

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

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Frederick Hodges
Mary McBride-Lee; Richard Ortiz, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia

OTHERS: Council Member(s): E. Martinez, M. Pereira, R. Smith & M. Valle; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Kathleen Brickett, OPM; City Atty. Tyisha Toms

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:23 p.m. He called the roll and announced that there was a quorum present. He added that Council Member Herron was not present due to illness.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES:

• March 27, 2024 (Rescheduled Meeting)

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 27, 2024 MEETING.**

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

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 27, 2024 MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED WITH FOUR (4) IN FAVOR (NEWTON, LEE, HODGES AND ORTIZ) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (VIZZO-PANICCIA).**

63-23 Proposed request to appropriate funds for the senior paralegal position in the City Attorney's Office, (Ref. #58-23).

Atty. Toms came forward and said that she had provided everyone with a slide from her budget presentation. She explained that she had two paralegals that she would like to promote to senior paralegal positions. There is funding in the budget to cover it. But the position does not currently exist, and therefore there is no funding allocated for the positions. There are five paralegal positions in the department and two of those positions are currently filled. Atty. Toms said that she would like to upgrade three positions to senior paralegal. This would leave her with two paralegals and three senior paralegals.

She then gave an overview of the financial details with the Committee.

Atty. Toms explained that the Senior Paralegals have a more difficult and challenging job function and it requires more independent thought and analysis. She said that the department also wishes to retain these employees because they have received offers from other law practices.

While these proposed changes will not match the outside offers, it will move the employees closer to the outside offers.

Council Member Pereira had several questions about the proposal, which Atty. Toms reviewed with her. She explained that she was just converting one currently vacant position and two filled positions to the new classification, but not adding any new positions to the department. There are two regular paralegal positions that would remain.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked for clarification. Atty. Toms explained that when she joined the department, all the paralegals were on Step 4 of the Salary chart. The pay scale was later changed to give the staff some growth opportunities. Discussion followed about the details, including comprehensive salaries in neighboring cities.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that the City needs to be competitive with the salaries if they want to retain good employees. This is why the City is losing good workers.

Council Member Newton said that the Department should have qualified staff, but said that he felt that the City Attorney's Office should be fighting more cases for the Council. He asked how many cases that the City Attorney's Office had handled in the last three years and how many of those cases had gone to trial.

Atty. Toms explained that there were several different categories to consider such as: a motion to dismiss, a motion for summary judgement or a motion to withdraw. She said that there were a number of cases that end up being withdrawn.

Council Member Newton said that he felt that there were some settled cases that he felt the City should fight and take to trial. If all the City does is settle cases, then he said that perhaps they should privatize the City Attorney's Office.

Council Member Burns asked Atty. Toms to have that information available when she returns for the Budget interview.

Council Member Pereira said that Council Member Hodges had repeatedly asked for a summary of all the settled cases and the Council Members have never received that information. Council Member Burns reminded everyone that they do receive the quarterly report on settlements.

The discussion moved back to the financial details listed on the spreadsheet, the new classification adjustment and the timing of the change.

Council Member Newton said that it would be important to make sure that all the paralegals receive reviews and are held accountable. He said that upgrading the salaries would be necessary to keep good employees.

Mr. Nkwo said that this change would move the two paralegals from the adjusted Step 1 to Step 2. Atty. Toms said that this would be so and noted that they would still be paid below other paralegals in neighboring towns. She explained that since she had been with the City, the Office

had lost 4 paralegals to other cities because the work distribution and salaries don't make sense. Since she has returned, she is attempting to bring people back.

Atty. Toms said that the paralegals work hard and gave two examples of when the staff had gone above and beyond to get their work done. She added that there is no overtime in the budget, so if there is a situation where they stay late, she has to give them comp time or force them to go home because she can't pay them overtime. Atty. Toms said that she would be asking for \$5,000 for overtime to pay the paralegals for those times when there are emergencies.

The Committee reviewed the documentation presented in the document titled "Paralegal Salary Adjustment".

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED AGENDA ITEM 63-23 PROPOSED REQUEST TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR THE SENIOR PARALEGAL POSITION IN THE CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

- **Public Safety personnel quarterly update.**

There was no report at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services