games. The kids need to be taught to think strategically so they can go through life.

Council Member Burns said that the online survey would be available for the next 10 days or so. He thanked his Council peers for being on the call.

**Ms. Helen Olga Losak** then spoke about the suggestions. She said that she was in agreement that the funding should be used for mental health for both the adults and youth. She spoke about the job employment programs in the past that ran for 8 weeks. They need help with job training for the former inmates. The homeless population is increasing. The seniors have been shuttered in because of COVID and there are many who are in need of food, like Bridgeport Rescue Mission. The infrastructure money should be used for the sewer upgrade. People need access to the Bridgeport transit. Helping homeowners with their repairs that were underway when COVID hit.

**Mr. Joe Griggs** of Chopsey Hill Road said that the funding should be directed to new programs and new leadership. As a community leader, he felt that he could bring help and assistance to the youth. The money should go to those people who are in the projects rather than behind a desk. He said that he agreed with the majority of speakers but wanted his name out there as someone who would be bringing the help back to the community. He wanted to know why they were funding programs that weren't helping, but wouldn't help him.

Council Member Burns thanked everyone and felt the suggestions were very helpful.

**ADJOURNMENT**

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services