

(The following is not a verbatim transcript of comments or discussion that occurred during the meeting, but rather a summarization intended for general informational purposes. All motions and votes are the official records).

SPECIAL MEETING – CITY COUNCIL

-JANUARY 21, 2021-

A Special meeting of the City Council was called held on Thursday, January 21, 2021 via ZOOM Webinar.

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 P.M. by the Council President.

Roll call showed the following members present: Councilwoman Marino, Councilman Ferri, Councilwomen Renzulli, Vargas, Germain, Councilman Reilly, Council Vice-President Brady and Council President Paplauskas -8.

Absent: Councilman Donegan -1.

Also Present: Mayor Kenneth J. Hopkins; Anthony Moretti, Director of Administration; John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor; David Dimaio, City Council Budget Analyst.

-JANUARY 21, 2021-



**CALL OF SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

In Accordance with Section 3.07 of the Home Rule Charter and Section 2.04.060 of the City Code, I hereby call a special meeting of the City Council to be held on **Thursday, January 21, 2021 at 5:30 p.m.**

Virtual ZOOM Webinar

You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

When: Jan 21, 2021 05:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Topic: Special City Council

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84987257602?pwd=N2VNbS9MR2VyemVYb3RBS0VRQnhPUT09>

Passcode: 808114

Or iPhone one-tap :

US: +16465588656,,84987257602#,,,,*808114# or
+13017158592,,84987257602#,,,,*808114#

Or Telephone:

Dial(for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):

US: +1 646 558 8656 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 312 626 6799 or +1 669 900 9128 or +1
253 215 8782 or +1 346 248 7799 or 877 853 5247 (Toll Free) or 888 788 0099 (Toll Free) or 833
548 0276 (Toll Free) or 833 548 0282 (Toll Free) Webinar ID: 849 8725 7602

Passcode: 808114

International numbers available: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84987257602?pwd=N2VNbS9MR2VyemVYb3RBS0VRQnhPUT09>

for Introduction and hearing of:

Resolution Requesting the Governor of Rhode Island and the Rhode Island General Assembly Adjust Public Health Guidelines and Executive Orders that are Harming Rhode Island's Small Business Community. Sponsored by Council President Paplauskas, Council Vice-President Brady and Councilwoman Vargas.

I hereby request the City Clerk to notify all Council members of the Call of the special meeting.

Executed at Cranston, Rhode Island, this 15th day of January, 2021.

/s/ Christopher G. Paplauskas, Council President

-JANUARY 21, 2021-

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that a true copy of the attached Notice of a Special meeting of the City Council to be held on, Thursday, January 21, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom Webinar, was delivered via electronic mail on the 15th day of January, 2021 to the addresses listed below.

Council President Christopher G. Paplauskas
chrispaplauskas@gmail.com

Council Vice-President Edward J. Brady
Brady4cranston@gmail.com

Councilwoman Jessica M. Marino
marinoforcranston@gmail.com

Councilman Robert J. Ferri
robferri2426@gmail.com

Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli
nicoleforcranston@gmail.com

Councilwoman Lammis J. Vargas
Lammis.vargas@gmail.com

Councilwoman Aniece Germain
aniecegermain2@gmail.com

Councilman John P. Donegan
JohnDoneganForCranston@gmail.com

Councilman Matthew R. Reilly
mreillyesq@gmail.com

/s/ Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk

-JANUARY 21, 2021-

RESOLUTION REQUESTING THE GOVERNOR OF RHODE ISLAND AND THE RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADJUST PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDELINES AND EXECUTIVE ORDERS THAT ARE HARMING RHODE ISLAND'S SMALL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

On motion by Councilman Brady, seconded by Councilwoman Renzulli, it was voted to adopt the above Resolution

Under Discussion:

Mayor Hopkins stated that as much as he really supports this Resolutions, he wants to keep in mind that the health, safety and welfare of our citizens are of the outmost importance and we can't lose sight of that, but at the same time, we have business owners in our City that have been unduly told to close a certain hour early without very little information to tell us that by closing early that this is going to stop the spread of anything. He thinks that we are all adults and we should be able to make those types of decision without government interference. He commended Councilman Brady, Council President Paplauskas and Councilwoman Vargas for this Resolution and especially for their efforts to work with Lt. Governor McKee, who he knows has also supported our position on this. He thinks that for the vital role of our businesses here in Cranston, this Resolution should be loud and clear to our State leaders that we need to allow our businesses to stay open and we need to allow our citizens to make those decisions. If we do not do something pretty soon, we are going to lose the base of our community, our neighborhoods, which is our small business population. He stated that he is in complete support of this Resolution and urged support of this Resolution on every level.

Senator Frank Lombardi appeared to speak and stated that we, as a body, have to partner ourselves up to do what is best for the community during this terrible pandemic and he thanked Council President Paplauskas, Councilman Brady and Councilwoman Vargas for bringing this forth. He stated that the General Assembly is going to introduce a Resolution that will mirror this Resolution and go a few steps forward. He also stated that he sees no data in terms of if any effect in that short timeframe has had on businesses. They would like to look and implore basically to ask the Governor's Office to pull back on the regulations as a whole. The Resolution should be drafted within the next day or so and put on the floor as soon as humanly possible.

Rich Simone appeared to represent Ocean State Coalition and also the Federal Commerce Association in favor of this Resolution. He stated that all the restaurants have been severely impacted by these regulations. None of the places that he is associated with have issues with mask wearing, social distancing or the cleanliness factors that they have to keep up with, it is the over-restricted regulations that you are considering this evening with curfews and also with bars. He hopes that this passes the City Council this evening and with Senator Lombardi's help and also others, we can get this to be seriously overturned from the State level.

Susan DeAngelus, owner of Twin Oaks Restaurant, appeared to speak and stated that they have spent \$5,000 - \$6,000 for plexiglass and can't use it. Luckily, they have a large enough dining room where they can seat people, but it is safer to sit at the bar then go up to a table and serve a customer. As to the closing early, she questioned if COVID comes out at 10 pm. She stated that whatever can be done to pull together and solve the situation, she is here. She also stated that we all need to stick together as restaurateurs and do what we can.

-JANUARY 21, 2021-

Heather Santoro, Manager of PJ's Pub on Pontiac Ave., appeared to speak and echoed what others have been stating about the restaurant industry and the restrictions that have been put on them. She stated that the time restriction has not only effected what they are able to do each day of the week, it has a major effect on the hiring process and it has become an extreme challenge when it comes to finding people to work. Nobody wants to sign up to work a four-hour shift and that be the only shift that they have during the week. You just can't survive that way. She supports this Resolution and hopes that something can come of it.

Marshall D'Ambrosio appeared to speak and thanked the City Council Members for taking up this cause and also Mayor Hopkins for getting onboard and Senator Lombardi for bringing this up to the State level. He has been in business for 43 years and this has impacted him greatly. He addressed the 10 pm closing and stated that this has impacted him and he has lost three of his best employees moving out of State. He also stated that he does not know what the impact is on City's finances or State finances, but when you are limiting one of your biggest grossing tax revenue in the State, that has got to effect the bottom line of the State budget and City budget. This is another reason we should be getting open and operating successfully. We have a vested interest in the hospitality industry to provide a very clean establishment. He hopes this Resolution is taken seriously by the State of Rhode Island and the situation gets resolved.

Councilman Brady stated that, obviously, this is a very important issue to him as a small business owner himself who has lost a restaurant through COVID. He still has four that remain, one in Cranston, one in Smithfield, one in Foxboro and one in East Greenwich. He certainly understands all everyday struggles that business owners go through. At times, our hope is to keep going, the hope of a small business owner is to bring joy into a world that is very tough in a year that was polarized through politics, Democrat and Republican not getting along. He stated that he is actually re-inspired by something that is just a Resolution like this tonight when he can work with a Senator who is a Democrat, he can work with a Mayor who is Republican, he can work with Councilwoman Vargas who is obviously a Democrat. When collectively, as two parties can find compromises in arbitrary mandates and make a difference, it is not just a Resolution, it is more than that and he thinks that is leadership. He also stated that twenty businesses were reported last year by the RI Hospitality Associated have closed for good. Another 100 stand in hibernation on pause unsure of their future as this pause gets extended, a pause that they signed up for and were ok with not opening for Thanksgiving Eve, one of the biggest nights of the year, not opening during the holiday season, the time that gets us through the January, February and March months. The State stepped up and gave these businesses some funding to get them through those times, but unfortunately, through this process the pause extended and the State stopped being responsive. Our Governor, who gave the Executive Order, stopped coming to the podium, stopped answering questions, stopped providing data and as some other States changed course like as of today, Massachusetts, and decided to reopen restaurants and reopen in less restrictive times, Chicago, New York and on and on throughout the country people are changing course because we are finding that the science is saying home gatherings are 70% or more of the continued spread of this virus. Let's get people back into control of the environments, let's get people back into restaurants that have invested money, funds, spirit, where there is plexiglass, continue to wear masks, where there is social distancing. He commended the Mayor for being the first Mayor in the State of Rhode Island to stand up and stand behind the City Council with this Resolution. He stated that he thinks it is an incredibly powerful move and a guy that he has stood behind his whole life of coach and teacher and someone that just listens.

-JANUARY 21, 2021-

Councilwoman Vargas echoed Councilman Brady's statements and thanked Mayor Hopkins and Senator Lombardi for their lead and allowing everyone to work together. She does not want to see boarded businesses. She hates to see empty storefronts in our community and throughout the State. She stressed that she is supporting the hours of operation for restaurants. She is not asking that we have nightclubs open. She thanked Councilman Brady for taking the lead on this. She asked the Council Members to pass this to help all our small businesses that are suffering.

Councilwoman Marino thanked Councilman Brady, Council President Paplauskas, Councilwoman Vargas and Mayor Hopkins for taking the time and energy for bringing this to the table. She stated that she agrees that this is not part politics, this is survival. What is the problem with them staying open during their hours when they are abiding by the rules? We have a system in place, we have rules, they have invested in that, which is a costly investment. Let them stay open the hours so they can see a return on their investment. We can't get complacent and say a rule that we put in place in early November is still good now and not tell us why when we can have malls that can stay open their regular hours during the holiday season, you can have big box retail that is open. It is just not fair. This is a challenging task, but it needs to be changed.

Councilwoman Renzulli echoed sentiments of fellow Council Members and thanked Councilman Brady, Council President Paplauskas and Councilwoman Vargas and Mayor Hopkins and Senator Lombardi for taking this Resolution to the State level. She supports this Resolution completely.

Councilman Ferri stated that, as a former business owner, he is in favor of this Resolution and thanked everyone for their work on it.

Councilwoman Germain acknowledged the power of communication. She stated that there is no data to say why we have to stay with the current restriction of closing at 10 pm and that is concerning. We need answers and we need to hold our elected officials accountable.

Councilman Reilly stated that he supports this Resolution and it is absolutely necessary and echoed sentiments of his fellow Council Members.

Councilwomen Marino, Renzulli and Councilman Reilly asked to be added as co-sponsors.

Council President Paplauskas stated that this Resolution is needed and really hopes other cities and towns follow what Cranston and Smithfield did the other night.

Roll call was taken on motion to adopt the above Resolution and motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting "aye": Councilwoman Marino, Councilman Ferri, Councilwomen Renzulli, Vargas, Germain, Councilman Reilly, Council Vice-President Brady and Council President Paplauskas -8.

The meeting adjourned at 6:25 P.M.

/s/ Leanne Zarrella, JD
City Clerk

/s/ Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committee