

*(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).*

## **FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Regular meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Monday, February 1, 2021 via Zoom Webinar.

### **CALL MEETING TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 P.M. by the Chair.

Present                    Councilman Matthew R. Reilly  
                                 Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli  
                                 Councilwoman Jessica M. Marino  
                                 Councilman John P. Donegan  
                                 Councilman Robert J. Ferri, Vice-Chair  
                                 Council Vice-President Edward J. Brady, Chair  
                                 Council President Christopher G. Paplauskas

Also Present:            Councilwoman Aniece Germain  
                                 Councilwoman Lammis J. Vargas  
                                 Anthony Moretti, Director of Administration  
                                 Robert Strom, Director of Finance  
                                 David Dimaio, City Council Budget Analyst  
                                 Leanne Zarrella, City Clerk  
                                 Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees  
                                 Heather Finger, Stenographer

### **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:**

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Council President Paplauskas, it was voted to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting and they stand approved as recorded. Motion passed unanimously.

### **CORRESPONDENCE/COMMUNICATIONS**

None.

### **OLD BUSINESS:**

None.

### **PUBLIC HEARINGS/NEW BUSINESS:**

No one appeared to speak from the public.

- **Real Estate Tax Abatements**

No one appeared to speak in favor or to oppose.

On motion by Council President Paplauskas, seconded by Councilman Ferri, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Abatements as recommended by City Assessor. Motion passed unanimously.

- **Motor Vehicle Tax Abatements**

No one appeared to speak in favor or to oppose.

On motion by Councilman Reilly, seconded by Councilman Ferri, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Abatements as recommended by City Assessor. Motion passed unanimously.

- **Tax Interest Waiver Approvals**

On motion by Councilman Reilly, seconded by Councilman Donegan, it was voted to recommend approval of the above list of Abatements. Motion passed unanimously.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS:**

- **Interest Waiver Approvals and Denials – process and criteria (Councilman Donegan)**

**Councilwoman Vargas** asked how interest waivers are processed, what criteria is used and what is considered a hardship. Director Strom stated that people are charged interest for being late on their taxes. They have the right to appeal that and send in documentation to the Treasurer. He reviews the appeal documents. Sometimes he feels it is warranted giving an approval for the interest to remove it. Other times, he recommends to deny. Sometimes it is based on prior years. Sometimes it is the same people trying to do the same getting their interest removed because they are late and having that rescinded. Other times, and in these particular cases, the Treasurer does look at them very thoroughly and cautiously to make sure it is warranted and then based on what they are appealing it for. It could be hospitalization, it could be hardship that they lost their job or it could be a number of things. He then makes his decision whether he feels giving them a waiver is warranted. Director Strom also stated that the Treasurer did express to him that he recommends to the Administration and to the Committee and then it goes to the full City Council for them to approve his decision, but the City Council has the right to question his decision. He also indicated that in all the years he has been with the City, he can count on one hand when it has ever been questioned.

**Councilwoman Vargas** asked how many times a person can make a request for a waiver and if they are denied, what is the process to appeal it or can they appeal it. Director Strom stated that if the Treasurer denies it, and it is a constituent who questions a Council Member, the Council Member has the right to question it at the Committee level or the City Council level and it could be overturned or reversed if warranted. He is not sure how many times a person can request a waiver, but he does not recall this every happening.

- **Abatement for 23 Kenney Dr. – WJAR NBC10 (Councilman Donegan)**

**Director Strom** stated that he spoke to the Tax Assessor and WJAR hired a company to review their tangible assets going back a few years and they felt that what we were charging for their tangible taxes was overstated and so they submitted documentation to meet with the Tax Assessment Board of Review to discuss it, however, prior to that, they sat down and met with the Tax Assessor and had discussions and the Tax Assessor did lower the assessment, but not to the magnitude that WJAR wanted it. WJAR, based on the conversation and negotiation, was satisfied and did not wish to go before the Tax Assessment Board of Review. They decided to accept the reduction based on what was agreed upon between them, the company they hired and the Tax Assessor and that is the figure that was presented to before the Council.

- **In the absence of Finance Director which staff member is available to answer any questions (Councilman Donegan)**

**Director Strom** stated that he very seldom is out, but with COVID, he did not have any choice. He stressed to the Council to rest assure that he has qualified people in his absence. He has a Controller, who has been with the City for 18 years, Mike Igoe. He has an outstanding City Treasurer, David Capuano, and also a Tax Assessor, Mark Capuano, who does a great job. He also has a Chief Financial Clerk that he has daily conversations with about our cash position, appropriating money to the Schools for various things. Even though he was out sick, he had constant communication between the key people in the Finance Department and everything went very smooth.

- **City Council Grant Writer, Lisa Andoscia, to address grants available to the City and any questions from the Council**

**Lisa Andoscia** appeared to speak and stated that it is really important to note that with Washington DC being in transition and the State being in transition, Federal and State Grants have not been released yet. What we are doing is getting prepared and developing a priority list so when they do become available and are released, we would know what the expected categories are and what would be the City's project that the Council would like to submit for. She asked Director Strom if Cranston has any 501C3 set up. Director Strom stated that he does not believe so. It is all part of our General Fund and our Budget. Ms. Andoscia stated that most municipalities do not. She also stated that in February and March, she expects to see coming from RI Foundation additional Grants for food assistance, household items and rent assistance. She also expects to see one for behavioral health. She also asked, for her understanding, in 2020, were there any other Grants that were secured. Director Strom stated that we do have some through CDBG. Ms. Andoscia asked if we know how much they were funded for. Director Strom stated those would be for CDBG moderate areas for people that would request assistance and would have to be approved by the department. Ms. Andoscia asked if we know what the award was for and for what programs were specifically submitted. Director Strom stated that he does not have this information at this time, but he can obtain it, if needed. He also stated that all this information is at CDBG and they have all that broken down by category. Director Moretti asked Ms. Andoscia to forward him an email requesting this information and he will provide her with the key personnel she can speak to to obtain this information.

**Councilwoman Vargas** asked if the City Council is privy to the information Ms. Andoscia will be provided with. Director Moretti stated that he believes so, but he will check with legal.

**Council President Paplauskas** stated that he would like all the Council Members to be updated as to the Grants. It could be something like a monthly report to the City Clerk to be distributed to the City Council.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked if she sees a Grant that she feels we should pursue, can she contact Ms. Andoscia to look into it? Ms. Andoscia stated that she is fine with that. If anyone would like her to look into any possible Grants, forward the information to her and she will pursue it.

**Ms. Andoscia** asked who is going to make the decisions on priority. Council President Paplauskas stated that that is a great question. We need to look at the list first before picking a priority. As far as the process, we have to try to streamline that and get back to her. He suggested that Ms. Andoscia attend Finance Committee meetings periodically for any updates on Grants.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

/s/ Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni  
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees