

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
AUGUST 14, 2023**

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Tyler Mack, Matthew McCarthy, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia, Ernest Newton, Co-chair (6:21 p.m.); Jeanette Herron (6:21 p.m.)

OTHERS: Michelle Otero, Construction Services, Jorge Garcia, BOE Facilities; State Representative Marcus Brown; Nestor Nkwo, OPM; Kathleen Brickett, OPM; Thomas Gaudett, Deputy Chief of Staff; Ken Flatto, Finance Director

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES:

• July 10, 2023 (Regular Meeting)

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JULY 10, 2023 REGULAR MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MACK SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JULY 10, 2023 REGULAR MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

97-22 Proposed Capital Plan Amendment to FY 2024-2028 for the complete rehabilitation of John Winthrop Elementary School per State Project #015-0182RNV/EA.

Council Member Burns displayed several documents on screen. Mr. Nkwo reviewed the figures with the Committee. He noted that there were about \$2 million dollars of items in the project that the State would not accept for reimbursement.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that the cover letter paperwork says \$17.9 and the report states \$17.8. Mr. Nkwo stated that the correct number was \$17.8

Council Member McCarthy said that this was to amend the Capital Plan and they would later go to bond for the money. They do not have to bond for the full amount. Mr. Nkwo confirmed that this was so. He explained that if there were surplus funding from other projects that was not used for their allocated projects, the funds could be transferred. Mr. Nkwo said that they could do this.

Council Member McCarthy asked why this school was being renovated.

Mr. Garcia said that Winthrop/Skane School was from the 1950's. Last year there was a flood and the boilers were in 8 feet of water. The building was non-ADA compliance, there is no HVAC system. It does have a slate roof.

Skane has a sewer system and single pane windows. The parking lots have to be totally redone. There was a steam pipe break in the tunnels and the steam started to push up floor tiles.

The new construction will give the City a chance to build a new building and replace buildings that are very old. The need for power is growing and the current buildings need upgrades. Skane has AC window units for the students who have a need for air conditioning.

He said that there is ledge all through the North End, so he was recommending demolition.

Council Member McCarthy said that they have two schools that need upgrades but they would be getting two schools for the price of one. He said that he was in favor of this project.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that the information in the paperwork only names the Winthrop School, but Anna Baum Skane was also a major contributor to the City. She expressed concerns about removing the Skane School because she could not see making one large school from two smaller schools. She said that they need more information and the paperwork needs to be corrected. There are two different entities and need to remain separate.

Council Members Newton and Herron joined the meeting at 6:21 p.m.

Mr. Garcia said that they had considered the issues with Skane and they want to make sure that the students get a safe learning environment. He said that he understood the Council Members' concerns.

Mr. Nkwo said that this was the first time that he was hearing about the Skane School being involved. Ms. Otero explained that the State was only referring to the project as Winthrop and that is why Winthrop was the only name mentioned on the paperwork. It is the same as the Bassick/BMA situation.

Mr. Flatto said that the resolution was approved by the State was a bit unusual. The City has 120 days to submit the proper paperwork. This is actually approving funding for the site. The BOE will be handling approving the merging of the two campuses. If this is not approved now, the City will have to wait another year for funding.

Mr. Flatto said that his plan was to give the Committee a resolution that would close out some previously project funding and transfer the funding to the Winthrop. He believes that this amount will be about \$3 million.

Council Member Newton said that they need to recognize that many of the school buildings in Bridgeport are over 100 years old. Not approving the bonding funding approved through Representative Brown's efforts would be a terrible mistake. Council Member Newton asked what kind of condition Skane School is in currently.

Mr. Garcia said that the infrastructure in both buildings are very old and some parts of the equipment have to be fabricated because they are no longer made. He said that there were 600+ students at Winthrop and about 200 students at Skane.

Council Member Newton said that the City spent a lot of money putting band aids on the buildings. He cautioned people not to send the wrong message to Hartford. He said that he was tired of bonding for buildings for chillers or other major issues.

Council Member Herron said she agreed with Council Member Newton. The students deserve better. They don't have air conditioning and they have summer camps there in 90 degree heat. Since Mr. Garcia has been back, his vision has helped the students. There are over 19,000 students in Bridgeport and they should move forward. She noted that they could make name changes later on.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that she was not against updating the school buildings but was concerned about the name changes. She said that she was looking for clarification and mentioned that Skane was a specialized program. She also wished to know if the Skane family had been notified.

Mr. Nkwo said that it was financially prudent. He gave the details and noted that if they had done the projects separately, it would cost the City much more money. Ms. Otero said that they would give the City more money if the student enrollment was higher.

Council Member Newton reminded everyone that the Council does not have any authority when it comes to the naming of the schools. Discussion followed.

Mr. Gaudett said that there was no proposal to remove Skane School and would be on the same campus. It will all be considered one project and it will be under one project title as Winthrop. The \$75 million dollar number is inflated because with the inflating prices, the City should not go over budget. This is being adding to the Capital Plan and the City won't bond for the total amount.

Council Member Newton said that he did not want to hear about this on the Council floor. Mr. Nkwo said that this resolution was for approving the plan, not for bonding.

Council Member Burns said that there had been some renovations in the past that had not gone well. He asked if the Skane School would be incorporated into the new building. Mr. Garcia said that the site had enough space to add a wing with an elevator and HVAC system. They could live together both in the same building. Ms. Otero said that they would need two elevators in case one goes down.

Ms. Otero said that Central was a major issue because they were doing the renovations with the students on site and had to spend money on landscaping.

Council Member Burns asked about the issues that happened with Longfellow which ended up with contamination. Mr. Garcia said that they were working with clean land and now that he was working with Ms. Otero again, so it should go smoothly.

Mr. Gaudett said that the State position was to renovate when possible.

Council Member Herron asked if they would have enough area for a playground and a field. Ms. Otero said that they would have a play area, but a field was not required. Mr. Garcia said that the site was adjacent to 90 Acres' field.

Council Member Herron said that she had been at Maui and requested prayers for the survivors.

Council Member McCarthy asked for clarification on the renovation. He wished to know what would happen if the same situation happened at Winthrop that happened at Longfellow. Ms. Otero said that a previous Superintendent had promised everyone a new building. Discussion followed.

Council Member Burns said that they were working on Bassick and wished to know when they could break ground. Ms. Otero said that they would have to break ground by June of 2025.

Mr. Gaudett noted that the cover letter had the incorrect figure, not the Capital project documentation.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM 97-22 PROPOSED CAPITAL PLAN AMENDMENT TO FY 2024-2028 FOR THE COMPLETE REHABILITATION OF JOHN WINTHROP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PER STATE PROJECT #015-0182RNV/EA.**

****COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO AMEND THE COVER LETTER TO CHANGE THE AMOUNT OF \$17.9 TO THE CORRECT FIGURE OF \$17.9.**

****COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO AMEND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM 97-22 PROPOSED CAPITAL PLAN AMENDMENT TO FY 2024-2028 FOR THE COMPLETE REHABILITATION OF JOHN WINTHROP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PER STATE PROJECT #015-0182RNV/EA AS AMENDED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

• **General Discussion re: Review of the Monthly Financial Report.**

Mr. Flatto said that for all intents and purposes the report is basically the same. The June report is still tentative until the August payments and auditors finalize the budget. There was a healthy surplus but it was a little lower than anticipated. Revenues is coming in strong because of the increased interest rates. The expense sides had a bit of savings and there may be more savings as they close out purchase orders.

Council Member Newton asked what Mr. Flatto thought the surplus would be. Mr. Flatto said that he felt it would be \$3-5 million but there might be more. However, he cautioned everyone that they just approved the Police contract which might reduce the surplus. Council Member Newton said that they want more accurate figures. Mr. Flatto said that he was being conservative with his estimate and there were some reserves that they need to factor in. Discussion followed about the amount of funding needed for the reserves.

Council Member McCarthy said that he thought that Mr. Flatto knows what the surplus would be but just wouldn't say it. Mr. Flatto said that he can't predict the future and pointed out how the interest rate increased recently. He noted that they have no way to predict what the tipping fees, utility bills or what the Attorney's account will need.

Council Member Newton said that there were some budgets that seemed to be high. He asked Mr. Flatto to keep an eye on the department budgets.

Council Member Burns said that there had been some positions in the Health Department, such as a position to work with the police, that had not been filled. He added that there were some increases for salaries for Blight. Mr. Nkwo said that he had to talk to Sumit Sharma about these positions. The increases have not been distributed to the positions at this time.

Council Member Newton said that it was a shame that the City Council allocated funding to help the Police and the Health Department and nothing has happened. He said that he knew Council Member Herron would speak to this.

Council Member Herron said that the Social Service component was put in place in the Police Department. Now they have one person, Ms. Gaines handling several jobs. Council Member Herron said that she did not know who they could call about homeless individuals. If the City is not doing the job, they have to fix the issue. Homelessness is growing. They need an active, aggressive social service department. If this continues, she will not vote for the social service component in the future.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services.