

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CITY COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEARING AND SPECIAL MEETING
TUESDAY, JUNE 28, 2022
6:00 PM
City Council Chambers, City Hall - 45 Lyon Terrace
Bridgeport, Connecticut**

CALL TO ORDER

Council President Nieves called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

PRAYER

Council Member McBride-Lee led those present in prayer.

ROLL CALL

The City Clerk Lydia Martinez called the roll.

130th District: *Scott Burns*, Matthew McCarthy
131st District: Jorge Cruz, Tyler Mack
132nd District: Marcus Brown, Rolanda Smith
133rd District: Aikeem Boyd, Jeanette Herron
134th District: Michelle Lyons, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia
135th District: Mary McBride-Lee, Rosalina Roman-Christy
136th District: *Frederick Hodges*, *Alfredo Castillo*
137th District: Aidee Nieves, Maria Valle
138th District: Maria Pereira, *Michele Small*
139th District: Wanda Simmons, Ernest Newton

The names in italics did not appear to respond during the roll call. It was announced that Council Member Burns and Council Member Castillo were not present due to work obligations.

Council President Nieves announced for the record that Council Member Small had submitted her resignation, effective immediately, earlier in the day.

93-21 Public Hearing re: Amendment to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2.06 – Common Council, amend Section 2.06.010 – Districts for Election of Council Members re: Redistricting to establish new City Council district lines in Bridgeport based upon the most recent demographic census data and concerning a certain redistricting plan/map entitled Bridgeport – 2022 Council Redistricting - Proposal A, as amended and approved by the Special Committee on Redistricting at its meeting of Thursday, June 23, 2022 at 5:00 PM; and to provide suitable polling places in such districts and to define the boundaries of the area to be served by each polling place.

Council President Nieves called the Public Hearing on Agenda Item 93-21 to order at 6:11 p.m. She then read the Agenda Item into the record. She said that there were five speakers signed up and requested the speakers announce their name and address for the record. She reviewed the protocols for public speaking

Ms. Carmen Lopez came forward to address the Council.

Council Member Hodges joined the meeting at 6:12 p.m.

Ms. Lopez said her understanding of the public notice for the public hearing was that the purpose of the hearing. She said that when she looked at the proposed resolution, there were brackets and wished to know if the language that was brackets was being deleted.

Council President Nieves stated that the Council Members do not reply during Public Hearings. Atty. Anastasi replied to Ms. Lopez, but since he did not use a microphone, his response was inaudible.

Ms. Lopez said her comments had to do with the question of what the rush was on this item. The Council could have had a meeting in December of 2021, but the Council waited. The first meeting was held in April and the second meeting was held almost overnight with almost no notice to the residents and taxpayers of Bridgeport. This is appalling. It is a new low for Bridgeport. She said that the Chair of the second Redistricting Committee had been advised by the attorney to let people speak but the Chair stated that it was his meeting and he would chair it the way that he wished to. This just shows how crude, rude and low life this body is.

Atty. Jonathan Klein
Broad Street
Bridgeport, CT

Atty. Klein said that his concern was the process and that the City Charter Chapter 5, Section 2 has time line requirements. He reviewed the details of these requirements and stated the fact that the census was taken in 2020. The Redistricting should have been done by February 15, 2021, not 2022. He then quoted another portion of the Charter about a July deadline, which the Council had missed. The Charter then calls for the creation of a Commission if the deadline is missed. Atty. Klein then reviewed the requirements for the six members that would be on this Commission with the Council. He announced that according to the Charter, the Council could not adopt this ordinance. They need to follow the process.

Atty. Klein said he was concerned about the Redistricting consultant that was hired by the City, and not by the City Council. The task of Redistricting is solely under the City Council and they are responsible for the hiring of a consultant.

The City of Bridgeport has gotten a black eye over and over again about election issues. He said that the current action was in error of the City Charter and the Council was walking into a

mistake where their eyes were wide open. He asked them not to do this and expose Bridgeport to more ridicule and election questions. Follow the Charter.

Mr. Ralph Ford

410 Noble Avenue
Bridgeport, CT

Mr. Ford said that he had dealt with Redistricting over the years. Because of this, he was familiar with the process. He said that the population changes every year. He said that there was only Dunbar in his district and they need to have Harding in their district as a voting location.

Helen Losak

304 Bradley Street
Bridgeport, CT

Ms. Losak said that she agreed with Atty. Klein and former Judge Lopez. She said that the Council needs to follow the charter. She said she had been an election moderator since 1999, and had worked in the old Harding. In that area, there is not good turn-out, a lot of absentee ballots and many people just not voting. She said that a greater number of people vote at Dunbar and The Raphola Taylor Center shares the gym with Dunbar. She said that Harding should continue to be in the 138th District. She said that they had lost many senior votes when a health care facility closed in their District.

Ms. Gemeem Davis

Generation Now
Bridgeport, CT

Ms. Davis said that she was representing Bridgeport Now. She said that she did not have any particular issues and does not have a solid understanding of the process. Education on how these decisions are made would be great so people have more information. Since the populations has changed, there will be changes in the districts. She said that she would support having Harding remain in [inaudible].

Council President Nieves closed the public hearing at 6:20 p.m.

93-21 Special Committee on Redistricting Report re: Amendment to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2.06 – Common Council, amend Section 2.06.010 – Districts for Election of Council Members.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN MOVED AGENDA ITEM 93-21 SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING REPORT RE: AMENDMENT TO THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF ORDINANCES, CHAPTER 2.06 – COMMON COUNCIL, AMEND SECTION 2.06.010 – DISTRICTS FOR ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS.
** COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ SECONDED.**

Council Member Pereira said that she was requesting a roll call vote.

Council Member Pereira then said that she would like to read a statement into the record and did not want to be interrupted. The following document was sent to the City Clerk for inclusion in the minutes:

Please find attached the prepared statement I read into the record word-for-word. Please ensure it is embedded in the minutes of the Tuesday, June 28, 2022 Minutes in its entirety.

Thank you,
Councilwoman Maria Pereira

In an effort to preserve the record I will be reading the entirety of a prepared statement into the record which will also be submitted to the City Clerk to ensure absolute accuracy. I am also requesting a roll call vote.

On December 20, 2021, the Council President appointed seven council members to a special committee on redistricting in violation of the City Charter. The Council President was required to but failed to appoint a committee in February 2021 which was required to complete the redistricting by June 30th. Due to Covid-19, the 2020 Census data was not released until August; however, the City Charter has a second mechanism for redistricting should the Council not complete the redistricting by June 30th.

The then Majority Leader, former Councilwoman Eneida Martinez, was required to appoint three democrats to a redistricting committee and the minority leader chooses three members. We do not have a “minority” leader; therefore, the Republic Registrar was required to choose three republicans to serve on a redistricting committee which was required to complete its work by December 31, 2021. This committee was never formed. Although the 2020 Census data was releases late in mid-August, the CT state legislature was able to re-district every state senate and state rep. district in CT on time by November. The legislature only failed to redistrict our congressional seats on time and had to go to the CT Supreme Court once the deadline was missed. The CT Supreme Court appointed a neutral, experienced arbitrator to re-district our congressional seats with the CT Supreme Court having to approve the re-districting maps. Neither the Council President nor the then Majority Leader fulfilled their responsibilities clearly delineated in the City Charter. There is no plausible reason as to why the council districts were not redistricted by December 2021 as required.

On April 5, 2022, at the first meeting of the Special Committee on redistricting I questioned Consultant Kim Brace on how his services were retained and by whom. Before he could answer, then 1099 consultant, Attorney Mark Anastasi interjected that Chief City Attorney Chris Meyer used his authority and power to retain the services of Kim Brace, however no such authority or power exists under Chapter 2 - City Attorney, nor Chapter 5 -City Council. The City Charter is clear that redistricting is purely a legislative process in which neither the mayor nor any member of his administration has any role in completing or directing.

On April 27, 2022, I met with Consultant Kim Brace on behalf of Councilwoman Small, myself and our constituents. Mr. Brace showed me a map on his laptop in which the 138th district had the entire left side of Boston Ave. from East Main Street to the Stratford border without a single block representing residents from the 139th district which I agreed with without objection, but then he clicked another button and asked, “how do you feel about this?” The map now displayed the 139th district gerrymandered into the middle of the JFK Precinct extended further down Bond St. on the block where the new Harding High School is situated. I immediately stated that was “gerrymandering” and there was no legal basis for crossing the natural border of Boston Ave. which is a major state road. Approximately 7,000 residents are in the original Harding Precinct on the South Side of Boston Ave. in the proposed map with approximately 300 residents gerrymandered on the 138th district’s side of Boston Ave., yet the Councilman from the 139th district is attempting to force up to 7,000 residents to cross Boston Ave. onto the North Side, into the middle of the JFK Precinct, to vote when there are perfectly fine polling locations in the former Harding Precinct such as Hall School and Capital Prep. Charter School in the actual neighborhood where his 7,000 residents reside.

There is no legal basis to move any residents into the 139th district which is the most overpopulated district in the city as both the 137th & 138th district are both underpopulated with the 138th district being the most underpopulated with 996 less residents than the targeted number, therefore there can be no plausible or legal justification for the 139th district crossing over to the North Side of Boston Ave. expanding its district on Bond Street in a clear attempt to gerrymander the new Harding High School out of the 138th district, nor can there be any legal justification to gerrymander the City Clerk out of the 137th district into the 139th district. The City Clerk is being targeted as a form of political retaliation and retribution for failing to re-endorse the Council President for re-election and working to defeat her at the polls.

We have a legal, moral, and ethical responsibility to re-district keeping those we were elected to serve and represent at the forefront of all of our re-districting decisions, yet re-districting is being used to retaliate against political opponents and to satisfy the egos and unreasonable wants of councilmembers which is an absolute disservice to Bridgeport and its residents. When residents and voters express distrust with the election process and in its elected officials; many members of this Council only have to look in the mirror to understand why.

For all the reasons articulated here, I will be voting no.

Respectfully yours,
City Councilwoman Maria Pereira

Council Member McBride-Lee said that when she had seen the map for the Redistricting, she had difficulty understanding why the most populated district had more people added to it even though he had said that he was going to remove some residences.

Council Member Newton said the 139th was the problem in this process and he would like to provide the Council with some history. He said that since 2019, the old Harding had been closed and the voters had gone to the new location to vote for primaries, Presidential and for District

voting. He said that the 138th had the upper area and listed the streets. He said that he had been told by former Council Member James Holloway about how the 138th lost a number of people. He said that people can cross Boston Avenue to vote at the old Harding High School. The State Legislature recently indicated that the voting site for State Representative would be Harding High. The Redistricting is a long process and the Council Member from the 138th District doesn't know the history. He asked his colleges to support this item.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she had gotten the answer to her question. She said that she was not concerned so much about Harding as a voting location, but concerned about the number of people that were moved from one district to another. Right is right and wrong is wrong.

Council Member Simmons said that she was concerned and would be fully supporting the measure but noted that she was not able to meet with the consultant or see the maps. She asked if the Redistricting was done just to include Harding or was it to include others.

Atty. Anastasi noted that the census data was not released until after June 30th 2021.

Council Member Lyons said that she had received a summons, she spoke about a previous census where her district had lost about 8 streets. She said that they had lost some of the streets due to the fact that there was a large number of college students in her District. Those students are only there for a part of the year. She objected to this at the time, but no one cared. She said that the City Council should have been choosing the Redistricting consultant. She also mentioned a time when State Senator Gomes had his district redistricted and lost many voters. It is unfortunate that things change and sometimes there are benefits and other times there are losses.

Council Member Herron said the consultant had shown her that the 132nd had some changes that needed to be made and there was some shifting that needed to be made. She noted that most of the Districts had two schools. She said that if the 139th only had one school, she suggested that they consider sharing a school. This fight is over 59 people.

Council Member Cruz said that he was on the Special Committee and named the other Committee Members. Council Member Cruz said that his district had lost a number of residents and those residents were moved to Council Member Hodges' and Council Member Castillo's District. No one called to complain. Everything that needs to be said has been said. The constant bullying is wrong. He said that he needs to be focused on working to make Bridgeport better and represent his constituents. Every ten years the numbers change and the Districts are changed. He asked what they were fighting about. He said that the Committee had done a great job.

Council Member Pereira said that this was discussing an issue as an adult, not bullying but using the legal process. She said that the new Harding was on the north side of Boston Avenue, while the old Harding was on south side. State regulations require that the districts be as equal as possible. This is about the obsession with the new Harding building. This is violating the law with voters crossing a natural boundary.

Council Member Newton said that the law says that each District needs to be within 10% of the target. He said that the numbers had changed. He said that this is making the District back the way it used to be.

Council Member Newton asked for a Council Member to move the question.

Council President Nieves said that there had been some changes in her own District and that the former Council Member from the 139th had explained the reason why the changes were made. She then gave an overview of the various streets that had been shifted around in her district along with the neighboring districts.

Council Member Lyons said that this was the first meeting in a long time where there was a difference of opinion without screaming. She said that it was important to respect other's opinions. Unfortunately, Harding moved from one side of the street to another side of the street. She thanked everyone for being civil.

Council Member Brown said that the current process required that the census being taken by going door to door and then the lines were drawn. He said that the City would have missed that deadline and they would have missed the deadline for having a Commission handle the matter, also. He said that it was decided that each Council Member would meet with the consultant to review where the lines were being drawn.

In order to meet the July 1st deadline, this Special meeting was called.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN MOVED TO AMEND AGENDA ITEM 93-21 SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING REPORT RE: AMENDMENT TO THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF ORDINANCES, CHAPTER 2.06 – COMMON COUNCIL, AMEND SECTION 2.06.010 – DISTRICTS FOR ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS BY CHANGING “PROPOSAL A” TO “PLAN A”.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.**

Council Member Pereira said that the document that were filed in the City Clerk's office used the word Proposal. She wished to know why it was changed from Proposal to Plan A brief discussion followed.

**** THE MOTION TO AMEND AGENDA ITEM 93-21 PASSED WITH SIXTEEN (16) IN FAVOR (MCCARTHY, CRUZ, MACK, BROWN, SMITH, BOYD, HERRON, LYONS, VIZZO-PANICCIA, MCBRIDE-LEE, ROMAN-CHRISTY, HODGES, NIEVES, VALLE, SIMMONS AND NEWTON) AND ONE (1) OPPOSED (PEREIRA).**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN MOVED TO SUBSTITUTE AGENDA ITEM 92-21 AS AMENDED.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO SUBSTITUTE AGENDA ITEM 93-21 AS AMENDED PASSED WITH SIXTEEN (16) IN FAVOR (MCCARTHY, CRUZ, MACK, BROWN, SMITH,**

BOYD, HERRON, LYONS, VIZZO-PANICCIA, MCBRIDE-LEE, ROMAN-CHRISTY, HODGES, NIEVES, VALLE, SIMMONS AND NEWTON) AND ONE (1) OPPOSED (PEREIRA).

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM 93-21 AS AMENDED.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM 93-21 AS AMENDED PASSED WITH SIXTEEN (16) IN FAVOR (MCCARTHY, CRUZ, MACK, BROWN, SMITH, BOYD, HERRON, LYONS, VIZZO-PANICCIA, MCBRIDE-LEE, ROMAN-CHRISTY, HODGES, NIEVES, VALLE, SIMMONS AND NEWTON) AND ONE (1) OPPOSED (PEREIRA).**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BOYD SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Telesco Secretarial Services