

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 29, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Tyler Mack, Co-chair; Eneida Martinez, Co-chair; Aikeem Boyd; Maria Valle (6:14); Ernest Newton; Jeanette Herron.

OTHER: Council Member(s): Aidee Nieves, City Council President; Scott Burns, Richard Ortiz, Maria Pereira (6:11) & Frederick Hodges (6:28); Anthony Paoletto, Special Projects Manager; Tom Gaudett, Deputy Chief of Staff; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Tyisha Toms, City Attorney (6:28).

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Tyler Mack called the meeting at 6:00 p.m. There was a quorum present at the time of the roll call.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES

- August 22, 2023 (Regular Meeting)

****MOTIONED BY COUNCIL MEMBER BOYD TO APPROVE MINUTES OF AUGUST 22, 2023 (REGULAR MEETING).**

****SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON.**

****THE MOTION PASSED WITH FOUR (4) IN FAVOR (MACK, BOYD, NEWTON, AND HERRON) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MARTINEZ).**

- September 5, 2023 (Public Hearing)

****MOTIONED BY COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON TO APPROVE MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 5, 2023 (PUBLIC HEARING).**

****SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER BOYD.**

****THE MOTION PASSED WITH FOUR (4) IN FAVOR (MACK, BOYD, NEWTON, AND HERRON) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MARTINEZ).**

39-23 Proposed Amendments to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 3.16 – Property Taxes, amend Article II – Real Property Tax Relief for Senior Citizens, Section(s) 3.16.110 – Real Property Tax Relief and Maximum & 3.16.120 –Application for Real Property Tax Relief.

Mr. Gaudett explained this item is eligible for senior citizens under state statute. The new program would be one of the biggest expansions for the state. They are looking to increase the amount of money for people in each bracket and allow more people to qualify. Going over the packet he showed everyone the easy graphs to read to understand what they are trying to do. He said this is something that makes sense to do as inflation increases.

He explained the language of the proposal is what is shown in the text. They also removed the budget cap from the new ordinance proposal to make it simpler and the people making over 60k now get a benefit as well.

****MOTIONED BY CO CHAIR MARTINEZ TO EXHIBIT THE PROPOSAL PACKAGE AS 02-29-24A.**

****SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER BOYD.**

****THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council member Newton asked if the old plan was up to \$58k and now it is going up to \$75k. He believes that the new difference doesn't make much change, they should have looked at a higher amount. Mr. Gaudett said that is correct, they looked at different places and they wanted to be reasonable. There was a lot of argument between going up to 80k, 90k, and even 100k. This would be a more generous tax credit for seniors within the state but not all programs are the same. They only have data on those who have been eligible and applied before, not the new applicants. As a taxpayer who might receive only \$30k, with the inflation going on, they wanted to help them out a bit. He suggested they implement the amendments as is and as a council, they have an obligation to review this every few years.

****COUNCIL MEMBER PERERIA JOINED THE MEETING AT 6:11PM.****

Council member Pereira asked when they made the last set of changes, the senior rebate program was just looking at just the senior's income residing at the residence or property owner. The last time revision was said to create a problem due to it becoming the household income. Meaning if they had relatives with them, their income had to be reported as well. It went from property owner income to household income. Council member Pereira asked did they change it back.

Mr. Gaudett replied he doesn't recall the past ordinances but the language did stay the same. He doesn't recall the ordinance going from property owner to household.

****COUNCIL MEMBER VALLE JOINED THE MEETING AT 6:15 PM.****

Council member Pereira said it didn't become an issue until after the first group of people applied under the first ordinance, the issues arose when the ordinance changed.

Council President said what she is interpreting what council member Pereira is saying with Section 3.16.100 subsection B, when they explain such taxpayers should be just the property owner and their spouse or whoever else pays taxes on the property. She interprets the term of household as the one who pays the taxpayer.

Council member Pereira said the tax assessors are using a different interpretation of the word household.

**** Mr. Ken Flatto joined the meeting via phone-in at 6:20 pm ****

Mr. Gaudett asked Mr. Flatto for clarification on what the definition of household met regarding the ordinance. Mr. Flatto responded it has always been household income, as the adults who contribute to property, usually being the property owners, whoever is on the deed.

Mr. Gaudett said he is sure that is how other municipalities operate the same way. Mr. Flatto there are other communities who have a two tiered system for single and partners.

Council member Valle asked if they are talking about homeownership for seniors or renter's rebate. Co-Chair Mack said this is a tax rebate.

Council member Newton asked for clarification, if the assessor is looking at whose name is on deed not everyone who lives there. Mr. Gaudett said from the understanding he got from Mr. Flatto is it would be based on the tax return on the individuals of who lives there, counting reported incomes coming from the household but the tax assessor will not be investigating any additional incomes.

Council member Newton suggested they should use the definition using just the seniors or property owners because the language can be perceived very differently every day or person to person. If this is a senior tax relief then they should keep it focused on the seniors.

Council member Herron added they need to make it very clear that it is the homeowner who is paying the taxes on the house. They shouldn't be dissecting living situations of children or caregivers being in the household.

Council member Burns added in Section 3.16.100C they refer to just the resident and their spouse regarding the threshold. He also wanted to know how much they have paid out within the last few years. Mr. Flatto added they paid out about \$1,054,000 dollars which served 1,090 senior households during the last fiscal year.

Council member Pereira said the problem is whatever this is saying is what the tax assessing is going by. If they use tax returns then many people will be disqualified.

Mr. Gaudett said he wishes the tax assessor was at the meeting to get her understanding of her interpretation and practice.

Council member Pereira added she would like to add that many seniors don't own property as they live in HUD subsidized housing but they do own a vehicle. They need to do something for those senior citizens.

****COUNCIL MEMBER HODGES JOINED THE MEETING AT 6:28 PM****

****CITY ATTORNEY TYISHA TOMS JOINED THE MEETING AT 6:28 PM****

Mr. Gaudett responded they do not have an enabling statute, they have to collect the taxes since they don't have an enabling statute. He hasn't heard of a car tax relief program but the car tax is the most burden over urban residents due to the mill rate.

Council member Burns asked how the application was filed. Mr. Flatto added that the application would last for two years. Council member Burns added what if someone's income changes during that period. Mr. Flatto replied anyone can file a new application at any year.

****MOTIONED BY CO CHAIR MARTINEZ TO TABLE ITEM 39-23.
**SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER VALLE.
THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

40-23 Proposed Resolution concerning the Initiation of a Charter Revision Process for the City of Bridgeport. *(Note: Item #'s 39-23 & 40-23 can both be found on the City of Bridgeport's Website: Boards & Commissions; City Council; Meeting Minutes, Agendas & Notices; 2023-2024 Full/Agenda Package; 2024-02-05pdf)*

President Nieves described this proposal to revise the charter. They would like to create a special committee group to review the charter front to back. She would like to get recommendations on how big the group should be. She knows department heads have been looking at their language to the charter and are interested in submitting changes.

Mr. Gaudett said when this proposal was created, they reached out to department heads to let them know they are serious. Once it hits the council, they have 30 days to fill in the positions. One thing he would like to take into account is once the commission is set, no one can dictate what they can or cannot revise. This time around with no rush, this committee can set the tone of the new commission.

Council member Newton said the last charter review was in 2012, who had the input on the charter review commission. Mr. Gaudett said based on his recollection, the old resolution had a bunch of whereas, but didn't give clear guidelines as to what needed to be done. Before the charter revision commission is set, the ordinance commission must set the guidelines for the new commission.

Council member Burns added in terms of make up, they can look at other charter efforts to see how many members were associated. He suggested since they have 10 districts, they can take that into consideration.

Council member Periera said from the last charter revision they have 29 changes including to the Board of Education, which could be very overwhelming for people.

Co-chair Mack really hopes everyone does homework because this is serious. At the last go around there weren't many responses. He hopes this go around everyone will participate to get the city on the right track. Everyone will be heard and this process will not be rushed.

****MOTIONED BY CO CHAIR MARTINEZ TO TABLE ITEM 40-23.
**SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON.
THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

ADJOURNMENT

****COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOTIONED TO ADJOURN.**

****SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER BOYD.**

****MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Vianca Rivera,

Telesco Secretarial Services.