

*(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 FINANCE COMMITTEE – APRIL 8, 2021**  
**(BUDGET HEARINGS)**

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Thursday, April 8, 2021 via Zoom Webinar.

**CALL MEETING TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 P.M. by the Chair.

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

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

**FIRE DEPARTMENT & FIRE ALARM**

**Director Strom** stated that Chief Warren and Assistant Chief Marcinko are present with him to answer any questions. He stated that today, he forwarded the City Council Expenditure and Revenue reports for this year for the Fire Department. From a Revenue standpoint, because we received COVID money, they are overbudget by \$1 million. We budgeted \$2 million. \$1.6 million of it is due to COVID. On the Expenditure side, they are tracking better than last year. They are down eleven people, which constitutes Overtime. IOD is overbudget, but we are still having a number of them that are still on it, but we are making progress.

**Council President Paplauskas** asked for an update on the Rescue in Station 3. He also stated that line item #52018, \$300,000 less is budgeted from last year, that has not been spent. He asked if there are any plans for vehicles under that line item. Chief Warren stated that the funds in that line item is for a Rescue truck that should be due in May. The Revenue on Rescue 5 is approximately \$2.5 million for this rescue and for all rescue runs.

**Council President Paplauskas** asked if we are still calling on other communities into Cranston for mutual aid. Chief Warren stated that they are back on normal runs right now. They do have mutual aid coming during the day.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked what the contractual increases are in this department. Director Strom stated payroll and the effects on other line items, such as pension, longevity, payroll taxes and legal holidays. Councilwoman Renzulli stated that with Station 3 and the part-time Rescue, if that was transitioned into a full-time Rescue, she asked if that would help us in terms of Overtime. Director Strom stated that the Chief is stating no, it would not help. You would have to have it manned with firefighters.

**Councilman Donegan** asked how much it would cost to move Station 3 Rescue 5 to full-time. Director Strom stated that at this time, it would be a little premature to do it because our runs are down from prior years. Chief Warren stated that it would cost approximately \$950,000 a year to fully staff.

**Council President Paplauskas** indicated to line item #101-1200 “Overtime”, and asked what that is for. Director Strom stated this is COVID expense and we have applied through FEMA Grants and we have not been reimbursed yet.

**Chair** indicated to line item #52018 and questioned why this has not been used. Director Strom stated that we have a Rescue coming in in May, which will be approximately \$390,000.

**Councilwoman Vargas** thanked everyone in the Fire Department in running the COVID vaccinations. She questioned where the money being reimbursed for COVID expenses will be going and whether it will go into the General Fund or to the particular department. Director Strom stated that it goes into the General Fund, but it goes under “FEMA Reimbursement”. Councilwoman Vargas questioned the increase in the line item for fire detection in new homes. Director Strom stated that we budgeted \$24,000 for last year and received \$19,000 so far. We increased it for next year based on the activity this year. Councilwoman Vargas asked for explanation of the Expenditure side of Fire Alarm, line item #53113 “Traffic Signal Repairs”. Chief Warren stated that the Fire Department maintains some of the traffic signals in the City and they are trying to change all the City ones.

**Councilwoman Germain** indicated to line item #51406 “Uniform Cleaning Allowance” and asked what the difference is between “Uniform Cleaning Allowance” and “Laundry”. Director Strom stated that these two items are contractual. The City gives the firefighters the money and it is up to them to clean their uniforms. Councilwoman Germain questioned line item #53020 “Rental of Hydrants”. Chief Warren stated that the City rents them from Providence Water and Kent County Water. The City has no control over the costs. Director Strom stated that this is regulated by the PUC and most of the cities and towns pay the same for them.

**Councilwoman Vargas** asked if there are any grants that could be used for the Training Program. Chief Warren stated that they would use that money to train new firefighters. This year they did not do much training due to COVID and this line item was not used as it normally would be.

**Councilwoman Germain** questioned “Overtime and Holidays” and why it is extremely high. Director Strom stated that they have approximately 14 holidays, which are all contractual and as to the Overtime, by hiring the 15 firefighters, it will hopefully help to reduce it.

**Councilwoman Marino** indicated to line item #53018 “Other Equipment” and asked what is other equipment in that category that is being budgeted for. Chief Warren stated that usually those items would be nozzles, paint, ladder testing through FDA. Councilwoman Marino indicated to line item #53019 and stated that this was barely used this year. She asked what this is for and why there is approximately 85% remaining. Chief Warren stated that they were in a fiscal crisis and they did not want to spend the money.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

## **POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**Director Strom** stated that Chief Michael Winqvist and Major Todd Patalano are present with him to answer any questions. He stated that looking at actuals, Expenses are running right on budget. On the Revenue side, they are running approximately 50% so far this year, but things are starting to pick up with the nicer weather. Going into next year, we pretty much level funded everything.

**Council President Paplauskas** thanked the Police Department for everything that they do. He commended them for staying in line with the budget. He asked how many marked vehicles are planned to be purchased this year. Major Patalano stated that they are trying to buy eight every year. Council President Paplauskas asked for an update on the new academy and how many people will be hired. Colonel Winqvist stated that as of April 7<sup>th</sup>, they have eight vacancies and they plan on hiring four and are in the process of recruitment process.

**Chair** indicated to line item #53201 and asked if this is direct result of rising costs. Director Strom stated that we budgeted \$60,000 for this year. We expended only \$22,280. We have encumbrances of PO of \$35,000. It should be more than enough for rest of the fiscal year. Chair indicated to line item #1202-50504 “IOD Blue Cross” and asked if this is directly related to COVID. Colonel Winqvist stated, yes, they had two officers who were hospitalized and one for several weeks. They also had some other related injuries.

**Councilman Donegan** indicated to line item #51118 and asked for explanation of this line item and what this is used for. Colonel Winqvist stated that this is School Safety Initiative.

**Councilman Donegan** asked how many more years are left on the rent of the Police Station. Director Strom stated that 2026 is the last year of the lease.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** indicated to line item #53206 and asked how much has been spent on that so far. Director Strom stated \$217,000 out of \$455,000.

**Councilwoman Vargas** indicated to line item #44500 “VIN Verification” and asked if the \$300,000 is what we are expecting to receive. Colonel Winqvist stated that when COVID really took hold of the State, the RI DMV and the Governor’s Office elected to shut down the ability for us to run the VIN checks and at some point, and when things started to loosen up a little bit with COVID, he and then Mayor Fung along with the RI Chiefs Association, which he is on the Executive Board, approached RI DMV Director Craddock and stated to him that we would like to get going again on the VIN checks. Unfortunately, they told us the Department of Health did not feel that we could do it in a safe manner even though he believed we could have and they decided that they were going to do the VIN checks at the DMV. Unfortunately, it is not as thorough of a check that we do, but fortunately, after several months of prodding them, they said we could reopen, but they are still going to allow people to go to the DMV and they are not going to charge them a fee. So, as you can imagine, the bulk of the people will go to the DMV. This caused less of substantial loss of Revenue.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

### **ANIMAL CONTROL**

**Councilwoman Vargas** questioned the status of the Revenue side of the “Animal Control Impound Fees” for this fiscal year. Director Strom stated that we have taken in only \$1,905 so far. This year we have expended \$233,000 so far. Revenue has been budgeted for \$5,000. Next year, it is pretty well level-funded except for salary increases and hospitalization.

**Councilwoman Germain** stated that there is an Ordinance on the books regarding dog ownership and she has received a lot of complaints about barking and pooping and these issues are not being enforced. Major Patalano stated that there are Animal Control Officers and they deal with all those issues and they do enforce the Ordinance. Whoever is complaining needs to call the Police Department.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

### **HARBOR MASTER**

**Director Strom** stated that, so far this year, \$4,100 has been expended, which is 71%. In Revenues, \$4,260 has been collected so far. Next year, this has been level-funded in the Expense side and Revenue side.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

## MUNICIPAL COURT

**Director Strom** stated that Chief Judge Matthew Smith and Elizabeth Bettis are present with him to answer any questions. He stated that because of the pandemic, the Court was closed for approximately three months so obviously our Revenue is much less than what was budgeted. It is now starting to come back. We have collected considerable amount of money in the last month. We have collected approximately \$300,000 this year and that is only 50% of where we should be. He does not think we are going to achieve the appropriated amount of \$635,000, but we are certainly going to be in a much better shape than we were originally. The good news is in our budget and what he has submitted as part of our American Rescue Plan, we included Revenue loss for Municipal Court for the end of 2020 and also 2021, so we should be able to pick up some Revenues to offset the loss for this year. On the Expense side, because the Court was closed, they are underbudget by \$40,000. Overall, the Court is doing well considering the pandemic. There is a staff of two full-timers and three part-timers and the Judges. We level-funded the budget from last year because we think the court is going to come back and we will ascertain the figure from this year next year and our Expenses pretty much are up due to contractual obligations.

**Councilman Donegan** indicated to line item #42151 “Building Codes” and stated that last year it was budgeted at \$5,000. Current amount is approximately \$20,000 so we are doing pretty well with Building Code. He asked Director Strom if he thinks a higher amount in that Revenue line item is possible. Director Strom asked Ms. Bettis to speak regarding this. Ms. Bettis stated that that line item is actually high because of one case in particular and had a lien against the property for \$15,000 with fines running approximately three to four years so it was a lump sum payment that we received.

**Council Vice-President Brady** indicated to line item #51100 “Salary” and questioned the increase from \$121,887 to \$137,160. Director Strom stated that this is due to the two full-time people and there was an increase for Judges.

**Councilwoman Vargas** asked for explanation for department expenses versus office expenses and supplies. Ms. Bettis stated that they have contractual agreements that are paid quarterly for software company that they use for the Court system.

### Public Speakers:

No one appeared to speak from the public.

## CRANSTON COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM (CCAP)

**Director Strom** stated that this budget is up by \$5,000, that was their request. The Administration level-funded it. Basically, everything from last year is the same for this year. The only increase they asked for that the Administration did not implement in the budget was Community Action Program at \$65,000 and it was level-funded at \$60,000. Right now, their budget is running right on schedule.

**Councilwoman Vargas** stated that she understands CCAP may possibly be receiving some sort of federal money. She asked if there are any areas that they are not getting funding from State or Federal Government. Director Strom stated that he does not know. Councilwoman Vargas stated that she will reach out to the Director of CCAP about this.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

## **CANVASSING**

**Director Strom** stated that very little was budgeted on the Revenue side. On the Expense side, the department has utilized most of the money. The department is right online with the “Salary” and “Overtime” is overbudget, but that has to do with a lot of the Elections we have had this year. He also stated that part-time help is a little overbudget because of the Elections. \$175,000 is being budgeted for Elections. Right now, it is at approximately \$136,000. Another Election line item, which is COVID related and that is \$42,694, which has been spent and we did obviously appropriate, however, that money is going to be pursued through FEMA and, hopefully, we can get some money for that. He also indicated that when we have an Election, the Registrar receives an additional stipend for that as well. Going forward for this year, Expenses are down due to the fact that we are not having as many Elections, Salary Schedule pretty much is the same except for step increases or salary increases for full-timers, Overtime is down and Part-Time Help is level-funded.

**Nick Lima**, Registrar, appeared to speak and explained the operation of this department during last year and during the pandemic. He stated that there is a part-time person, who he would like to be made full-time. Solicitor indicated that discussion should not be held about individual employees in the budget process because that would be more of an employment thing. You can talk about a position, but not an individual in this process.

**Councilman Donegan** asked how much it would cost to add one full-time position including benefits and salary. Director Lima stated \$41,000 to \$42,000 per year, plus benefits. Director Strom stated that if the position is approximately \$50,000, you are looking at approximately \$70,000 to \$75,000 for that position with benefits. Director Strom asked Director Lima if that would be a Teamster position. Director Lima stated no. Director Strom asked if this position would be a tested position. Director Lima stated no. Under the City Charter and State Law, members of the Canvassing Office are appointed and unclassified and not tested. Director Moretti asked Solicitor if it is more appropriate to have this type of discussion in Executive Session, since we are speaking now of a Teamster position. Solicitor stated, yes, we should keep the details out of any positions.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked Director Lima if he could use some help from the new City Council Grant Writer to help him find money for this department that could be funded by grants. Director Lima stated that he did reach out to the Grant Writer a few weeks ago and, unfortunately, there is not a lot out there for personnel expenses.

**Councilman Reilly** asked for clarification of whether Director Lima is seeking one additional full-time position. Director Lima stated, yes, this department needs a full-time position in order to comply with expected federal mandates from the US Department of Justice that are coming down this year. This full-time position would eliminate the need to have a part-time line item.

**Councilwoman Vargas** asked for an Executive Session to further discuss this issue. Council President asked Councilwoman Vargas to send an e-mail to the Clerk requesting this Executive Session.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

The meeting adjourned at 10:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

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