

Office of the City Clerk
Legislative Department
Lydia N. Martinez, City Clerk
Frances Ortiz, Assistant City Clerk



**Notice and Agendas for Miscellaneous Special Budget & Appropriations
Committee Meetings for FY 2024-2025**

Date	Time	Agenda Subject / Dept.	Location
Wednesday, April 3	6:00 pm	Capital Plan and General Budget Review	Wheeler Rooms
Thursday, April 4	6:00 pm	Capital Plan and General Budget Review	Wheeler Rooms
*Saturday, April 6	10:00 am	Capital Plan and General Budget Review	Conference Rooms A, B & C
Monday, April 8	6:30 pm	Civil Service/Human Resources/Labor Relations & Benefits	Wheeler Rooms
Wednesday, April 10	6:00 pm	City Attorney/CAO	Legislative Services Office
Thursday, April 11	6:00 pm	Board of Education: General Budget and Capital Plan Review	Wheeler Rooms
Tuesday, April 16	6:00 pm	Police Department/EOC	Wheeler Rooms
Thursday, April 18	6:00 pm	Fire Department/ITS	Wheeler Rooms
*Saturday, April 20	10:00 am	Capital Plan and General Budget Review: Public Facilities	Wheeler Rooms
Wednesday, April 24	6:00 pm	Registrar of Voters/Central Grants Office/OPM	Wheeler Rooms
Thursday, April 25	6:00 pm 6:30 pm	Public Hearing: Capital Plan OPED/Capital Plan Discussion	City Council Chambers Wheeler Rooms
*Saturday, April 27	10:00 am	Capital Plan and General Budget Review: Finance Department/ Vote - Capital Plan	Wheeler Rooms
Monday, April 29	6:00 pm	Public Hearing: Board of Education	City Council Chambers
Tuesday, April 30	6:00 pm	Public Facilities: Parks Administration	Wheeler Rooms
Wednesday, May 1	6:00 pm	Public Facilities: (All non-Parks Divisions)	Wheeler Rooms
Thursday, May 2	6:00 pm	Public Hearing: General Fund Budget	City Council Chambers
	6:30 pm	Library/Legislative Department/General Budget Review	Wheeler Rooms

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*Saturday, May 4	10:00 am	General Budget Discussion/Vote – Capital Plan	Wheeler Rooms
Monday, May 6	7:00 pm	City Council Meeting: Vote – Capital Plan	City Council Chambers
Wednesday, May 8	6:00 pm	Health Department: Social Services/Fair Rent Commission	Wheeler Rooms
Thursday, May 9	6:00 pm	Health Department: (All Other Divisions); General Budget Discussion & Possible Budget Vote	Conference Rooms A, B & C
Friday, May 10	4:00 p.m.	General Budget Discussion & Possible Budget Vote	Conference Rooms A, B & C
Monday, May 13	*5:00 pm	City Council Meeting: General Budget Vote	City Council Chambers
Schedule is subject to adjustments as needed by Committee Co-Chairs: 05/07/2024 – Rev.# 4			

Locations: *City Council Chambers: City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace 1st fl., Bridgeport, CT 06604.
Wheeler Rooms: City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace 1st fl., Bridgeport, CT 06604.
Conference Rooms A, B & C: Margaret E. Morton Government Center, 999 Broad Street,
Bridgeport, CT 06604.
Legislative Services Office, Margaret E. Morton Government Center, 999 Broad Street, Bridgeport, CT
06604.*

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 4, 2024**

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

OTHERS: Council Member(s): Council President A. Nieves, A. Boyd, E. Martinez, M. Pereira, R. Smith & M. Valle; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director, Kathleen Brickett, OPM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and greeted everyone. He said that this was Council Member Ortiz's first budget meeting.

Co-chair Newton said that the grand list did not grow very much and this would be a difficult challenge. There are some shortfalls, but Council Member Newton said that he was pleased to hear from the Board of Education.

Council Member Burns said that the Committee would have to take their time to go through the budget and that ultimately it would be presented to the Council for adoption.

The Budget Book contains the actuals from 22-23 and the adopted budget from last year along with the requested, the proposed and the variances between the modified and the proposed.

Council Member Newton said that he was aware of how things had been done in the past, but pointed out that the proper procedure for the budget is the seven members of the Budget and Appropriations Committee sit at the table and discuss the budget figures. Then the Committee members vote on the budget and present the approved budget to the full 20 member Council. The goal is to keep these meetings as productive as possible.

Council Member Burns said that it would be important to be respectful to one another and not jump into conversations, but to wait to be called on by the Chairs. It will be important to keep their eyes on the goal.

Council Member Burns asked if the Committee Members had any particular goals that they wanted to share with the group.

Council Member Herron reminded everyone that this will be a tough year for budgeting since all the extra Federal funding will end in June. This is why it is important not to over hire when grant funding is awarded. The Board of Education was very careful not to overbudget with the extra Federal funding. This year, the Committee will have to deal with some of these financial revenue losses. There have been times when the City has been told that funding would be coming to it, but 10 years later, the City still hasn't receive the funding.

Council Member Newton said that every year, the Council allocates funding for various positions and then the positions aren't filled. And after speaking with the Council President and the Co-chair, the funding for vacant positions needs to be moved to areas where there is really a need. In Public Facilities they hire seasonals. They need to include seasonal positions in the individual department budgets. Public Facilities can use up all the funding with overtime for mechanics and carpenters so by the time another department needs funding, there is no money left. It will be important to learn to budget so that the funding is available when it is needed, which might be later in the budget cycle.

The Committee then stated their names and Districts.

Council Member Newton said that the Health Director sometimes has to send staff out at night to check into issues.

Council Member McBride-Lee agreed with Council Member Newton about departments that had requested funding and then not used the money.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia then reminded everyone that there were certain items that the administration was obligated to fund. There are also some issues with situations where the Health Department, Public Facilities, Building Inspectors or even Zoning may have to go on site after hours. She pointed out that there was the minimum staffing for the Fire Department and the overtime that is required to maintain those levels. It is important to remember that the administration has no control over the fire, illnesses, vacation or training time.

Council Member Burns said that the focus of this meeting is the proposed 2024-2025 Capital Plan which is the long term spending plan. The Committee also will begin to look at the proposed budget.

It was explained that there were a number of projects that would be in the Capital Plan, but the proposal is to fund them from the General Fund in order to avoid bonding. The City has been doing this type of funding for the last five years. Some items were initially listed in the Capital Plan but later removed because they were funded from the General Fund. Because of this, these various line item will appear in the General Fund section of the budget.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED "CAPITAL REQUESTS VS. FUNDED BY GENERAL BUDGET" AS EXHIBIT 04-04-2024-A.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Nkwo explained that the document was broken out by department and there was a listing of what they intended to purchase. These are one-time expenses and they don't actually belong in the Capital Fund. He gave an example of Civil Service needing furniture for the testing center.

Mr. Nkwo then spoke about the Workforce Time Management software, which is a one time expense. The software tracks employees checking in, clocking out for lunch and then when they leave for the day. Currently, many employees just arrive at their desks without clocking in. The departments submit time sheets that are filled out. This will automate the time sheets.

He then spoke about the Police Department and noted that the Department had not purchased the tasers that they had said they would. Apparently, the funds were spent on something else. Mr. Nkwo has informed them that they have to spend the funds before June 30th and honor the funding that the Council allocated.

The Fire Department has a request to purchase four cars, one of which is a supply van that is 40 years old.

In Public Facilities, they are asking for a HVAC technician, a F-250 truck with a plow and a fork lift for pallet deliveries and one mid-sized SUV. Mr. Nkwo then listed the various employees, such as sanitarians, housing code employees, and public works staff that need access to City vehicles for their jobs such as removing graffiti.

At the Klein Memorial work needs to be done on the air conditioning and heating system. Mr. Nkwo said that the air conditioning in the summer costs about \$25,000 a month. That comes to about \$75,000. Discussion followed.

Mr. Nkwo said that they had been leasing a mad vac, which was working out well. They are coming to the end of those five year contracts and will own the equipment for \$1.00. He gave a brief overview of the landscaping equipment requests.

Council Member Newton spoke about how there were a number of police cars that were damaged shortly after they arrived. He asked if the officers were told that they should care for their cars carefully because they were City property. The officers should drive the vehicles as if they were driving their own personal vehicles.

There was a question about why these line items were separated out. Mr. Nkwo explained that these items would be paid from the General Fund and the reasons for this. Discussion followed.

Council Member Herron asked about the tasers and wished to know what the Police Department was using the funding for that was allocated for the tasers. She said that the administration should charge those amount back. She would like the information on what they spent the funding on to be sent to the Committee. Mr. Nkwo said that the Chief was not aware of the details of the specific allocations. Council Member Herron repeated that she would like the information on what they spent the funding on to be sent to the Committee.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked about the Klein Memorial and Mr. Nkwo reviewed the details of the line item. She also wished know why the City was paying for the HVAC but did not receive any revenue from the events. Council Member Burns explained that the City owns the Klein and the City is obligated to maintain it.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked if they lease it from the City. Mr. Nkwo reviewed the details of the agreement with her. Council Member Burns said that he would request the Klein administration present a report to the Committee. He added that the Klein does a lot of work with civic groups and with children.

Council Member Martinez said she appreciated Mr. Nkwo informing the Committee that the Police Department did not use the allocated funding to purchase tasers. She said that she when joined the Council in 2018, she had noticed that previous Police Chiefs had not necessarily used the funding where it was allocated for and used for other things.

Council Member Martinez said that she sees City employees beating up vehicles and driving at excessive speeds. It is time to start holding employees accountable for the vehicles they are assigned to drive. It is wrong to keep putting money in the budget for new vehicles.

Council President Nieves suggested that they look into using some CARES funding for the Klein if it is qualified rather than taking the money from the General Fund. Discussion followed about the details of using bonded money.

Council Member Newton asked why the departments could use funding allocated for vehicles or tasers and use it for something else. He said that he thought that the department would have to come back to the Council to transfer the funding. Mr. Nkwo said that he cannot monitor the daily financial transactions of the various departments. He reminds them periodically during the year, but that is all he has time to do.

Council Member Newton said that when the various departments come in for their presentations, the Committee should remind them that the funding should be used for the allocated items and if they don't do that, the funding should be returned to the General Fund. Mr. Nkwo said that he had just discovered this a few months ago.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that they should send the department heads a memo saying that they would be expected to account for the allocated funding expenditures for equipment.

Mr. Flatto pointed out that the department heads do have some latitude to transfer funding within categories. Council Member Burns agreed. Mr. Nkwo said that he can object to a transfer, but he has to approve it if it is the same object code.

The discussion moved to the adjustments in the budget book and attrition.

There was a question about the Board of Education budget and the time clock system. She asked why they were not using Kronos city wide. By not having all the departments on the same system, the City loses leveraging power when it comes to negotiation contracts. Mr. Flatto replied that there were timesheets turned in and given to the supervisors for approval. The biggest departments with staff that are in the field have to verify the sheets.

Council Member Burns said that the Committee should ask the CAO and the ITS director about this when they are present for their interviews.

Council Member Hodges asked for clarification on what would be considered a “small” department. Mr. Flatto said that it was usually an administrative department that had about 5 to 15 staff members. He added that everything is included in the system, but it starts with manual time sheets.

Council Member Burns reminded everyone that this was just a review of items that were in the Capital Projects Plan but being paid out of the General Funds.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED “THE OFFICE OF POLICY AND MANAGEMENT FOR PURCHASES” AS EXHIBIT 04-04-2024-B.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council Member Burns announced that page 1 was revenue increases, page 2 was revenue decreases and expenditure decreases, page 3 and 4 were expenditure increases. There is a summary on the final page.

Mr. Nkwo then gave a brief overview of the State figures that the Governor has indicated. He then reviewed the amount of anticipated tax revenue. The Grand List did not grow much and the tax review is sustained by the collection rate. He also spoke about the PILOT payments and Steel Point payments.

Council Member Newton asked what the \$17 million was for. Mr. Nkwo said that it was State Aid. Mr. Flatto gave the details and said that there was an amount of \$7 million that had not been included as “reoccurring”. Mr. Flatto said that the State legislators had been confident that the extra funding would be restored and made a commitment that the \$12 million would be allocated. The Mayor and the legislators were trying for the additional \$5 million, but he said that there was a risk that they may receive less. \$5 million is already incorporated in the State Budget for Bridgeport. They are hoping for an additional \$7 million. Discussion followed.

Mr. Nkwo said that the electric bill had increased along with the cost of the garbage tonnage.

Council Member Burns said that this would be the number that the Committee needs to consider and that the ARPA money will help meet the Mayor’s Budget.

Council President Nieves reminded everyone that the ARPA funds will sunset in June. Discussion followed about the South End Flooding Project and the Rooster River flooding.

Council Member Herron said that Mr. Urquidi, the City Engineer, has stated that the City needs a ACOE study and one was done approximately 30 years ago. State Representative Hennessey managed to secure funding for the project, as did State Senator Marilyn Moore. She noted that C zones were now becoming Flood Zones. The ACOE study has to be done before anything else is done. She said that she would be asking Mr. Urquidi about this when he was present for his presentation.

Council Member Newton said that because the State messed up on the Bassick Plan, it ended up costing the City more money. The Resilience Plan never went through and now the legislature will have to try to fix what should have been done four years ago. Now they have to deal with the issues with the school and the road.

Mr. Nkwo then gave a brief overview of the revenues listed on the pages and the premises that these projections were based on.

The discussion moved to the fact that the revenue from the cannabis dispensaries was being placed in the general fund rather than being allocated back into the host communities.

Mr. Nkwo said that he was required to put it into the General Fund. Council Member Burns said that they needed to create an ordinance to separate those funds out from the General Funds. Council President Nieves said that this was being worked on. She added that Affinity had been working on supporting the local communities.

Council Member Martinez said that Jonathan Delgado had created some language, but that it needed to be amended, so that the resolution for the ordinance is in the works, but not quite completed.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia cautioned everyone that the revenue was based on a percentage that would change over time depending on sales.

Mr. Nkwo then reviewed the funding for the City Attorney's Office. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that the City Attorney had made an agreement about how the funding would be handled.

The School Bus Violation revenue has not started coming in because the State has not approved the statute yet. Until it passes, the number was reduced to \$50,000.

He reviewed the remaining revenue items and then reviewed the expenditure decreases.

Council Member Burns explained that MERP (Municipal Employee Retirement Plan) was the State Retirement Pension fund and the State determines the percentage of what the City should pay. Regular City employees are covered at a certain rate, but Police and Fire have a high payment percentage.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED "FY24 ADOPTED MONTHLY RATES" AS EXHIBIT 04-04-2024-C.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The Committee then began a review of the Capital Budget.

Mr. Nkwo then reviewed the figures on the document with the Committee and how the figures changed with salary raises and State percentage rate increases.

Council Member Newton said that the Council had been told that by joining MERP, it would save the City money, but it wasn't saving money now. Mr. Flatto said that they should do an analysis to determine if the plan was still working for the City.

Mr. Nkwo then listed a number of one time purchases that were listed on the page 2 of the document, included the purchase of two dump trucks. He noted that line 47 contained information involved with binding arbitration.

There was a request for a list of positions and salaries, which Mr. Nkwo made a note of.

Mr. Nkwo said that the Probate Court office needed to be renovated. Council Member Newton asked about this. Mr. Nkwo explained that the City was responsible for providing space, a copier lease, and other requirements except salary.

The Committee then reviewed page 3 of the document. Council Member Burns asked about Lines 59 and 60, which held information on fees. Mr. Nkwo said that they had never included this information in the budget previously.

He gave a brief overview of the debt service payments.

Council Member Pereira asked why they were charging sewer fees for the City building. Mr. Nkwo explained that the Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) was a separate entity with its own tax ID number and considered to be a private corporation. Discussion followed.

Mr. Nkwo said that he had reviewed the Police allocation for gas and they had not increased it, but the cost of fuel has, so Mr. Nkwo increased the amount to prevent the Police Department from not having enough money for gas.

Council Member McBride-Lee asked for details about inviting the department heads to the meeting and wished to know about whether the sub-departments are included in the presentation invitation. Council Member Burns said that the Committee often invited the smaller department heads to present. Council Member Newton said that they will often invite others that might be able to provide clarification on issues.

Council Member Pereira asked why they were installing an HVAC system during the summer rather than when it was cooler. Mr. Nkwo said that this was the first question he had asked. He was told that it takes about 8 months to get the new system. The rental was just to get through the summer.

The discussion moved to the Small and Minority Business Office and then to the purchase of City vehicles.

At the conclusion of the review, Mr. Nkwo said that in totality, both sides of the budget would increase by \$10.6 million dollars.

There was a question asked about the Council Member's stipends. Council Member Newton said that the City has a responsibility to their residents. He mentioned two recent deaths of residents

in his District and said that he had received calls for financial assistances since the two young people did not have insurance. It is important to help the community. People need help 24/7. Raising the amount from \$1,100 to \$1,500 was fine with him. If a Council Member does not want to spend their funding, they can give it back. Discussion followed about the Council stipends, the travel allocation and the fact that the Council probably receives the lowest amount of stipends in the country.

Council Member Herron said that many of the Council Members can't afford to attend the various NLC meetings. The Council Members have an obligation to be educated and they should bring back information to the Council. She said that she had learned a lot at NLC and CCM conferences. Council Members can choose not to attend the conferences, which is their choice. Some Council Members can pay out of pocket for the conferences and courses, but others can't afford it. In New York, the Council Members receive \$120,000 in salary along with admins and offices. Bridgeport is the largest City in the State and the Council Members have to ask repeatedly to attend conferences and have had issues with stipend cards. She said that the stipend card allows her to keep on learning.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that it was up to the individual Council Members as to how to use their stipend funding. She also mentioned the City wide contributions were good because it shows the people that they are getting something for all their taxes.

Council Member Newton reminded everyone that this was just an overview and that they have a lot of work to do. He encouraged everyone to write down their questions for the department heads.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED TO ENTER THE DOCUMENT TITLED "THE FY 25 PROPOSED GOVERNOR'S BUDGET VS. THE FY 24." AS EXHIBIT 04-04-2024-D.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia encouraged everyone to send their questions on the various departments to the co-chairs in advance so they can forward them to the various departments. This gives the Department Heads time to prepare. Council Member Newton said that they had tried that before and it didn't work. People waited until the meeting to ask questions. Council Member Pereira agreed.

Council Member Burns said that this was their first night. They would be meeting on Saturday, the 6th and the BOE has a major retreat, so rather than the BOE Facility Director speaking to the Committee on their capital budget, the Committee will look at the City's Capital. On Monday, they have a regular Budget and Appropriations meeting scheduled. On Wednesday, April 10th, they will be meeting in the Council suite. On Thursday, April 11th, they will have a discussion on the BOE Capital Budget. Council Member Burns said that Mr. Nkwo had received the BOE Capital Budget requests.

Council Member Herron asked that the Council suite be aired out and vacuumed thoroughly because of her asthma. Council President Nieves made a note of this. Discussion followed.

Mr. Nkwo gave a brief description of the document that had just been distributed regarding the proposed State Aid. Council Member Newton said that the State had a billion dollar surplus and should be investing that in the cities and infrastructure.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 6, 2024**

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

OTHERS: Council Member(s): Council President A. Nieves; Jorge Cruz, Dasha Spell, E. Martinez & M. Valle; Thomas Gaudett, CAO; Anthony Paoletto, Mayor's Office; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Kathleen Brickett, OPM; Ken Flatto, Finance Director

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Newton called the meeting to order at 10:09 a.m. He called the roll and announced that there was a quorum present.

Council Member Newton said that they would be reviewing the revenue portion of the budget and the Capital side of the budget. The budget books are at 45 Lyon Terrace. This budget is different from two years ago. It is a very tight budget.

Council Member McBride-Lee joined the meeting.

Co-chair Burns said that there was not a recording secretary and the audio will be sent to the secretary. Mr. Nkwo will review the revenue portion.

A discussion followed about the availability and use of PowerPoint presentations and what information the Committee was expecting from the Departments. Council Member Burns said that during the past few years, the departments have been good about providing the Council Members with documentation. They are looking for changes in the Departments, successes and disappointments in achieving their goals. He noted that there were some departments that were supplemented by grants.

Mr. Gaudett pointed out that according to the Charter, the Budget and Appropriations Committee only has the authority to change the budget figures. He said that they made changing in other budget areas.

Council Member Newton said that he had yet to hear a Department director state that they had accomplished X,Y,Z goals. He said that he would be looking for that.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia suggested that they check out the OPED conference room across from the Legislative Offices which was set up for PowerPoint presentations. Discussion followed about the details.

Council Member E. Martinez joined the meeting.

Mr. Nkwo gave a brief overview of the material.

Council Member Newton asked Mr. Nkwo to give them a brief overview of where they stand, with how much money they need and how much money they have. Mr. Nkwo said that that they needed \$12 million dollars for the 24-25 FY.

Council Member Newton said that he had read that the Appropriations Committee in Hartford had not re-opened the Governor's budget. He asked Mr. Gaudett to explain what this would mean to the City.

Mr. Gaudett said that a few years ago, the legislature increased the PILOT non-taxable payments, but the formula does not help Bridgeport much. Cities like New Haven and Hartford have almost double the amount of non-taxable properties, such as churches and hospitals, but also includes State and Federal buildings. Whenever that formula is changed, Hartford and New Haven gain a lot of money, but Bridgeport only get some money. Mr. Gaudett said that they had complained about this but no one knows how to correct the problem without upsetting the apple cart. Their solution was to stay with the formula and add a line item that designates an extra \$5 million dollars to Bridgeport.

Last year, the City asked for a larger allocation and were given \$7 million more but it was a one time allocation. While this was very good, and there was a change in another allocation, the City received \$12 million dollars. However, those additional funds were not included in the new budget. The Speaker said that he would try his best to include additional funding, but their budget is already fixed. If they are allocated any additional funding, they will be informed about this in the coming weeks.

Mr. Flatto directed everyone to page 66 in the Budget Book and indicated where the PILOT payments were listed. He said that they had the \$7 million and reviewed the details of the other figures in the columns. Mr. Flatto suggested that they amend the budget by removing the \$5 million and make some additional adjustments. Discussion followed about the details.

Council Member Newton said that they would make the necessary adjustments as they receive updated information. This was just to get a clearer picture of what the Council was facing. There are no magic wands. He added that trying to factor in the State contributions before the State sets their budget was a terrible way to do the budget, which he has said numerous times before.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked what the percentage was for the State PILOT contributions. She said her last figure was 47%. Mr. Flatto said that he thought it was about 50%. Additional discussion followed.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia noted that Sacred Heart University was expanding their property holdings in Bridgeport, but they list their Fairfield address. She asked if the City was getting credit for the non-taxable University property in Bridgeport. Mr. Flatto said that they do recognize the SHU parcels.

Council Member Spell has a question about non-profits. Council Member Newton suggested she speak with Mr. Gaudett and Mr. Flatto about this off line.

Council Member Burns asked about the unexpended ARPA amounts. Mr. Gaudett said that he needs an accounting about this. Council Member Burns asked for a copy of the reimbursement rate. Mr. Gaudett said that he would provide that information to the Committee.

Mr. Gaudett pointed out that there were a number of very creative minds at the meeting and asked for suggestions on what they could proposed next year to the State Legislature to update the PILOT formula that is not dependent on non-taxable properties. This is a long term problem.

Council Member Newton pointed out that Hartford and New Haven watch out for their own towns and they are in key positions to watch out for their communities. He noted that it takes the will of the leadership to adjust this. Unless the Governor puts funding in for Bridgeport, it will not happen. Mr. Gaudett agreed and pointed out that even when the State has a surplus, they won't give money to Bridgeport because they have inserted guard rails to prevent that. Even when there is a surplus, they have to use it for pensions or set it aside. The discussion moved back to the \$7 million for Bridgeport, earmarks and the work of the delegation.

Council Member Burns asked for clarification on the Contingency fund investments on page 38. Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo then reviewed the details.

Council Member Newton reminded everyone that the City was in a much better financial place than they were five years ago. He added that for Bassick High School, the City has to use their funding to pay the contractors because the State has not yet reimbursed the City for the work. He said that the State owes the City about \$120 million. One of the problems is that once they submit the paperwork for the reimbursement, the State asks for more documentation. Once they receive the funding, the money will be used for Capital projects, since that is where they took the money from to pay the contractors . Discussion followed.

Council Member Burns wished to know what the oldest school projects were that the State had not paid out the reimbursements. Mr. Flatto said that he thought it was Fairchild Wheeler. Council Member Newton agreed and added that they were still waiting on reimbursement for Black Rock and Aquaculture, also. He reminded everyone about the State scandal that had happened and how the State shut everything down to start everything all over again.

Council Member Burns asked for clarification on what the State guidelines were for investments. Mr. Flatto listed them. Council Member Burns said that they had \$40 million in the General Fund and asked for potential investment returns on investments. Discussion followed about the details.

Council Member Newton said that if a Council Member knew they would not be able to be present at a meeting when a department director was presenting, they should send their questions and concerns to the Chairs. That will then be passed to the department director as a request for information or explanation.

Council President Nieves reminded everyone that there were some raises were included in the Budget Book, but often they are parts of contractual agreements and sometimes they are accumulated COLA increases. If a contract is delayed due to negotiations, the final adjustments seem to be major increases in salaries. Mr. Gaudett and Council Member Newton agreed.

Mr. Gaudett reminded everyone that when there were retroactive payments, the employees worked for that period of time without the pay adjustment they were due. Discussion followed.

Council Member Martinez said that it was important to attend Committee meetings because there is information that is presented at them. She said she has issues with the unions being two years behind with pay raises. She noted that Atty. Skyers was working on having the contracts settled in a timely manner.

Council Member Martinez said that all the concerns about various Departmental issues should be given to the Council President and that she should be the one who contacts the departments. Council Members are elected to represent their Districts, not departments in the City. There are many residents in the City that think the elected officials are supervisors of the Departments, but this is why they have to let the Council President contact the Department directors and bring the information to the Council Members. This is how to run it effectively, appropriately and avoid miscommunications.

Council Member Burns said that on Monday, they had a regularly scheduled meeting with two items on the agenda. They will consider the Civil Service item first and then after the conclusion of that meeting they will have the special meeting on the Budget.

Mr. Nkwo said that they would see a three year spread of budget information. Council President Nieves said that this was a proposed budget and the Council would approve it. No Mayor or Governor will submit a perfect budget. It is the job of the Council to be fiscally responsible and plan ahead to the best of their ability. She said that the Council was working hard to be financially responsible.

Council Member Burns asked about parking meter collections. He said that the person who was directing that operation had passed away and the person who was overseeing it on a part time basis experienced some health issues. He asked who was going to be in charge and wished to know about the details of the operation. The employee has to leave at 5 and that means he is not collecting until 5 because he has to be back in the office.

Mr. Gaudett said that things were changing on a daily basis. He said that he had a meeting with all of the Parking Enforcement staff. They are going to try to hire a bi-lingual employee to fill one of the vacancies. A Personnel Request Form (PRF) has been submitted. Mr. Gaudett then reviewed the hiring process. He also explained that department had been split into two sections, one that deals with the actual equipment will be overseen by one area of Public Facilities and the other that deals with the administrative issues such as tickets will also be handled by a different aspect of Public Facilities.

Mr. Gaudett said that there was a debate about Parking Enforcement because while it generates revenue, it also can incur overtime. While it enforces the rules, it make the residents angry.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked if they could stagger the hours. Discussion followed about the cost of filling one of the vacancies in the Parking Enforcement.

Council Member Martinez said that she had an issue with having someone collecting the money from the meters without supervision. She believes that there were too many Parking Enforcement staff members and that the Parking staff enforces where they want to ticket rather than following the guidelines in the ordinances. There have been incidents where low income residents have received parking tickets for being a few feet away from the curb or other minor issues. She said that they could eliminate positions in this department.

Council Member Herron said that there was an ordinance already in place about this and they can only go to specific areas. Previously, the enforcement officers were going all over the City. These are regular civilians, not sworn officers. The department needs to be revamped.

Council Member McBride-Lee spoke about how someone had been ticketed for parking in front of their house. She spoke about other, long standing concerns with the department and potential conflicts of interest.

Council Member Cruz said his problem was with the week-end parking. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that they could ticket if someone parked in a handicapped space or a No Parking area. The meters are not active on week-ends.

Council Member Cruz said that he got a call from a pastor about his parishioners being ticketed on Easter Sunday. Mr. Gaudett said that there was an appeals system and the Parking Enforcement staff becomes annoyed when the tickets are issued and then just are ignored. Some Parking Enforcement staff are very dedicated to their jobs and sometimes excessively so.

Council Member Newton said that there had been a Public Facilities staff member who had been annoyed with an official and ticketed family members. This is not a secret police department.

Mr. Gaudett pointed out that they have thousands of employees and that if a Council Member sees something, they have to let him know because the administration cannot possibly oversee everything in the City. By letting the administration know, the administration will try to deal with it.

Council President Nieves reminded everyone that Police Officers can also issue tickets and mentioned a particular intersections where there were a number of accidents. She added that the Police Chief had promised to deal with tractor trailers. Residents need to realize that the signs that say “No Parking” mean something. It is time to hold the residents accountable.

Council Member Burns said that the meters were located downtown and at St. Vincent’s. It is time to enforce them. Police enforcement is another side of it. Fire hydrants and parking on corners are no parking areas for a reason. He said that he had spoken with the Police Chief about tractor trailer enforcement.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that they were working on getting an area under an overpass blocked off by the State because it is a safety issue.

Council Member Newton asked the Council Members to prepare for the upcoming meetings. Council Member Burns said that on Monday, they had a regularly scheduled meeting with two

items on the agenda and then after the conclusion of that meeting they will have the special meeting on the Budget.

Mr. Nkwo asked for clarification on a particular issue from Capital Funding. He said that the City of Bridgeport is the manager of the Klein Memorial and it was the City's responsibility to keep the building repaired. They have been requesting funding for their HVAC system.

Mr. Gaudett said that he had spoken with Mr. Nkwo about this and noted that interest rates were high, so using the General Fund for the repairs was okay with him. Discussion followed.

ADJOURNMENT

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

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

**** THE MOTION TO ADJOURNED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Telesco Secretarial Services

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
SPECIAL 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): Council President A. Nieves; A. Boyd, M. Pereira, R. Smith & M. Valle; Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director, Kathleen Brickett, OPM; Eric Amado, Personnel Director, Civil Service; Atty. Eroll Skyers, Labor Relations Director; Monquencelo Miles, Benefits Manager; Lisa Mastronunzio, Civil Service

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:54 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.

CIVIL SERVICE

Mr. Amado then greeted the Council Members and said that they updated the Civil Service presentation. The Civil Service office handles matters related to Chapter 17 of the City Charter in terms of hiring, tracking and retaining high performing employees.

Mr. Amado said that the Department had been asked to supply an organizational chart and highlight any major changes along with providing a breakdown of departments. He then reviewed the details regarding the reallocation of some positional duties to other positions. He gave an example that the Department doesn't need a time clerk anymore but they do need a data clerk. Now that the Department is giving more examinations, there will be a need for an additional person to assist with those processes.

Mr. Amado said that when examinations are given, there are many details to address such as marketing and advertising, scheduling pre-appointment physicals and other tasks.

The Department has continued to hire police recruits and currently has a police class graduating, one that is in the process and they have started the process to assemble the next class of recruits. He thanked the Council for approve the lateral transfer for police officers.

The Fire Department has 18 recruits in it and they are continuing to process recruits. They are working on the transition of provisional positions to regular positions.

Mr. Amado said that one key issue that Bridgeport and other municipalities need to work on is home growth and promoting Bridgeport residents within the City structure. He said that it would be important to have Bridgeport residents employed at the entry level and work into key positions.

Mr. Amado then spoke about the employee evaluations. He explained that his Department is working on updating and modernizing the employee evaluations. The instructions for the various department heads for promotion criteria and any associated examinations have been reviewed and updated along with the probationary reviews. In February, Civil Service and Labor Relations held a training session for supervisors on how to complete forms and how to engage their subordinates. The evaluation process should be a daily thing. This type of training should help address the deficiencies that currently exist.

Council Member Newton said that he was pleased to see this and said that they were making progress in this area. There are employees that have been working in the City for 20 years without reviews or any type of documentation in their files. He thanked both Mr. Amado and Atty. Skyers for this.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked about the updated employee evaluations, which Mr. Amado reviewed with the Committee. The evaluation forms were created some time ago, but rarely utilized. The forms have been updated and there has been collaboration with the Labor Relations on this.

Council Member Hodges asked if the evaluations were required yearly. Mr. Amado said that when someone was appointed, they are subject to evaluations. The probationary forms are for when someone is hired or promoted into a position, depending on the contractual agreements involved. The Department is trying to encourage regular coaching and creating documentation for the employees. He added that not every employee automatically receives step increases. Discussion followed.

Council Member Hodges wished to know what kind of guard rails were being put in place so that if a police officer or fire fighter goes through the training, they don't transfer out immediately. Mr. Amado said that if an employee transfers to a new municipality before a set time, the new municipality is responsible to pay the cost of the training back to the City. Mr. Amado said that the various municipalities don't have a problem paying for the training. He said that they would continue to work with the legislature on this.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that the evaluations should be on-going. She asked for clarification about Second Chance hiring. Mr. Amado said that the community has a number of individuals who have been incarcerated and that they need to take a strong approach to hiring those who had been formerly incarcerated. It will be important to evaluate the person's ability to perform the job functions and bring it before a peer committee. He gave examples and potential scenarios.

Council Member McBride-Lee said that they should also be sure to hire young people who may not have been incarcerated but need jobs.

Council Member Newton said that when individuals pass the written and physical tests, but are eliminated at the psychological testing phase. He said that the Department has to check into the number of candidates that are being eliminated because of the psych evaluation.

Council Member Newton pointed out that the City may be hiring 16 new employees but there are 25 retiring. He asked if they would ever get caught up.

Mr. Amado said that POST requires the psychological evaluation but his office now reviews some of the disqualifications. He then outlined the process of now using three providers which they have been using to address this. The Civil Service does have an appeal process, also. Candidates are being given as many opportunities as the Department can offer.

Regarding the retirees, Mr. Amado said that with so many people retiring, the City is trying to hire enough so that there are more people that can't retire than there are of those who can retire.

Council Member Newton noted that past administrations hurt the City by not hiring new police officers and firefighters.

Council Member Pereira had a detailed question about the positions within the Department. Mr. Amado reviewed the details of the reallocating of one of the positions listed on page 106 with the Committee.

The discussion moved to the security for the on-site testing rooms and why this was important.

Council Member Martinez said that she was glad that there were other psychologists that a candidate could be referred to for the psychological evaluation.

Council Member Martinez said that she would like to know how the Department director evaluated his or herself. Mr. Amado said that right now they do not have a process in place for a supervisor review. The main focus is on having the regular evaluation reviews done. He added that everyone should have a supervisor other than the Mayor, who is accountable to the constituency. Right now, there is no formal process but he will be working on that. Discussion followed.

A question was asked about sexual harassment. Mr. Amado explained that sexual harassment reporting was mandated by the State. That and DEI will be part of the supervisor's tool kit and having the documentation such as evaluations will help with this. Every year, HR is tasked with providing a spectrum of training. He spoke of creating a Total Quality Management team and a morale team. A survey was done in January with the staff and supervisors about the types of training that people felt they needed. Some of the training is mandated either by the State or the collective bargaining agreements.

At the conclusion of his comments, Mr. Amado left the meeting.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED "CIVIC SERVICE PRESENTATION" AS EXHIBIT 04-08-2024-A.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED "CIVIC SERVICE EMPLOYEE RATING FORM" AS EXHIBIT 04-08-2024-B.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

LABOR RELATIONS

Atty. Skyers greeted the Committee. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia announced that the information was on page 118.

Atty. Skyers distributed copies of a document to the Committee.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER A DOCUMENT TITLED “LABOR RELATIONS PRESENTATION” AS EXHIBIT 04-08-2024-C.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Atty. Skyer explained that Labor Relations encompasses Benefits Administration, Human Resources and Labor Relations. Ms. Miles is the Benefits Administration Manager and Ms. Sandra Ferreira is the Human Resource Manager.

Atty. Skyers then gave an overview of the organizational chart. He said that there was a Labor Relations Director vacancy and he has been in contact with a potential candidate. An offer letter has been sent and Atty. Skyers expects to have an affirmative reply in the near future. The Labor Relations Administrative Assistant position is also currently vacant. He explained that he has a plan to reconfigure that position.

Regarding the Benefits, there is a vacant position for Benefits Coordinator. This position has been posted internally, but there has been no response. It will be released for external posting.

He then gave an overview of the Human Resources department. The Human Resources Coordinator position is vacant and will be eliminated.

Labor Relations administers the collective bargaining agreements and negotiations. There are three contracts that are open. Two of the three “open” contracts actually have a June expiration date and discussion have already started. During Atty. Skyers’ tenure, the Department has settled four bargaining agreements, all of which involved expired contracts.

Atty. Skyers then reviewed the details for converting the Administrative Assistant to an Executive Assistant position. This change will result in some savings for the department. He explained that while he did need some assistants, he did not think he needs an administrative assistant.

In the Benefits/Human Resources area, the position for the Human Resources Coordinator could be replaced with a Clerk 1 position. The new hire has proven to be a very good employee and can handle the position.

Atty. Skyers said that there were part time floaters that could work in different departments and there has been a shortage of part time clerks. Atty. Skyers was requesting two additional part

time floaters. He reviewed the details of the finances. The floaters learn about the various departments and potentially could be a future full time employee.

BENEFITS AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Benefits and Human Resources are the added value for Bridgeport City employees. The health care cost continue to increase. Atty. Skyers briefly spoke about 2022 Inflation Reduction Act that will increase costs.

Ms. Miles then spoke about the grandfathered retirements plans that the City is obligated to fund and the Municipal Retirement Plans. She gave a brief summary of the updated changes and explained that because of these recent changes, she does not have firm figures for the prescription plans. There will also be some changes regarding the rebates and there will be a meeting in the near future to give more of the details.

Discussion followed about the Beacon Plan and the BOE paying for their retirees. Council Member Pereira asked for a report on the BOE changes.

Atty. Skyers said that the department would like to emphasize wellness. They want this to be part of the Human Resources in terms of added value and gave a brief description of this program. They are requesting to use the Linked Learning System that would provide training to employees. This request would be for an additional \$40,000 for in house wellbeing program. The Linked to Learning system cost \$20,700.

Council Member Hodges had questions about the benefits listed and noted that his insurance through his employer covers this. Ms. Miles said that when the City was self-insured, these benefits were included but when the City switched over to a partnership, they were not.

Council Member Hodges said that he had heard a number of complaints about implicit bias. Atty. Skyers said that it was most likely included in the Linked In Learning under Equity training. Council Member Hodges wished to know if that training would be mandatory. Mr. Paoletto said that there was a unit that had been mandatory and covered the topic.

Discussion followed about who would have access to the data, bid requirements, the cost and potential customization of the program and course reimbursements.

Council President Nieves spoke about a previous incident where an employee left the job because of the way the supervisor spoke to him. She said that having mandatory training would result in employees that were more content and stay longer.

Council Member Newton said that people need to remember that the City is actually a corporation and that they can't go on just placing people in positions without training.

Council President Nieves asked if the unions could require their employees to attend mandatory training classes. The discussion moved to reimbursement for courses.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that they have to start this when the new contracts begins. She added that she would like to put a cap on educational compensation for this. Discussion followed about the details of mandatory training.

Council Member Burns asked for a more detailed break out on the number of individuals who had taken the training modules, the number of hours that might be required for mandated training and if there would be the opportunity for employees to take the courses outside of work hours.

Council President Nieves asked about having the Council Members included in the training along with other groups. Atty. Skyers said that he realizes that the front line workers need the training but they need to advocate for respect and dignity with every conversation, it will benefit everyone.

Council Member Burns asked about the upcoming retirement changes slated for June 26th. He said that the State retirement plan was scheduled to change and go into effect that day. He asked if Labor Relations had come up with a plan for this change. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia reminded everyone that these changes will affect all the departments, not just police and fire. Often the Council Members hears about Police and Fire, but not about the smaller departments.

Mr. Paoletto said that the changes will affect Public Safety the most because it changes the retirement from the top three years of employment to the last two years of employment.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 18, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Jeanette Herron, Mary McBride-Lee;
AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia

OTHERS: Council Member(s): M. Valle & R. Smith; Curtis Denton, ITS Director;
Ken Flatto, Finance Director; Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Acting Fire
Chief Lance Edwards

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. and greeted everyone. He then asked the said that Committee members and representatives of the City administration identified themselves. Council Member Burns noted that the Committee Co-chair, Council Member Newton, was absent due to receiving an award for his work and that Council Member Hodges was absent due to a death in the family.

Mr. Curtis Denton, the Director of Information Technology Services (ITS), greeted everyone and distributed copies of the ITS Department Budget Presentation.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED TO ENTER THE ITS DEPARTMENT BUDGET PRESENTATION DOCUMENTATION AS EXHIBIT 04-18-2024-A.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Denton explained his org chart, noting that a PRF had been submitted for the Security Specialist and that he was waiting to post the Support Specialist until Civil Service updates the job description. Mr. Denton later explained that a PRF is a Position Request Form, an official request to fill a position. Council Member Burns asked whether the interns were properly vetted; Mr. Denton confirmed that they were.

Mr. Denton continued to explain his presentation regarding accomplishments, including the rollout of a second IP datacenter location; assisting Civil Service and Labor Relations with recruitment and retention; and upgrading the City Council center and the Wheeler Rooms.

A discussion department challenges followed, including being on call seven days a week, all year long; inflation; and cybersecurity. Council Member Valle asked about cybersecurity risks that she learned about at NLC. Mr. Denton acknowledged the threat, noting that New Haven was recently hit with an expensive hack and even MGM in Las Vegas lost out on \$100 million.

Mr. Denton reviewed the Grants related to ITS. He noted two major increases to the ITS budget, including specific licenses as well funding for the Permitting study. Council Member Burns

asked about whether OpenBridgeport was actually used and at what cost. Finance Director Ken Flatto said he would look into it.

Mr. Denton went on to discuss a new Time Entry/Leave Mgmt. Council Member Herron noted that the Board of Education uses a similar program for the BOE, using the state contract rate. She also asked about ‘work from home’ practices and the possibility with this technology. Mr. Denton noted that similar WFH practices could be handled there. Council Member Herron noted that matters of fairness and equity as well as unions need to be taken care of on this policy.

Discussion followed regarding ParkCityPortal.com. Mr. Denton noted that the system seems to be working well, but could not comment on why the Permitting Study needs to go ahead.

A discussion about phones and other tech hardware followed. Budget Director Nestor Nkwo explained that all IT requests need his signature and all necessary for any such purchases.

Council Member McBride-Lee explained that the ITS office had been helpful to her directly. Council Member Herron asked about desktops vs laptops in terms of cost. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked about making the basement of the Annex more secure. Council Member Burns asked about whether the Council would be able to access the skills of the GIS technician. Mr. Denton explained that that could be possible.

Mr. Denton left the meeting at 7:20 p.m.

Acting Fire Chief Lance Edwards then joined the committee at the committee table. He distributed copies of his budget presentation and an Open Grants document.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED TO ENTER THE BRIDGEPORT FIRE DEPARTMENT BUDGET PRESENTATION DOCUMENTATION AS EXHIBIT 04-18-2024-B.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VIZZO-PANICCIA MOVED TO ENTER THE BRIDGEPORT FIRE DEPARTMENT OPEN GRANTS DOCUMENTATION AS EXHIBIT 04-18-2024-C.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Chief Edwards noted the five current vacancies in his department, plus 12 vacant firefighter positions. He also shared that Bridgeport’s Fire Department staffing is much lower in personnel compared to New Haven and Hartford. He pointed to page 189 in the budget book to the request for three additional positions: one firefighter, one Fire Inspector, and one clerical assistant.

The intent behind the request for a new firefighter was to help with lowering overtime costs. Mr. Nkwo explained that his intent of adding the position was to reduce staffing shortages. Chief Edwards explained that that position could be used in that way only if shift totals were reduced below 63 firefighters per shift. Mr. Nkwo went on to question whether that new position would help with overtime. Discussion followed.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked about the time needed for firefighter trainees to join the force. Chief Edwards explained about it included about 11-13 weeks of training, and about five-six months before becoming fully active.

Chief Edwards explained the need for an additional Fire Inspector to deal with the increased need for safety inspections and highlighted information in the budget packet. The clerical position is requested to address Freedom of Information (FOIA) requests that are now forwarded to the department, rather than handled directly by the City Attorney Office. Currently about 150 requests are in the backlog, and three different people are working on it. Mr. Nkwo explained that police are using an officer to address the Police Department backlog.

Chief Edwards also addressed the ethnic makeup of the department and highlighted that the staff included 10 women, including four women in promoted ranks.

Chief Edwards went on to address some of the public outreach and data on victims in fires. The outreach included a visit to PT Barnum Apartments at the request of residents and the EDITH program with flyers in English and Spanish. Council Member McBride-Lee explained that she tries to teach her students to listen and follow directions during fire drills, and that she would leave them behind if they didn't listen.

The after-hour task force including Bridgeport Fire and Police Departments, the Health Department, and CT Liquor Control has been effective. Council Member Burns asked about coordination and cooperation with the state liquor office. Chief Edwards explained that the Police Department has a good relationship with the Liquor Control office. Council Member Burns expressed his appreciation for their support.

Chief Edwards added that the City had 25 burn victims in the last year, and that all were the result of kitchen fires. Two fatalities also occurred.

Additionally, the Training Division engaged in cancer awareness and cancer screening efforts. PFAS (the so-called 'forever chemicals') continue to be used in the firefighter equipment because it is effective in keeping firefighters' gear dry and not heavy while fighting fires. Council Member Burns asked about PFAS being used in foam firefighting materials. Chief Edwards replied that those have been completely phased out.

Youth training and outreach has also continued. Council Member Herron noted that the Wakeman Boys and Girls Club on Madison Ave is part of the Cadet Program. Swim lessons through the Y are also part of the support program.

Dealing with the opioid epidemic continues, and there were 309 incidents last year. The Police and Health Departments continue to coordinate on the program. Mr. Flatto noted that the Finance Department is managing the funding that is part of a federal settlement. Chief Edwards added that a grant is helping support the use of Narcan by fire personnel.

Chief Edwards addressed the grants in the department. Some date back to FY21. LUCAS devices used for CPR were acquired three years ago. The department declined the same FEMA grant in FY22 since it was a duplicated. The Tech Rescue Grant has not yet been drawn from, but classes

are expected to begin this fall. The FY23 Port Security Grant has also not been drawn, but is intended for boat training.

Mr. Nkwo addressed some of the vehicle expenditures, including four vehicles at a total of \$160,000. There is a request for FY26 for a new fire engine for Engine 10 for \$1,000,000, which would cover the vehicle and its fit-up.

Mr. Flatto and Mr. Nkwo discussed how past CDBG funds had been used on a previous fire truck, and that the authorization remains in place. They discussed whether the item should be included in this year's capital budget. Chief Edwards noted that the delivery of such vehicles now takes 42-45 months. He also asked that the City plan to fund a new ladder truck for Tower Ladder 5, the busiest in the City. The estimate is \$2,700,000.

Chief Edwards also emphasized the need to replace Station 12 on Beechmont Ave. At 106 years old and lacking modern facilities, including for women firefighters, the building needs to be upgraded.

Discussion followed about budgetary line items. Council Member Burns asked about Floor Plan review fees. Chief Edwards explained that the process is digital today, but requires training and the additional inspector position would help this effort. Mr. Nkwo noted that the rates have not been changed since 2016. He added that overtime is sometimes used to manage these applications.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia asked about whether propane tanks were regulated and inspected by the Fire Department. Chief Edwards replied that the department does not inspect those. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia also expressed concerns about natural gas. Chief Edwards explained that natural gas is safer than propane in some ways because natural gas tends to dissipate while propane sinks because it is heavier than air.

Council Member Burns asked about management of OT and its relationship to the new contract ratified a year ago.

Mr. Nkwo then shared a document outlining historic overtime trends, and noted there is much work to be done to get OT expenses under control by the end of the fiscal year.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER HERRON MOVED TO ENTER THE DOCUMENTATION OUTLINING HISTORIC OVERTIME TRENDS AS EXHIBIT 04-18-2024-D.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Chief Edwards noted that more suspensions of firefighters for abuse of overtime have occurred this year, and that those should have an impact on overtime numbers. Mr. Flatto added that the OT is hurting the City budget.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia added that the committee had not spoken on the request for 100 units of SCBA gear for FY2028. Council Member McBride-Lee added that she is appreciative of the Fire Department's efforts.

Mr. Nkwo also noted that there are actually two in the Deputy Chief vacancies as long as Chief Edwards remains as Acting Chief.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
APRIL 29, 2024**

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

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Newton called the public hearing to order.

Dr. Levy-Davis, the Superintendent of Schools, came forward and greeted the Council Members. She stated that the District currently serves students from over 80 different countries. The District's role is to assist the students with achieving the American dream. They also have several priorities that include case management for each and every student. The speaker said that they wish to track the students long after they left the schools to determine exactly what the data set is and how successful they are as a result of receiving an education in the District. Many parents, teachers, community members are looking forward to a new era of education for the Bridgeport Public Schools and this is what the staff is striving to do. It will take time and Dr. Levy-Davis is dedicated to do this, which will require no less than 10 years.

Dr. Levy-Davis said that this work also requires that they provide their teachers with competitive salaries and adequate facilities. Every teacher needs to be provided with adequate support and training so they can deliver clear instruction and information to the students the first time.

The District also needs to be accountable to the divergent students with Special Needs and need a completely different type of support. They are working towards greater inclusion and limiting the amount of time the divergent students spend in self-contained classrooms. This will provide them with greater opportunities to interact with their peers and requires an innovative approach in how the teachers deliver instruction, how they communicate and inform parents and how the teachers are trained to support the students.

Dr. Levy-Davis said the curriculum that the District uses requires a complete overhaul. It has to be coherent, challenging and innovative for the students, and also provide instruction for the English language learners who arrive in the District. They have a great need of support in language and adjusting to a new culture.

Dr. Levy-Davis said she is committed to delivering these services to the students, but was looking for the same level of commitment from the City Council. It does not have to happen all at once, but it should increase over time. This will help the students attain success over a long period of time.

Dr. Levy-Davis thanked the Council Members for their consideration and support.

The next speaker, Ms. Christine Baptiste-Perez, came forward and greeted the Council Members. She stated that she was the Chair of the Board of Education. She said that she had done some background research because she hears the same narratives that the Council Members do, including the underfunding of the District and other things. The majority of the School Board is looking to move forward and in order to do this, they need funds. She added that she does understand the Council Members' perspectives.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez noted that there have been five Superintendents since March 2014, which means that there has been a new Superintendent every two years. The average tenure of a Fortune 500 CEO is about 10 years. The Board will be using the allocated funding wisely because they have a highly qualified and certified Superintendent and a well-equipped District Office that can address all the needs. It may be hard to think of the investment now, but as Board Chair, she has noted some issues that have come to her attention. The Board understands the Council's position and they are working on a plan to change things. This includes providing teacher education and better training. They need the investment now, but they will be using the money wisely and directing the funding thoughtfully to insure student success. With the pattern of the two year turn over, it is hard to make the investment, but this is the first time that Ms. Baptiste-Perez can promise the Council to see a return on their investment. Bridgeport will be that turn around where students walk with their heads held high and the pride when they say "I am from Bridgeport."

Ms. Baptiste-Perez thanked the Council Members for their time.

Ms. Jennifer Perez came forward and greeted the Council Members. She stated that she was the Board of Education secretary and a lifelong resident, who attended the Bridgeport Public Schools. Underfunding has been a long term issue. During her time as a teacher, she paid for many supplies out of pocket and worked two extra jobs on week-ends. During her last year teaching, there were massive cuts and para professionals were eliminated from the District. With the COVID relief funds, they were able to hire back some para professionals and support staff. This budget would allow them to just maintain the staff they already have. \$3 million is just not enough. They need additional dollars to work towards the future for successful student outcomes.

Mr. Joseph Sokolovic came forward and greeted the Council Members. He stated that he was a member of the Board of Education. He said that he did not disagree with anything that anyone has said thus far. He said that he hoped that the City Council and the Mayor would take care of Bridgeport's children by not closing the schools, but by properly funding them. He noted that he had previously testified before the Council about the funding in past years. The Council bears the responsibility for the 25/26 Fiscal Year. This year, the District needs \$41 million dollars just to keep afloat with what they currently have. He spoke about past freezes and cuts. He said that there would need to be an increase of \$52 million dollars from last year's budget. There are no savings to cover the gap. If nothing changes, they are looking at six school closures in the 24/25 school year. Please remember this moment.

The next speaker was Albert Benejan Grajales came forward and addressed everyone in Spanish.

At the conclusion of his remarks in Spanish, Mr. Benejan Grajales said that this was not the first time that he was present to address the Council Members. There is something going on in the

Bridgeport Schools. They need to be sure that the schools are funded. Schools need to be prepared to educate the students. It is not for the Council to say that the District does not know what to do with the money. This is not the first time that they have spoken to the Council about this issue.

Mr. Robert Traber was the next speaker. He greeted the Council Members and stated that he was a member of the Board of Education. He said that his first time of speaking before the Council was about 30 years ago and since then he has testified as a parent, as a teacher and union leader. Now he is a member of the Board of Education. He requested that the Council allocate the District the \$16.7 million in requested funding. This will, as Mr. Sokolovic said, keep the District even with the services they are currently providing.

He said that over the years, he has dreamed of the Bridgeport students receiving the same level of services and education as those in the neighboring towns of Fairfield, Westport and Darien. Everyone would like to see the students receive those levels of services, but right now, the request is for the students to continue to receive the current level of services. The Mayor has offered \$3 million, but if they don't get more than that, they will have to take between \$12 and \$13 million out of their ISF savings account. There will be about \$3.5 million in service and turn over cuts already. That will leave the District with about \$1.5 million in the savings account for the next year. This will result in cuts next year of about \$40 to \$50 million dollars. Instead of kicking the can down the road, they are asking the Board to chip in \$13 million above what the Mayor has suggested.

Mr. Traber said that he has worked with Council Member McCarthy, Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia and Council Member Herron in the past. If the Council could continue to contribute \$1 million a year, which is very doable. If this was done, they would be able to offer the same services that the students in Fairfield, Westport and Darien receive. Right now, they are working on closing the ESSER gap and fund the budget that the Superintendent has requested.

Council Member Burns called Mr. William Medina forward. Mr. Medina greeted the Council and said that he would like to have the Council just spend some time imagining what a great school environment and a great education looks like to the Council Members. Now he is here six years later, still asking the same question. He asked the Council what they thought the schools would look like in five years. He noted that Waterbury spends \$30 million dollars in education and this is more than they spend on their Police officers.

Mr. Medina said that he had been challenging the Council Members to do the right thing for many years. Everything is on the table. Under the Superintendent's Budget, it shows that the District has received less than a 3% increase over the last ten years. People receive raises, but the City does not invest in their schools. He urged the Council Members to think about what an excellent school system looks like and said that Bridgeport has not cut the mustard in this City. Bridgeport is the largest city in the State and now they have to build a foundation that has never been built before. They have been short in their funding for education for decades. Now they may have to close down schools because of funding. The change has to start sometime and let's make this year the year.

Mr. Medina said that there had been a list published of the top 100 earners in Bridgeport and 99 of them were police officers. The City spends over \$7 million dollars just on overtime. How many better buildings and teachers could the District have with \$7 million dollars?

Mr. Medina thanked the Council Members for their consideration and time.

Council Member Newton said that he had forgotten to announce that the speakers should give their names and addresses when they came forward to speak to the Council Members.

The next speaker was Kendra Brewen, who came forward and greeted the Council Members and said she was present to speak about the Youth Powers Meeting. She asked the Mayor and the Council to invest more money in the education initiative. She said that she was a Special Education student and was worried about her education. She would rather spend her time working on her education and would like to become an aesthetician. This was not easy for her because she doesn't want to fall behind. The education budget has fallen behind since 2014, but the Police budget has kept on track. She asked why the Mayor was not supporting students like her and said it was disappointing. The Council needs to work with the Mayor to allocate more funding for the students' budget.

The Youth Power Committee is looking to open the first youth led, College and Career Counseling Center program, which will be led by trained high school students. In order to create this program, they need the support of the Mayor, the Council, the Superintendent and the Board of Education to increase the budget.

Ms. Arensa Gonzalez was the next speaker. She greeted the Council Members and said that she was also a member of Youth Power. She said that she was disappointed with the Mayor's Budget with only \$3 million for the education budget. She is personally affected by the underfunding of the school budget and was calling upon the City Council to allocate more funding to education and specifically to the College and Career initiative.

Ms. Gonzalez said that she was no longer a Bridgeport school student because she attends a technical college in Milford to learn about architecture. She left the Bridgeport Public Schools because her experiences there were not good at all. Each year, she started off learning the same material repeatedly. This has an impact when she started 6th grade in a Charter School. When she was finishing up 8th grade, she started looking at the various schools in Bridgeport, which were not promising at all. This is why other students like herself are leaving for other schools outside the City. She noted that there had been a drop in school enrollment of over 1,000 students. Students are leaving because they feel they cannot succeed in the Bridgeport Public Schools. This shows that the schools need to do better.

She said that the Youth Power program is focused on the College and Career Counseling program that they want to open in 2024/2025 at Harding High School. She was calling on the Council and the Mayor to increase the funding for education.

Ms. Emily Revera came forward and greeted the Council Members. She said that she was speaking on behalf of Maritiza Contradas of Saunders Avenue. Ms. Contradas' daughter is a student in the Bridgeport Public Schools. She said that their goal is to achieve a fair and

equitable education for all students no matter where they come from or what language they speak.

Ms. Contradas arrived in Bridgeport seven months earlier from her native Venezuela. She heard about the Welcome Center for newly arrived parents and they helped her register her daughter for school. Unfortunately, the bi-lingual schools are over-crowded because the students need to learn English and have fewer opportunities than their peers. The funding will end this year and the program will stop.

Ms. Contradas also had concerns about students who have part time educational days. Many students have to wait a long time for a seat in those programs. The schools do not have the resources for educational success. Increasing the funding by \$3 million dollars will not solve the problems that the educational system has.

Ms. Contradas was calling on the Council Members and the Mayor to provide the funding for all the students so they have good educations. When Ms. Revera finished reading Ms. Contradas' comments, she thanked the Council Members for their time.

Ms. Leslie Carabya was the next speaker and came forward to greet the Council Members. She lived on Howe Street in Bridgeport. She remained silent for approximately 30 seconds and said that the silences was intentional because that is what the parents receive from the Superintendent.

She said that she was present for more than what the Superintendent gives the parents. Year after year, they come to the Council to ask for more. There is an on-going issue that Dr. Levy-Davis will not discuss with people about closing a school this summer. Ms. Carabya said that in a recent article, Dr. Levy-Davis had called others liars. Ms. Carabya asked if the District cared about the students or cared about their pockets.

Ms. Carabya said she was fed up and asked the Council to please support the students and give more funding because the Superintendent's math never adds up correctly.

Ms. Mona Mon was the next speaker. Ms. Mon said that she was Connecticut born and a native. She grew up in Bridgeport, attended the Public Schools and the Lighthouse Annex program. She ended up continuing her education in Trumbull due to the lack of education in Bridgeport. Her parents moved the family to Trumbull. The neighboring towns provided better educations. She went on to speak about Park City Magnet School. Currently, Ms. Mon said that she was studying for her Master's in Public Health at the Reed School in New York. She loves Bridgeport but noted that a neighbor moved to Fairfield due to the poor quality of education in Bridgeport. In order for Bridgeport to produce scholars like her and those standing behind her, the Council needs to allocate more funding to the schools.

Council Member Newton commented that Ms. Mon was a prime example of what a Bridgeport student can become if they want to. He congratulated her on her achievements.

Ms. Cass Shaw was the next speaker signed up. Ms. Shaw greeted the Council Members and said that she lives in the Brooklawn section of Bridgeport. Ms. Shaw said that everyone had mentioned that the City was between a rock and a hard place when it comes to the budget and

also acknowledged that it was the students – the children and youth of Bridgeport who pay the price. She said that she had seen the Board Members and others begging the Council for more funding. If the District doesn't allocate more funding, they will have to draw down on their savings just to get through the year. But she asked, what about next year and the year after that? She asked the Council Members to be pro-active as they look towards the future. They need to create a long term plan – 3, 5 or 10 years. They need to recognize that they don't have the resources by themselves. It will be important to find partnerships to create a sustainable pathway. It won't help this year or next year, but they are faced with this issue every year. They have to find a way to make this work for the future.

Just Resto came forward and gave their address in the East End and said that they were from the Park City Path and was an advocate for all the schools. They said that the current proposal lacked essentials and the potential school closure was a wake-up call for many people. The parents are panicking and rightfully so. How can the City expect meaningful change without providing the necessary funding and resources. The schools are underfunded. She asked what would become of the dedicated staff members and others if they close schools. Regardless of political affiliation, the primary concern was always the well-being of and the future of the children. The school buildings have endured years of neglect and underfunding. It is time to provide the fundings for generations to come.

Council Member Burns called the next speaker, Ms. Callie Heilman, forward.

Ms. Heilman came forward and greeted the Council Members and gave her address. She said that she was a Bridgeport parent and usually brings typed out remarks to the meeting. This is her eighth year coming to the Council for more funding. This is too depressing, particularly in terms of the financial challenge. She asked the Council Members what their plan was for next year. She said that since 2017, they had cut 243 positions and this has been discussed before, including kindergarten paraprofessionals, math coaches and many others. In 2019, there was a discussion about having the students walk 2 miles to school in order to save money. There was also a discussion about closing schools back then.

This crisis has been coming for years, but the pandemic delayed everything. Now the chickens have come to roost and you are reaping what you sowed. Pick your phrase. It's time to face the truth and it is time to make a plan. The plan can't be that next year 100 more positions will be cut because at the current staffing levels, the students are not receiving the services that they deserve and need. Everyone knows this because it is the truth of the situation. If the Council doesn't come up with a funding plan for the District, the Council is saying that it is okay that they lose these additional positions and that the education system continues to decline.

Ms. Heilman said that she knew that the Council Members do not believe that their role is to make the education system even worst. This requires a radical plan. She suggested that the Council asked every department to cut their budgets by 10% and that savings amount is combined together and given to the District. This year is the year it must be addressed. The time for waiting is over.

Ms. Gemime Davis of Cottage Place came forward and greeted the Council Members. She said she did not come with prepared remarks, but would agree with Ms. Heilman. She said that she had been coming for the last eight years to ask for more funds. Now she is asking for solutions.

Ms. Davis said that after George Floyd was murdered, they came together with the Council to discuss the budget and increase funding. There was a detailed look at the Police Budget and some changes were made. Now it is time to look at that budget again and make more changes.

Ms. Davis said that the Council consider the Superintendent's suggestion about the mill rate. It is time to think creatively. Ms. Davis said that she was born and raised in Bridgeport and attended the Bridgeport Public Schools in the 80's. It is sad to see what has happened since then. She said she would encourage them to follow the same process that they did in 2020. The Mayor has proposed \$3 million, but it is time to think outside of the box.

Ms. Shyla Robinson of Trumbull Avenue was the next speaker. She said that she was coming to express how tired she was. She has raised four children, two of which have graduated from the schools and two of which are still in the District. She said that she was tired of coming to beg for money for her children's education. The parents come every year and the conversation is always the same. The common denominator across the board is that the students need their services, the bi-lingual and SpEd students need their opportunities. The teachers need support.

The community spends more time attending funerals and supporting people when they lose someone than they do supporting teachers. The community expects teachers to show up and be amazing but are not providing support. If the children don't attend school, the parents receive visits, email and threats when children miss too many days of school. But the system doesn't provide the children with an education. Instead, they are closing schools and the parents are begging the City to provide the funding.

Ms. Robinson said that in the proposed budget there were some things that needed to be reallocated because she doesn't believe in a top heavy budget. Those who make the top dollars like the Mayor and the Police Chief need to have their budgets cut.

Mr. Chris Caruso was the next speaker. He came forward and greeted the Council Members and said he lives on Beechmont Avenue. Mr. Caruso said that after one of the meetings when Mr. Caruso had suggested to the Charter Revision Commission that they abolish the Taxation Enforcement Commission and give the power of the budget to the City Council. However, the Council Members are policy makers and Mr. Caruso felt that the Council Members have greater power than the Executive branch. They have the ability to change the budget to reflect the concerns of the City.

Mr. Caruso then spoke about how the ECS funding had not increased and gave the details. He said that they need a vision of where they want the City to be, but added that the tax base was shrinking because the grand list was also shrinking. The base has changed from home ownership to 55% rentals. There is less and less development happening in the City. Where does education fit into the vision? He reminded everyone that when people are looking to move to a new location, they look at the education system. That is why people are looking to the suburbs. There are many bright stars in the system, but not every child has access to them.

He went on to give some suggestions. The Mayor said that he wanted a legacy, but here are some suggestions. Mr. Caruso said that over 9,000 people had driven past stopped buses that were discharging students and had their stop signs out. 9,000 drivers. If they charge \$250 per vehicle that would generate \$2.2 million dollars. Senator Gaston has submitted some legislation that would allow the municipalities to collect that money. Mr. Caruso suggested that they have a City attorney in charge of collecting that money and any funds collected go right to the Board of Education. The Council has the power to create that policy and to hold the administration accountable.

Secondly, he suggested a hiring freeze across the board. Next year, if the taxes increase, the room will be packed with people.

Look at last year's budget and take any surplus funding and send it towards education. It's time to tap into the reserve. He also mentioned allocating the interest that the City is making on that reserve funding to the Board of Education.

The Council's budget should be clear and show what direction the City is going in. How does the role of education fit into the plan for the City? If they allocate \$3 million dollars, that will be a temporary stop gap. The ECS formula needs to be revised and the City needs more money for education.

The Council is the policy making board. The Superintendent of Schools is trying to do her best and the City should meet her half way about the budget.

Council Member Maria Pereira was the next speaker called forward. She greeted the Council Members and said she resides on Granfield Avenue. She said that there were so many young men present and asked how many had received a great education. Some go off to college, others to the military and others become a trades person. Many think they don't have what it takes and they end up incarcerated or in the cemetery. The Amphitheater and the soccer teams will not change the trajectory of the City, its residents or its youth. The City has to invest in the public schools. There is nothing negative that comes with that because it will affect every neighborhood and every community by giving the most important constituency a solid education.

Council Member Pereira said that she had attended public schools and received a great education. She said that out of the 169 district in the State no district, no city, contributes less to the public schools on a percentage base than Bridgeport. Only 28% of the funding for public schools comes from the City and 72% of the funding is from the State.

If the \$3 million that the Mayor has allocated is divided by 19,500, which is the projected enrollment, that allocates \$154.00 per student extra next year. If you divide that amount by number of school days, each child is receiving an extra .84¢ a day. How could this change anything them? This administration has been in office for 8 years. Over that period, the administration has given the students an extra .46¢ a day. The first three years, the administration proposed \$0. Council Member Pereira said that she was on the Board of Education when that happened. Math specialists, reading specialist were all let go.

New Haven will receive \$2,800 more per pupil than Bridgeport. If Bridgeport received the same amount that New Haven is getting for Bridgeport's enrollment, that would be an extra \$54 million per year. Hartford is getting some \$5,534 per student than Bridgeport. That would be \$108 million per year.

Where is Bridgeport's delegation? Council Member Pereira said part of the problem is that they may not feel like Bridgeport has skin in the game because of the low percentage that the City contributes to the schools. She said that she would not vote for a budget that does not truly fund the schools.

Ms. Kayla Medina was the next speaker. She came forward and greeted the Council Members and said that she was present to address the Council Members about the fact that they need to be transparent about how the City's finances are managed. Despite the calls for greater transparency, the schools and the children continue to suffer. Closing schools is unacceptable and indicates a severe flaw in governing. The Superintendent cooperates with both the Council and the Mayor, yet despite the alignment, the District still struggles to address the financial needs of the schools. She encouraged the Council Members to extend the support to address the urgent needs of the schools.

The recent proposal to allocated a mere \$3 million dollars to the schools is insufficient and is simply a band aid where a real solution is needed. Some Council Members profess dire ignorance regarding the condition of schools in their districts. However, as elected officials, they are entrusted with the well-being of their constituents and it is clear that their duty to the schools is being neglected. As residents and taxpayers, she said that she recognized that the budget is more than just a number, it is a reflection of the City's values and priorities. It indicates where the resources and allocations are. What does the budget say about Bridgeport's values, and economy? The advocates shouldn't have to keep coming to the City year after year and asking for more money.

Ms. Medina said that she had three daughters and has been here year after year, fighting for more money. Her daughters are now 25, 22 and 19, but Ms. Medina is still here asking for the same budget increases. When is enough enough? She said that there should be more transparency and accountability. They should work together as a community.

Council Member Newton thanked everyone for coming out to share their concerns about the budget. He said that in the last eight years, this has been a much better and more experienced Committee. Council Member Newton said that they would take the comments expressed into consideration.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services.

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
MAY 8, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Scott Burns, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Jeanette Herron, Richard Ortiz, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia, Mary McBride-Lee (6:13 p.m.)

OTHERS: Council Member(s): Jorge Cruz, Michelle Lyons, Eneida Martinez, Dasha Spell, Maria Valle, M. Pereira (6:13 p.m.) & A. Boyd (7:15 p.m.); Nestor Nkwo, OPM Director; Kathleen Brickett, OPM; Dr. Elizabeth Rivera-Rodriguez, Director of Health & Social Services; Sumit Sharma, Deputy Director of Health & Social Services; David Reyes, Nadine Douglas, Social Worker; Jennifer Rocha, Social Worker; Linda Luben, Social Worker; Juan Hernandez, Fair Rent Coordinator; Cindy Anderson, Director of Veterans; Vivian Hernandez, Community Project Coordinator; LaQuasha Bowens, Relocation Specialist, Toshirea Jackson, MIRA; Jennifer Gonzalez, MIRA

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Burns called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. A quorum was present. Council Member Burns announced that Council Member Hodges was excused due to illness.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT: SOCIAL SERVICES

Dr. Rivera-Rodriguez came forward and greeted the Committee and others present. She then led the presentation of the 2024 Budget Presentation.

Council Member M. McBride-Lee and Council Member M. Pereira joined the meeting at 6:13 p.m.

The staff then answered the Committee and Council Members' questions about the Budget details.

Council Member Boyd joined the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

Discussion followed.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON MOVED TO ENTER THE DOCUMENT TITLED "SOCIAL SERVICE 2024 BUDGET PRESENTATION" AS EXHIBIT 05-08-2024-A.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

RECESS

Council Member Burns announced a recess at 7:50 p.m.

Council Members Lyons, Martinez and Valle left the meeting at 7:50 p.m.

Council Member Burns reconvened the meeting at 8:17 p.m.

FAIR RENT COMMISSION

Mr. Juan Hernandez, the Fair Rent Coordinator, came forward and greeted the Committee members along with the others who were present. He proceeded to give an overview of the proposed budget and answered the Committee's questions.

Council Member Pereira left the meeting at 9:15 p.m.

Discussion followed.

Council Member Cruz left the meeting at 9:30 p.m.

Discussion continued.

ADJOURNMENT

- ** THERE WAS A MOTION TO ADJOURN.**
- ** THERE WAS A SECOND.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted.

Telesco Secretarial Services