

*(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**

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Thursday, July 14, 2022 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, Rhode Island.

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

The meeting was called to order at 5:03 P.M. by the Chair.

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

Absent:                    Councilman Richard D. Campopiano

Also Present:            Councilwoman Aniece Germain  
                                 Councilwoman Lammis J. Vargas  
                                 Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff  
                                 Paul McAuley, Deputy Chief of Staff  
                                 John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor  
                                 Daniel Parrillo, Director of Personnel  
                                 David Dimaio, City Council Budget Analyst  
                                 Rosalba Zanni, Acting City Clerk

### **I. PUBLIC HEARINGS\* and/or NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE**

#### **A. PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**Deputy Chief of Staff McAuley** stated that he had the pleasure of working with Ernie in his position as Director of Constituent Affairs. He is meticulous in his job and brings enthusiasm. He is helpful to the citizens of the City of Cranston and he takes his job seriously. He hates losing Mr. Tommasiello but he has the utmost confidence that he will do a terrific job in his new position.

## **B. NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE**

- **ADVICE AND CONSENT HEARING ON MAYOR'S APPOINTMENT OF:**
  - **Ernie Tommasiello as Community Development Director**

On motion by Council President Paplauskas, seconded by Councilwoman Renzulli, it was voted to approve the Advice and Consent of the appointment of Ernie Tommasiello as Director of Community Development.

### Under Discussion:

**Director Moretti** introduced Mr. Tommasiello and requested approval for the Advice and Consent to appoint him as the next Director of Community Development for the City of Cranston and gave his background. He stated that Mr. Tommasiello checks all the boxes to serve as the next CDBG Director.

**Mr. Tommasiello** appeared to speak and thanked the Committee for the opportunity to appear before them to answer any questions there may be. He stated that over the past several weeks, he was lucky enough to transition over to the Community Development Department. What he has seen there is just remarkable. He was so impressed with the personnel there. He has made five visits with Joe Lagana to different organizations that the Department has to monitor for the Federal Government and the work that they do for the citizens of Cranston. He is excited of what he has seen, he is excited to hopefully be appointed Director.

**Council President Paplauskas** echoed Director McAuley's statements in regards to the time Mr. Tommasiello worked in the role of Constituent Affairs.

**Council President Paplauskas** asked Mr. Tommasiello in his time that he served on the Board of Directors of CDBG, how that would help him in his new role and is there anything he learned from being on the Board of Directors that he can bring into this position as Director if he is given the position. Mr. Tommasiello stated that the biggest thing he learned was the amount of help that is needed within the City. It was a great experience and enlightening and should be very helpful moving forward.

**Councilman Donegan** asked Mr. Tommasiello what his duties were on the Board of Directors of CDBG. Mr. Tommasiello stated that they were responsible for interviewing applicants that were looking to receive money from them, evaluating their needs and coming up with the final figure. Councilman Donegan asked, as a member of the Board, was there any involvement with handling any of the federal guidelines or regulations that were consistent with the Department. Mr. Tommasiello stated, no. Councilman Donegan asked how his experience in sales and business specifically will translate to some of the really strict parameters that the federal government has. Mr. Tommasiello stated that it is a very regimented very strict set of guidelines that they receive from them. They give the Department an allocation of funds, they tell them exactly what percentage will go to certain groups and then it is the Department's responsibility to go out and recruit those groups, ask them to submit requests for money and then see which ones fall in line and meet all the recommendations from HUD. Councilman Donegan asked Mr. Tommasiello what he thinks are some of the important issues facing the constituency that this HUD funding is really kind of geared towards and how he thinks the Community Development Department, as a whole, can be a vehicle for creating equity within the City. Mr. Tommasiello stated that the requirements and guidelines are very strict. It is not going to be open to his personal opinion or anyone else's personal opinion.

**Councilwoman Marino** asked Mr. Tommasiello when he served on the CDBG Board. Mr. Tommasiello stated around 2008 or 2010 timeframe.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** thanked Mr. Tommasiello for his work as Constituent Affairs Director. She also stated that she is confident that he will do a great job in his new role. She asked Mr. Tommasiello how he will bring his marketing experience to the role of Director of Community Development. Mr. Tommasiello stated that what he has realized in the last few weeks is he has been in contact with people questioning what this department does. People in the City do not know what this department does. He thinks it really needs to be emphasized what the department does to the public whether it be through Facebook or through mailings. He thinks the department can help a lot more people if they can get the word out of what is available.

**Chair** stated that as far as he is concerned, Mr. Tommasiello has done a great job as Constituent Affairs Director and he has been very responsive. He asked Mr. Tommasiello why he would want to move onto the Director of Community Development's position. Mr. Tommasiello stated that in helping the people through Constituent Affairs, he realized he can help more people in this position.

**Councilwoman Germain** asked Administration for clarification on how the hiring is done. She also asked if this position was put on the website in order to have everyone have a fair shot to apply for it or if it is internal because she sees that Mr. Tommasiello has had the privilege to go first to see how it works and to have an idea and then after, get the job. Director Moretti stated that there are a number of positions in the City that are Civil Service that requires the advertising, application process and passing of examinations and selections and there are certain positions that are Administrative and that has been since the beginning of time and have been appointments of the Mayor. This is one of those positions that is an appointment of the Mayor. We did not require to go outside. The Mayor felt that he had the most qualified person. He reiterated Mr. Tommasiello's qualifications. Councilwoman Germain stated that she is not questioning Mr. Tommasiello's qualifications. Her question was about the procedure of hiring. What she stated was that he has the privilege, he was in a job in the City already and after, he had the opportunity to go to another job that is vacant to spend a week to look at how things work. This is privilege and she does not feel comfortable if we do that for everybody when we hire someone in a position. Director Moretti stated that Mr. Tommasiello is not experimenting. Right now, he is serving in a necessary role in the Acting capacity that we need to have someone there to have a minimum presence in the process until a person is officially hired into that position. There is no insider deal going on here and we are being fully transparent if that is an issue.

**Deputy Chief of Staff McAuley** stated that when the Administration reshuffled and took away that position, that saved the taxpayers money and the position of Executive Secretary to the Mayor was eliminated, everyone took on more responsibilities. Mr. Tommasiello, through his efforts and through his work, he showed as Director of Constituent Affairs, the Administration thought he would be an ideal candidate for that position when it opened up. To answer Councilwoman Germain's question, it was to fill a need there.

**Director Moretti** deferred to Deputy Chief of Staff McAuley for the remainder of the evening and left the meeting.

**Director Parrillo** stated that the Mayor has several appointments in the City, approximately twenty that are his direct appointments that do not go through a testing process or interview process. They are his direct appointments. Those appointments come in front of the City Council for Advice and Consent. Civil Service appointments go through a test, Teamsters, Laborers, Police and Fire, written test, oral examination and physical agility. So, there are two distinct classifications, Classified and Unclassified. All the Mayor's Department Heads are Unclassified and fill a role through Advice and Consent. There are some non-Director roles in the Mayor's Office that do not come in front of the City Council, but for the most part, a role like this, a Director's role comes in front of the Council for Advice and Consent. The Mayor does not have to advertise, he does not have to reach out. If he feels he has someone internal that he knows can fill the role, meets the requirements, he is able to put that person forward and it is up to the Council to say "yes" or "no".

**Councilwoman Marino** asked what the budgeted amount is for the salary for this position. Director McAuley stated that he believes it is federally funded and does not come out of the City budget. He believes the salary is approximately \$70,000. Councilwoman Marino asked, with this appointment, is the Administration looking to increase the salary for this position? Director McAuley stated, no, it is being left as is.

**Councilman Reilly** asked what CDBG experience former Director Sanzi had when he was appointed. Director McAuley stated, none. Councilman Reilly asked if Mr. Sanzi served on the CDBG Board. Director McAuley stated, no, he did not. Councilman Reilly questioned if Mr. Tommasiello did. Director McAuley stated, yes, he did. Councilman Reilly stated that his recollection is former Director Sanzi was approved unanimously by these exact members. Councilwoman Marino stated that while she would like to get into the details of the former Director's resume with respect to his qualifications for this job, we would be violating Open Meetings Act and not giving the right to present himself before we have that discussion, so she will say that there is another side to that coin with respect to why he was appointed to that position, but unfortunately, it cannot be discussed this evening.

**Chair** stated that he had requested from Director Moretti and Director Parrillo a job description for this position and never received it because he wanted to check the boxes and he made some phone calls when checking the resume and he was having trouble checking the boxes that he wanted to check and based on the fact that he was not satisfied with the phone calls he made and questions he had and the answers he got from people, he is not going to be able to support voting in favor of this position this evening. It is not personal, but he feels he is doing the right thing. Director Parrillo stated that he did send the job description to the City Clerk and he thinks we are trending in the wrong direction. He knows we are trying to get good qualified people to work for the City, but right now, he does not feel the Council has his back in trying to do that. If we are going to reject every person that is brought in front of the Council, he asked how is he going to get anyone to come here? We are one of the lowest paid City in the State. There is a qualified person here who showed his commitment to the City over the last 35 years of volunteer work and now we are giving him the opportunity to work for the City that he has been here his whole life and we are going to say 'no' because of a job description. He just does not understand that.

On motion by Council President Paplauskas, seconded by Councilwoman Renzulli, it was voted to move the question. Motion failed on a tie vote of 3-3. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilwoman Renzulli, Councilman Reilly and Council President Paplauskas -3. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilwoman Marino, Councilman Donegan and Council Vice-President Ferri -3.

**Councilwoman Vargas** stated that she is bothered first and foremost that the Administration is just walking out this evening. That was extremely disrespectful. That is a slap to her at least and she finds it very very unprofessional. We are all professionals and we all should be able to handle agreements or disagreements whether it is within the party or not. She addressed Director Parrillo and thanked him for staying and bearing with everyone. She asked, in the event this fails, any possible projects that are in the timeline, what happens at that point to any projects that are in the works relative to CDBG? Who would handle those projects or any future projects? Director Parrillo stated that he cannot speak to exactly what would happen, but he would say that everything is on hold without someone there as a point person especially with the Feds coming in August 1<sup>st</sup>. We are not going to be able to present the Federal Government who are Director is, that is going to be a problem for us. It is going to be a problem for our Grant going forward and going to be a problem for any of our projects going forward and it could jeopardize future money for the City.

Roll call was taken on motion to approve the Mayor’s Advice and Consent and motion passed on a vote of 5-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilwoman Renzulli, Councilman Reilly, Councilwoman Marino, Councilman Donegan Council President Paplauskas -5. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Council Vice-President Ferri -1.

- **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

/s/ Rosalba Zanni  
Acting City Clerk