

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

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair, Jeanette Herron, Matthew McCarthy, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia

OTHERS: Council President Aidee Nieves, Council Member(s): Jorge Cruz & Tyler Mack; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Kathleen Brickett, OPM; Fire Chief Lance Edwards, Ken Flatto, Finance Director; John Stafstrom, Bond Counsel; Michelle, Thomas Soltes

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES:

- August 7, 2023 (Public Hearing)
- August 14, 2023 (Regular Meeting)

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 7, 2023 PUBLIC HEARING AND THE AUGUST 14, 2023 REGULAR MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

115-22 Proposed Approval of the De-Authorization of Five (5) Projects previously approved for Bonding Authority.

Mr. Flatto came forward and greeted the Council Members. He said that there were two errors on the document. The downtown parking garage was authorized for \$2 million rather than \$1 million.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO AMEND AGENDA ITEM 115-22 PROPOSED APPROVAL OF THE DE-AUTHORIZATION OF FIVE (5) PROJECTS PREVIOUSLY APPROVED FOR BONDING AUTHORITY IN ORDER TO CHANGE THE AMOUNT FOR THE DOWNTOWN PARKING GARAGE FROM \$1 MILLION DOLLARS TO \$2 MILLION DOLLARS ON LINE 125 AND ALSO ADJUSTING THE TOTAL FOR THE DEAUTHORIZED PROJECTS TO \$9 MILLION.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA SECONDED.**

Council Member Cruz asked for clarification on the location of the parking garage. Mr. Flatto explained that the Council had authorized some funds for the potential acquisition of the downtown garage on Broad Street across the street from City Hall. The owner has decided to rehab the garage on his own and it is no longer available for potential City ownership.

Council Member Cruz said that he and his partner, Council Member Mack, had expressed concerns about the garage disrepair in the past. Mr. Flatto said that the City was hoping to buy it and repair it. Since the owner is planning on doing the repairs himself, the money should not be sitting there, so the project was placed on the deauthorization list.

Council Member Cruz asked if the City would be liable in any way. Mr. Flatto said that he was not an attorney, but to his knowledge, there was no City involvement in any way.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council Member McCarthy asked who decides which projects should be deauthorized. Mr. Flatto said that a few months earlier, the Council asked him and Mr. Nkwo to review the capital projects that had surplus funding and also projects that had been bonded but the funds had not been used yet. He went on to give a brief summary of the projects on the list.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the funding for the Black Rock Senior Center, which has been allocated \$500,000 in funding, but was later dropped off the Five Year Plan. He also wished to know about the \$2 million allocated for the library. Mr. Flatto said that they would have to change the Capital Plan to move the funding from the parking garage to the Black Rock Senior Center.

Mr. Nkwo said that there was a grant application in process that would be presented to the Council for the Black Rock Senior Center.

The discussion moved to allocate funding for the Library. Mr. Nkwo said that the Library is responsible for paying the debt service. The City simply bonds on their behalf. They have been paying all their debt service for all the funding they've borrowed.

Discussion followed about the details including the Wonderland of Ice roof and the Newfield Boat Launch. Council Member Newton said that he had spoken with Mr. Nadrizny and that the roof at the Wonderland of Ice was in the process of being repaired.

**** Council Member Newton moved to approve Agenda Item 115-22 Proposed Approval of the De-Authorization of Five (5) Projects previously approved for Bonding Authority as amended.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA SECONDED.**

Council Member McCarthy said that this was just the start of moving money around for Budget. Council Member Burns said that four years earlier, they had deauthorized a number of projects that had not moved forward. This will allow them to bond less and reduce the debt service costs.

Mr. Stafstrom said that it was a good project for the Council to review the bond authorizations every four years to eliminate projects that have fallen by the wayside.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

116-22 Proposed Approval of General Obligation Bonds for the John Winthrop Elementary School Renovate/New Project.

Mr. Flatto said that this was the second part of the project. Mr. Stafstrom explained that as the projects become ready to move into construction, this authorizes the funding.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED AGENDA ITEM 116-22 PROPOSED APPROVAL OF GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS FOR THE JOHN WINTHROP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RENOVATE/NEW PROJECT.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia expressed concerns about the renovation at the Anna Baum Skane School. She said that she did not want to see the Skane School absorbed into Winthrop and felt the two schools should be on separate campuses. While she will approve the bonding but will continue to voice her concerns.

Council Member Newton said that it was his understanding that the Skane School will continue to have its own identity and building separate from Winthrop. Discussion followed.

Council Member Newton asked if they could include something about the Skane School as a separate entity in the resolution. Mr. Flatto explained that the wording of the Winthrop project title has already been sent to the State, but the Skane School could be included in the Capital Plan as a “whereas” statement. Mr. Stafstrom agreed with Mr. Flatto. He suggested that they consider language such as “whereas the funds will also be utilized for the replacement of the Skane School as part of the Winthrop School renovation project”. Mr. Nkwo said that when the project is included in the Capital Budget, there will be an additional line item. Discussion followed.

Council Member Herron said that the Skane School needs to be rebuilt and so it would be a win/win for the Board and the students. However, she reminded everyone that the Board of Education has control over the naming the building. Mr. Flatto said that the Board of Education has to submit an Ed Spec document to the State.

Council President Nieves reminded everyone that they had faced the same situation when they did the Classical Studies School. Council Member Burns said that they would have two schools under the same roof.

Mr. Flatto said that he had Mr. Tuttle on speaker phone and Mr. Tuttle confirmed that the Education Specs included the Skane campus moving into the wing of the Winthrop campus. No action has been taken by the Board of Education because the project has not yet been approved by the Council.

Council President Nieves and Council Member Newton both agreed that the Council has no input on what the State Representatives or State Senators decide to do regarding the City. Council Member Burns said that he had spoken with State Representative Brown and that Winthrop was one of the three the State considered most needy.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that she would like to get some written reports from the BOE Maintenance Department about this because otherwise they are going on hearsay. It is important to have the documentation. She also requested that the Council Members receive documentation in writing before it goes to the full Council.

Michelle asked what documentation Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia was requesting. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that she would like the minutes of the meeting, the exact wording on this and all the other related documentation to the State and City in order to be open and transparent. Michelle said that she would contact Mr. Flatto and Mr. Garcia and compile the documentation for Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO AMEND AGENDA ITEM 116-22 PROPOSED APPROVAL OF GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS FOR THE JOHN WINTHROP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RENOVATE/NEW PROJECT TO INCLUDE A FOURTH “WHEREAS” CLAUSE AS FOLLOWS: “WHEREAS THE FUNDS WILL ALSO BE UTILIZED FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF THE SKANE SCHOOL AS PART OF THE WINTHROP SCHOOL PROJECT.”**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that until they have it in writing from the State, she could not support the resolution at this time.

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH THREE (3) IN FAVOR (HERRON, NEWTON AND MCCARTHY) AND ONE (1) OPPOSED (VIZZO-PANICCIA).**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCCARTHY MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM 116-22 PROPOSED APPROVAL OF GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS FOR THE JOHN WINTHROP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RENOVATE/NEW PROJECT AS AMENDED.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH THREE (3) IN FAVOR (HERRON, NEWTON AND MCCARTHY) AND ONE (1) OPPOSED (VIZZO-PANICCIA).**

Council Member Newton left the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL QUARTERLY UPDATE.

Council Member Burns noted that Fire Chief Edwards had left the meeting earlier.

Council Member Mack said that they had been pushing for a police staffing study but asked if there was a study done for the Fire Department. Mr. Nkwo said that the Fire Department was mandated by contract to have maximum and minimum staffing. He went on to review the details with the Council Members. Discussion followed about the number of firefighters by contract.

The Committee then reviewed the Police Personnel report. Council Member Burns noted that there were 35 officers eligible to retire. Mr. Nkwo said that there had been 30 who left in June, but only 4 had left in the past quarter. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that there had been a change in the contract and a number of officers had decided to stay on.

CAPITAL PROJECTS REPORTING UPDATE.

Council Member Burns said that he was still working on the Capital Projects Report information. The intern is doing some very good work and making use of the spreadsheets and working with the Department directors. He said that it was his intent to have the information available when the Council closes in the next 10 to 15 days.

A discussion followed regarding reconciling the funding available reports from OPM and Finance.

PENDING AUDIT PROCESS.

Mr. Flatto said that the annual governance memo to the Council committees to let them know that the audit process has started. All of the GASBY standards are being followed. He said that he would hope they would be finished with the audit by December and filed with the State.

Council Member Burns asked if they would have the final reports by January. Mr. Flatto said that he would like to have the audit filed on time with the State. The discussion moved to the ARPA funding. Mr. Flatto reviewed the process with the committee.

GENERAL DISCUSSION RE: REVIEW OF THE MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT.

Mr. Flatto presented his report to the Committee. It is too early to analyze the variances. He said that the conveyance tax review was very good. On the Expense side, Mr. Flatto hopes they will not need to use contingency funding. There were some savings in the Police Department through vacant positions, but some of those funds will be offset by overtime.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the Port Jefferson ferry. Mr. Flatto said that the contract has expired a year ago.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the cannabis sales tax. Mr. Flatto said that there had not been any revenue generated as of yet. He said that he expected to have some revenue in the next month. Discussion followed.

Mr. Nkwo suggested that periodically the Committee have the Directors of revenue producing departments in for a revenue status update.

Council Member Burns asked for a brief update on the Contingency Fund, ARPA and ESSA funding. Mr. Flatto reminded the Committee that while the BOE has what appears to be excess funding in their account, it will be dispersed over the next year.

Commissioner Burns asked if any plans have been made for extra funding for the Registrar of Voters if the need arises. Discussion followed.

Council Member McCarthy asked about the interest earnings on the investments, which Mr. Flatto reviewed with him.

The discussion moved to Police Overtime for Special Events. Mr. Nkwo said that he could produce a special report showing the cost of the Police Overtime for those events.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO EXHIBIT THE 2023 THIRD QUARTER POLICE MANPOWER REPORT AS EXHIBIT 10-10-23A.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO EXHIBIT THE 2023 THIRD QUARTER FIRE STAFFING STATUS REPORT AS EXHIBIT 10-10-23B.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED TO EXHIBIT THE PULLMAN'S SPREADSHEET BOND AUTHORIZATIONS AS EXHIBIT 10-10-23C.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Telesco Secretarial Services