

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 8, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Jeanette Herron, Frederick Hodges, Mary McBride-Lee; Richard Ortiz

OTHERS: Council Member(s): A. Boyd, J. Cruz, T. Mack, E. Martinez, R. Smith, M. Valle & Council President A. Nieves; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Fire Chief L. Edwards; Kathleen Brickett, OPM; Police Capt. Cummings; Barbara, Su-Yun; Call-in User_1; 203-414-0712, 203-880-5666

This meeting was held via Zoom.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. A quorum was present. He noted that Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia was not present due to recovery from surgery.

Co-chair Newton welcomed Council Member Ortiz and Council Member Hodges to the Committee.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES:

• October 10, 2023 (Regular Meeting)

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 12, 2023 MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH (NEWTON, HERRON, AND MCBRIDE-LEE) IN FAVOR AND TWO (2) ABSTENTIONS (HODGES AND ORTIZ)**

REVIEW OF PUBLIC SAFETY STAFFING.

Council Member Burns said that the Committee had begun reviewing the staffing levels for the Fire Department and Police Department during the past year.

Fire Chief Edwards greeted everyone. Council Member Burns displayed the current Fire Department Staffing levels report on screen. There were seven separations, six of which were retirements and one of which was a resignation. He reviewed the current vacancies including the Senior Fire Inspector. Once the position is filled, it may create another vacancy.

Mr. Nkwo pointed out that once the current recruitment class is formed, it will have exhausted the current list. He suggested that since they were anticipating promotions that the Department and Committee consider a class of 25 for the next recruitment.

Council Member Herron thanked Mr. Nkwo for being pro-active in terms anticipating the promotions in order to keep the department fully staffed. Council Member Herron said that the current Fire Inspectors were phenomenal. She sees them in the field and has spoken with them.

Council Member Newton agreed and said that in the past, the department had found itself in a position of continually trying to catch up. He thanked Chief Edwards for that.

Council Member Newton asked Chief Edwards to give an overview of the details of injury leave and long-term sick leave. Chief Edwards said that right now, they had unlimited sick and injury leave. If it is a line firefighter, that individual's position is filled with a person being paid time and a half. It is required to have 63 staff on duty 24/7.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked about the new firefighters coming into the department. Chief Edwards said that there were 16 new firefighters currently on the streets now. Discussion followed about the details of filling vacancies.

Council Member Burns asked about the number of lieutenants. Chief Edwards said that they had held an exam for this and were currently waiting for Civil Service to certify the results.

Council Member Burns thanked Chief Edwards for his input.

Council Member Burns explained that Chief Porter had a schedule conflict. Police Captain Cummings was present to answer questions. Council Member Burns said that there were 288 sworn officers. There were three retirements and three on injury leave or light duty in the last quarter. There are over 30 officers with more than 25 years of service. Captain Cummings said that those individuals with 25 years of service would be leaving in 2025 because of the upcoming change in the COLA pension.

Police Captain Cummings said that there was a staffing study currently underway.

Council Member Newton asked for an overtime on the injuries and long-term sick. Captain Cummings explained that the Police have a different agreement than the Fire Department. They have a limited amount of sick time, which runs out after about 18 months.

Mr. Nkwo pointed out that most of the retirements have already occurred and he expected another 10. He noted that the City had held five police exams in the last 24 months. He added that by allowing lateral transfers, officers from other cities, towns or states could

come and join the department without having to go through the exam and training process.

Council Member Ortiz asked about the morale and the overtime. He wished to know who was monitoring the situation. Captain Cummings explained that they are watching carefully to insure that the officers are not being burned out. 23 new officers have joined the force and right now, there are 16 that are still in training.

A discussion followed about the number of potential retirements. Council Member McBride-Lee said that she felt that the Police Department was doing well and the morale had improved.

Council Member Herron gave an overview of the Police Department sick time, which is limited to a year, along with one extension period.

Captain Cummings said that they were looking for a sergeant promotional test in the spring. There will need to be more lieutenants, but Chief Porter would like to wait for the staffing study to be published.

REVIEW OF PART-TIME POSITIONS IN CITY GOVERNMENT.

Council Member Herron requested that a list for unfilled positions in each department be provided to the Council Members. She said that if the positions were not filled within a year or so, they should be reconsidered.

Council Member Burns then displayed a listing of the part time employees that Civil Service generated. Some of the positions date back to 2016. He asked how they could create a fair budget when there are part time positions tucked in various departments.

Council Member Newton noted that there were two people on the list that were making over \$100 an hour. Council Member Newton said that there are people who retire and then come back to work for the City part time. This needs to be reviewed and decisions should be made about how to move forward.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that they should not let former employees come back to work for the City. Discussion followed about what would be considered part time and the challenges in recruiting for positions.

Mr. Flatto pointed out that many of the key positions have specific requirements that would limit the pool of candidates. While they are looking to fill a position, there needs to be some flexibility in re-hiring former employees to fill the gap.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION RE: REVIEW OF THE MONTHLY
FINANCIAL REPORT.**

Mr. Flatto gave a brief overview of the current budget status. He said that on the revenue side had a risk in terms of anticipated sales of City properties, such as the former Harding High School. He suggested that the Committee consider asking the Office of Economic Development for an update on these various properties before starting the budget process.

Council Member Newton asked for an update on the Steel Point project. Mr. Flatto said that the Christof's had paid the City back in terms of what it was owed, but the Christof's had not received their portion of interest on their investment in the infrastructure. He then gave the expected timeline for construction and the interest payment to the City.

Mr. Flatto said the only worry on the expense side is the overtime issue. He felt that they would be okay at the year's end but did not feel they would have as much of a surplus at the year's end.

Council Member Burns asked about the Registrars of Voters budget in light of the upcoming elections, including the Presidential primary and the mayoral election later in January. Mr. Nkwo said that they were expecting a minimum of \$100,000 overage. Council Member Burns asked how they would handle this. Mr. Nkwo suggested that the Committee could do a transfer if they desired to do so.

Council Member Newton said that he believed the overrun would exceed \$100,000 because there would be the special election in January, the national primary and the Council Districts before the end of the calendar year.

Mr. Flatto said that over the last few years, there have been budget surpluses, they have applied it to the Contingency to cover the deficit. He said that if necessary, they could pull some of the funding.

Mr. Flatto said that they had been working at refinancing. Mr. Nkwo said that if the interest rates continues to be high, refinancing would result in a negative amount. However, re-bonding would be worthwhile. Mr. Flatto said that they were able to reprogram some funding from previous projects to reduce the debt service on the new bonds.

Council Member Newton asked about the Contingency Fund balance. Mr. Flatto said that they were supposed to have 8% in the Contingency Fund, and currently only have 7%, but the Internal Service Fund is healthy and would be the funding he was referring to earlier. Three or four years, the City did not have that funding available to use for the potential transfer to the Registrars of Voters. Council Member Newton said that he would like to commend the Committee for planning ahead.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER THE FIRE DEPARTMENT STAFFING REPORT AS EXHBIT 01-08-2024-A.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER THE POLICE DEPARTMENT STAFFING REPORT AS 01-08-2024-B.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER THE CITY OF BRIDGEPORT PART TIME EMPLOYEES REPORT AS EXHIBIT 01-08-2024-C.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HODGES SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

REVIEW OF GOALS FOR BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
FOR NEXT FISCAL YEAR.

Council Member Burns asked if there were any topics that the Committee members would like to focus on for upcoming meetings.

Council Member Herron said that they need to tap into the local colleges for potential hires. She said that the colleges would be open to something like this. Council Member Burns agreed with Council Member Herron about using the colleges as a recruitment pool.

Council Member Burns said that they had started looking at the properties that the City owns and how they could bring them back onto the property rolls.

Council Member Burns said that they also need to consider a policy for the cannabis funding and finally he mentioned that they were an environmental justice community. He said that he and Council Member Boyd had attended a program on investment regarding this.

Council Member Newton said that they have departments that generate revenue for the City such as Vital Statistics and the Building Department. He said that those departments should be fully staffed so they could generate even more revenue for the City.

Mr. Nkwo noted that one issue was being able to hire and retain employees in various departments.

Council Member Newton said that the budget timetable had been sent out and people should look at that. He added that they would be meeting in person. Mr. Nkwo informed the Committee members that certain codes on the Part Time listing were grant funded positions and cost the City nothing. Those positions also do not involve benefits.

ADJOURNMENT

- ** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- ** COUNCIL MEMBER MCBRIDE-LEE SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services