

(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 11, 2022
(BUDGET HEARINGS)

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Monday, April 11, 2022 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, Rhode Island.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 P.M. by the Chair.

Present Councilwoman Jessica M. Marino
 Councilman John P. Donegan
 Councilman Richard D. Campopiano
 Councilman Matthew R. Reilly
 Councilman Vice-President Robert J. Ferri, Chair

Absent: Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli, Vice-Chair

Also Present: Councilwoman Aniece Germain
 Christopher Millea, City Solicitor
 Michael Igoe, City Controller
 David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst
 Rosalba Zanni, Acting City Clerk

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Ed Garcia, Director of Libraries, appeared to speak and thanked the Council for their continued support of the public library. Coming out of the pandemic, the libraries are busier than ever with people coming back to the library.

Councilman Donegan commended the library system in Cranston. He asked how much is in the Reserve Fund right now. Director Garcia stated that as of the end of December, the Reserve is actually higher than they would like it to be, but it is \$245,000. During the last two years, during the pandemic, they had significant issues trying to spend down their entire budget mostly due to the supply chain issues where they were actually trying to spend money on whether it was books or building maintenance issues, capital projects and they actually could just get supplies back in time to account for the Fiscal Year. They also had some issues in the last couple of years during the pandemic of staffing where they did not need to have their full compliment of part-time staff on because of the restrictions that they were under as far as COVID restrictions and what they could actually do in the building.

Councilwoman Germain thanked Director Garcia for the work he has been doing with the library. She was able to look at the diversity of books, which is something that is mostly liked and he makes the effort to offer a variety of diversity in the book ad for black history month. When she and her kids went into the library, the staff was very helpful. Director Garcia thanked Councilwoman Germain and stated that he will let his staff know. They have an amazing team at the library and with the community.

Councilman Donegan stated that in the Capital Budget this year \$315,000 is appropriated for improvements, which he is sure is needed, but asked if there is any chance that that money in the Reserve Fund could be used for part of that to reduce the debt service. Director Garcia stated that he would not be able to answer what the debt service is on that amount. The project at the Auburn Library actually combines several needed building upgrades into one project. Renovations are needed for three restrooms in that library, front entrance to the library is not accessible so an automatic door needs to be installed, but also widening the entire entrance to the building because right now the way it was constructed is really difficult for anyone in a wheelchair or a large stroller to be able to navigate into the building. We also want to make a permanent outdoor programming reading area in the front of the library. As far as the Reserve Fund, that is certainly possible. They are looking at all avenues to find funding. Right now, they are trying to spend down some of their lines this year and some of the things they are looking is part of the capital projects that they had approved a year ago to pave the central library parking lot. The most important part of that is the sidewalks leading up to the building. They are looking for other funding for this project. He just applied for funding through Senator Whitehouse's Office for the Auburn project for the entire amount of it. They are reaching out to non-profit organizations to apply for various funds.

Chair stated that the payroll for 2023 is up \$46,000 over 2022. He questioned why. Director Garcia stated that the Board of Trustees just went through contract negotiations with the library union and signed a three-year contract. The payroll increases are just contractual from the contract. Chair asked Director Garcia if he sees anywhere in this budget where he can cut expenses to prevent a tax increase this year in the City of Cranston. Director Garcia stated that most of the line items in this budget are level funded so there is very few increase that are not contractual. The only major line item increase that was not personnel contractual increase was in the operations line. That increase is going towards the Security Officer.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Franklin Paulino, Economic Development Director, appeared to speak and stated that the Economic Development Program promotes businesses coming into the City of Cranston. The department is very focused on Grant and helping small businesses through COVID, Currently, they worked with a Grant program for the City of Cranston for \$175,000 and they helped over 61 businesses this year. Currently, the City of Cranston has about 2,500 small businesses and we are waiting for the ARPA Funds to become available so we can help small businesses that came out of the pandemic. The Office has two employees, himself and a Secretary, Marcia LoPresti, who has been with the department for almost twenty years.

Councilman Donegan asked what the status is of the agreement with Warwick Convention Bureau and if it will be finalized for the end of the Fiscal Year. Director Paulino stated that we finished the agreement with the lawyers and it is all set. He has a meeting on Wednesday with Christine O'Donnell just to finalize it. Councilman Donegan asked Director Paulino if he thinks that will help increase revenues for the City for the taxes we might receive for meal and beverage. Director Paulino stated, yes. The Tourism Agreement that we have, they will be providing the website and it will be giving the City of Cranston a lot of exposure in terms of tourism and the hospitality and all the restaurants that we have in the City. It will be very helpful because it is a partnership of Providence, Cranston and Warwick.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

EXECUTIVE

Director Moretti appeared to speak and stated that this budget is pretty much level-funded overall with minor increase. The Executive Department removed Temporary Help, which was the biggest change of \$17,000.

Chair indicated to the "Public Observances" line item and stated that, as a suggestion, the \$10,000, which he would not in a million years take away, we could look into getting businesses to sponsor those things so we could save \$10,000. Director Moretti stated that we could look into that. Chair suggested having Economic Development take on that task to survey businesses in the area.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

LAW DEPARTMENT

Christopher Millea, City Solicitor, appeared to speak.

Councilman Donegan questioned why "Outside Legal Services" on the Expenditure side is being reduced by \$25,000. Solicitor Millea stated that one thing he has been trying to do is utilize services of the members of his own staff where in the past they may have been given to outside legal counsel.

Councilwoman Marino she stated that she does not see in this Budget the actual breakdown of the staff of the Law Department and how many Solicitors there are or what the salaries are. Solicitor Millea stated that he presented that in the original budget when it was presented, but he certainly can provide a breakdown. He has, himself included and five attorneys on staff and one Administrative Assistant. He can provide further information on that. He also indicated that all the positions are part-time. Councilwoman Marino asked if that could be supplemented, it would be great.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

INSURANCE CLAIMS & RISK, MANAGEMENT

Mr. Igoe stated that the Claims Committee is charged with paying any claims that come before the City both people that sue the City and also for insurance policies that the City has. The budget for the Claims Committee is paid from the Finance Department as an exposure. In the Finance Department, there is a line item called “Contributions to the Claims Committee” for \$1.2 million and that is budgeted for the year. The budget for FY 2023 is level-funded at \$1.2 million consisting basically of money set aside for insurance policies and claims payments.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

PERSONNEL

Daniel Parrillo, Director of Personnel, appeared to speak and stated that this department is responsible for all civil service testing, Police and Fire promotions, discipline, contract negotiations, policy development and so forth. There are two increases in this budget, salary for the 3% raise for himself and his Assistant and part-time help, which includes Gail Topakian, retired Colonel who works at the front desk in City Hall and Dominic Dandrea who is kind of a floater who started working at the front desk and when the Colonel came on he kind of became a floater and works in different departments helping out.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Rosalba Zanni
Acting City Clerk