

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
REGULAR MEETING
JULY 10, 2023**

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Jeanette Herron, Tyler Mack, Mary McBride-Lee, Matthew McCarthy, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia

OTHERS: Council Member(s): A. Boyd & M. Pereira; M. Anastasi, City Attorney; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo; Fire Deputy Chief J. Cronin, Police Captain M. Cotto; A Paoletto, Special Projects Manager; Su-Yun; Mery B. Intern; 203-414-0712; 203-880-5666

This meeting was conducted via Zoom.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Newton called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. A quorum was present.

Approval of Committee Minutes: April 10, 2023 (Regular Meeting); April 18, 2023, April 27, 2023 & May 4, 2023 (Public Hearings); April 5, 2023; April 6, 2023; April 10, 2023; April 11, 2023; April 12, 2023; April 13, 2023; April 15, 2023; April 18, 2023; April 20, 2023; April 22, 2023; April 25, 2023; April 26, 2023; April 29, 2023; May 3, 2023; May 4, 2023 & May 6, 2023 (Special Budget Hearing Meetings).

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED THE FOLLOWING COMMITTEE MINUTES:**

APRIL 10, 2023 & JUNE 12, 2023 (REGULAR MEETINGS); APRIL 18, 2023, APRIL 27, 2023 & MAY 4, 2023 (PUBLIC HEARINGS); APRIL 5, 2023; APRIL 6, 2023; APRIL 10, 2023; APRIL 11, 2023; APRIL 12, 2023; APRIL 13, 2023; APRIL 15, 2023; APRIL 18, 2023; APRIL 20, 2023; APRIL 22, 2023; APRIL 25, 2023; APRIL 26, 2023; APRIL 29, 2023; MAY 3, 2023; MAY 4, 2023 & MAY 6, 2023 (SPECIAL BUDGET HEARING MEETINGS).

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANNICIA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council Member McCarthy joined the meeting at 6:04 p.m.

QUARTERLY REPORT ON PUBLIC SAFETY STAFFING.

Council Member Burns said that he had reviewed the Fire Department staffing report and Deputy Fire Chief Cronin stated that he was present to answer questions.

Council Member Newton asked if they were planning on a training class. Deputy Fire Chief Cronin said that they were planning on holding a class in September if the background checks were completed.

Council Member Burns asked if there were concerns about losing leadership. Deputy Fire Cronin said that Civil Service was working on holding all seven tests. All the vacant positions were being filled by “acting” staff.

Council Member Herron said that she had been told that they were using outside agencies for the background checks. Council Member Newton and Council Member Burns both said that they had not heard this. Council Member Herron said that she send the minutes where it was noted. A discussion followed regarding the police personnel shortage in Internal Affairs.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that regarding the background checks, the City has been using a company in Shelton for background checks. She stated the Council needs to look into further. It used to be done by the Police Department and the State Police. This was changed when the new administration came in. Discussion followed.

Atty. Anastasi noted that a few years ago, Civil Service started using an outside company for background checks for City employees, but not Police or Fire. Council Member Newton said that he would like to have Atty. Anastasi look into the situation.

As there were no further questions regarding the Fire Department staffing, the Committee then reviewed the staffing report for the Police Department. Council Member Burns gave a brief summary of the report and noted that there were 30 expected retirements.

Police Captain Cotto stated that he was present to answer questions.

Council Member Newton asked what the status of the staffing study was for the Police Department. Council Member Burns said that the scope of the study will include not only the staffing but also the department needs. Cpt. Cotto said that they had an increase in the number of officers who wished to retire since the report was completed. There are shortages in both the ranks and for the rank of sergeant. However, crime has dropped significantly.

Council Member Newton asked if the figures included the new officers who were coming on to staff. Cpt. Cotto said that it did not because they were not sworn officers at this time.

Council Member Burns said that the report data was drawn from the figures that Civil Service has. Cpt. Cotto said that a number of retirements came in just before July 1st.

Council Member McCarthy asked why they did not have an up-to-date figure if the information was coming from Civil Service. He asked where the other 25 retirements came from. Cpt. Cotto said that there were 23 recruits at the academy that are not sworn officers.

Council Member Herron asked for clarification on the number of sergeants needed. Cpt. Cotto explained that the number was governed by legislation and one sergeant is required for every 10 officers.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that there was an incident in her District recently and the police officers were there very promptly. She also had a question about the process, which Cpt. Cotto reviewed with her. Council Member McBride-Lee said that it looked like there was improvement in morale.

Council Member Pereira requested that the report include a separate section for cadets, so that it is easier to see how many sworn officers there are. Council Member Burns said that they often have the number of sworn officers in the report.

Council Member Pereira thanked Cpt. Cotto for the fact that he was not retiring now that he was eligible. She said that while they were keeping down the numbers, but quality of life issues were a high priority for the constituents. Cpt. Cotto said that about 80% of the quality of life issues happen during the second shift. They are working to form a special details to deal with this because residents shouldn't have to wait three hours for a loud music call. One problem is now that bars have outside seating, there are more issues and they are trying to stay on top of it. The goal is to try to solve problems without arresting people. That only solves the problem for the shift.

Council Member Pereira said that she tells her constituents that they should expect loud music on holiday week-ends like Labor Day and 4th of July.

Council Member Newton said that he had a location where there have been issues and gave Cpt. Cotto the address. He went on to say that he had noticed a major change in the Police Department.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia reminded everyone to keep their questions focused on budgetary issues.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked if there was a noise ordinance that had a cut off at 10 p.m. Cpt. Cotto said that there was.

As there were no other questions, Council Member Newton thanked Cpt. Cotto for his time.

96-22 Proposed Amendment to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, amend Section 2.36.010 – Officers’ and Unaffiliated Employee Salaries for the purposes of adding a New Part-Time Salary for the position of OPM Director under the subsection, Executive Appointed Officials at Grade 8.

Council Member Newton said that Mr. Nkwo retired and he would like to come back on a part-time basis. He noted that there was no one else who knows the budget like Mr. Nkwo but the Council needs to put a time frame on this.

Council Member Burns said that this would create a new, unaffiliated part-time position for OPM Director. Council Member Newton said that the City needs to stop doing business like this by having a part-time director.

Atty. Anastasi said that the Council was approving a salary for a part-time position. He said that he did not believe that anyone could do the job of OPM Director on a part-time basis. Mr. Nkwo would be there to assist the new OPM Director and be a contractor for the budget cycle. The position already exists and the Committee is creating a salary. Atty. Anastasi reviewed the details with the Committee regarding the salary. Discussion followed about the full-time salary range and the part-time salary range.

Council Member Newton reminded everyone that the Budget Committee controls the purse strings for the City.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that the City has a habit of taking a short-term temporary position and making it a permanent part of the budget.

Atty. Anastasi said that the State recognizes that there are employees who retire and then come back as consultants because they have unique knowledge or skill. He pointed out that the job of the OPM Director cannot be done on 19 hours a week. He reviewed the details of process for assisting the new OPM Director.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked if there were full-time employees that were now part-time employees. Council Member Burns pointed out that Atty. Anastasi was an example. She said that she felt that they need to make changes.

Council Member Pereira said that no one was irreplaceable. She said that the reason that the part-time positions was there to protect the people in the full-time positions. She said that it was \$92 an hour and \$103 an hour in the range. This is out of the range and she will not be voting for this. It is inappropriate and she will not support this in any shape or form. Discussion followed.

Council Member Newton said that he had seen people retire, come back and stay for decades. The Committee needs to change this practice.

Atty. Anastasi pointed out that this process was not unique to the City of Bridgeport, but done all over the State. He said that Mr. Nkwo and Mr. Flatto both have unique skills for the budget process. The Charter requires a full-time OPM Director.

Mr. Flatto said that both he and Mr. Nkwo put in over 40 hours a week and a part-time position will not allow for the work to be done. He encouraged the Committee to approve the position because there are a number of tasks that have to be done over the next few weeks.

Council Member McCarthy said that he was pleased that they were not losing Mr. Nkwo when they do not have someone to replace him. They are not paying his health care or pension. It is important to have staff members who have someone in the department to take over.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that it was July. She said that in May during the Budget cycle that there was a possibility that Mr. Nkwo would be retiring. She asked why the Budget Committee did not know about this.

Atty. Anastasi said that Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia pointed out that there was no pension or health care involved.

Mr. Nkwo said that filling the OPM Director at a comparable salary would cost the City an additional \$97,000 more.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that she felt that Mr. Nkwo should come in as an independent contractor.

Council Member Pereira said that on page 129, the OPM Director salary was listed, but the Budget & Appropriation approved an additional \$3,000 increase for the OPM Director and the Finance Director. She noted that they were not even able to get the budget printed out correctly. This is wrong.

Atty. Anastasi apologized for a mistake he made with the figures. He noted that it was quite common for people to retire and come back as a consultant.

Council Member Burns said that they might want to consider creating an ordinance to set a time limit for a retired employee to come back as a consultant.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED 96-22 PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF ORDINANCES, AMEND SECTION 2.36.010 – OFFICERS’ AND UNAFFILIATED EMPLOYEE SALARIES FOR THE PURPOSES OF ADDING A NEW PART-TIME SALARY FOR THE POSITION OF OPM DIRECTOR UNDER THE SUBSECTION, EXECUTIVE APPOINTED OFFICIALS AT GRADE 8.**

Council Member Newton said that he came back to the Council in 2017 and that he did not have any idea of what may have happened before he came back. He said that it was important to him to have some time frames. It is not right to have someone come back as a consultant for five or ten years. The purpose is to train someone to fill a position, but not in favor of using this ordinance to hire a former employee for many years.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANNICIA SECONDED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO SCHEDULE A PUBLIC HEARING ON 96-22 PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF ORDINANCES, AMEND SECTION 2.36.010 – OFFICERS’ AND UNAFFILIATED EMPLOYEE SALARIES FOR THE PURPOSES OF ADDING A NEW PART-TIME SALARY FOR THE POSITION OF OPM DIRECTOR UNDER THE SUBSECTION, EXECUTIVE APPOINTED OFFICIALS AT GRADE 8 ON AUGUST 7TH AT 6:00 P.M.
*** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANNICIA SECONDED.**

Council Member Pereira asked whether Mr. Nkwo had officially retired and whether the City did not have an OPM Director right now.

Mr. Gaudett said that Mr. Nkwo had retired and the OPM position was currently vacant. He reminded everyone that Mr. Nkwo had a great deal of experience, which is why the Mayor wished to have Mr. Nkwo come back.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

CAPITAL PROJECTS REPORT UPDATE.

Council Member Burns said that their UB intern was present. Council Member Burns then displayed a one page spreadsheet form that listed the Capital projects.

Council Member Newton asked who would be responsible for filling out this form. Mr. Nkwo said that it would most likely be OPM.

Council Member McCarthy said that he was worried that there were staff who could not use a simple Excel spreadsheet.

Ms. Mery B. then gave a brief overview of the form and she explained that it would help with paper reduction.

Council Member Mack thanked both Council Member Burns and Ms. B for working on the form. This will help keep track of the funding for projects and unspent funding.

Mr. Flatto spoke about some of the details such as hard costs, soft costs and noted that Capital Projects are approved in the Capital Plan, but are not approved in installments.

Council Member McCarthy asked how they track the project information now. Mr. Flatto said that each project has a separate project number that can span years. They are also broken out by types of service, like architectural costs, etc.

The form is still a work in progress.

QUARTERLY REPORT ON PUBLIC SAFETY STAFFING CONT'D.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED "FIRE STAFFING REPORT" AS EXHIBIT 07-10-2023A.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANNICIA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED "POLICE STAFFING REPORT" AS EXHIBIT 07-10-2023B.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANNICIA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

GENERAL DISCUSSION RE: REVIEW OF THE MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT.

Mr. Flatto then presented an overview of the monthly report, which was displayed on the screen. It has been a solid, positive year. The highlights were included in an Executive Summary. He noted that this was only an 11 month report.

Council Member Newton asked about the status of the Airport and the balance in the Contingency Fund. Mr. Flatto said that there when the administration had come in, the Contingency Fund was very low and most cities have between 6-8% in their funds. The Fund is now adequately funded. He said that he expected a \$9.5 million dollar surplus. However, there were still bills that were pending. Discussion followed.

Council Member McCarthy said that he felt that Mr. Flatto was not being honest. Mr. Flatto said that he was being cautious. Any forecast is a work in progress.

Council Member Burns asked where the reserve fund for the newly settled Police Contract would be booked. Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo reviewed the details of the accounting for that funding.

Council Member Burns said that he just scanned the budget for May and that there were 15 departments that had surpluses over \$100,000. He said that there was a delay in hiring some positions which leaves the city short staffed.

Council Member Herron said that the City hiring practices seemed odd to her. There are three universities in the City and the City should be recruiting from those colleges. It is time to think outside the box. The City needs to do better on this.

Council Member Newton and Council Member McCarthy agreed.

ADJOURNMENT.

- ** COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- ** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Telesco Secretarial Services