

*(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, April 3, 2023 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

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

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M. by the Chair.

Present                      Councilwoman Aniece Germain  
                                    Councilman Richard D. Campopiano  
                                    Councilman Robert J. Ferri  
                                    Councilman Christopher G. Paplauskas  
                                    Council Vice-President Lammis J. Vargas, Vice-Chair  
                                    Councilman John P. Donegan, Chair  
                                    Council President Jessica M. Marino

Also Present:              Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli  
                                    Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff  
                                    John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor  
                                    Tom Zidelis, Finance Director  
                                    David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst  
                                    Tracy Nelson, City Clerk  
                                    Rosalba Zanni, Acting City Clerk  
                                    Heather Finger, Stenographer

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

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

### **I. COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER**

**Councilman Donegan:** *(No Votes will be taken) (Cont. from 2/6/2023)*

- *Exploration of Liability policy for the City*

**Director Zidelis** stated that as he stated back in February, we are working with a third party administrator. He is getting information that they need so they can provide us with a quote to review.

**Chair** asked Director Zidelis if there is any reasonable timeline that you may think you might have a tangible report from that third party company. Director Zidelis stated that back in February, they had stated 90 days. He is still shooting for the 90 days deadline.

**Chair** asked that this item be placed on the May agenda.

- ***Legal vendor report***

**Chair** stated that Director Zidelis did send something electronically earlier this evening. He had not had a chance to review that and asked that this item be continued to next month's meeting.

**2-23-07**      ***Ordinance in amendment of Title 3 of the Code of the City of Cranston, 2005, entitled "Revenue and Finance, Chapter 3.97.030 – Fifteen (15) Years Economic Development Tax Incentive Program for Property located at 661 Park Avenue and 271 Doric Avenue (Tax Stabilization Agreement). Sponsored by Councilman Ferri. Co-sponsored by Councilwoman Renzulli. (Cont. from 3/6/2023)/***

**Councilman Ferri** stated that he would like this Ordinance continue for one month.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Council Vice-President Vargas, it was voted to continue this Ordinance for one month. Motion passed unanimously.

## **II. CORRESPONDENCE/COMMUNICATIONS**

None.

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

### **A. PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**Michael Farina**, 10 Caitlyn Ct., appeared to speak and stated that he saw the announcement last week that the Mayor is looking to build a new pool and a splash pad at the side of the old pool. He came here tonight to hear debate on the resolution on the agenda asking for \$350,000 for basically what looks like a site survey for a project that is not approved yet. Procedurally, he thought that was kind of odd that we would be asking for funding for something that this Council really has not debated or approved. Why would you allocate \$350,000 until we know what this body is going to do for the Budget.

**David Baldwin**, 67 Fordson Ave., appeared to speak regarding proposed Ordinance 3-23-01 and stated that his opinion, as a Cranston resident, is that if this Committee's job is just to approve and spend money for whatever the Mayor wants, then we do not have a lot to talk about. His opinion, as a resident of Cranston, is we are not asking the right question and the right question is not can this proposal work or how much will this proposal cost, but what is the right proposal. He feels and believes everyone is in agreement that before we start spending this kind of money to evaluate one proposal where there is only one item on the menu, we want to make

sure that we know what the people of Cranston would like to see for their pool. This is not the Mayor's pool, this is the City of Cranston pool. He has read and heard the Mayor's press conference a few times and there has not been one word representing the voices of anybody, of any citizens of the City. Before \$350,000 is spent, he would like to make sure we hear what the people of Cranston want for the pool.

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

**3-23-01**      *Ordinance transferring \$350,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act Grant Fund for engineering design development cost for construction of a Budlong pool and partial renovation of an improvement upon the property. Sponsored by Mayor Hopkins.*

Councilman Paplauskas motioned to approve this Ordinance. Council Vice-President Vargas seconded the motion for discussion.

### Under Discussion:

**Director Moretti** stated that, as everyone knows, for the past one to one and half years, there has been much enthusiasm expressed from every member of the City Council of tremendous urgency in questioning how come a new pool has not been built or how come existing pool has not been repaired. The Mayor has put forward this resolution because of that urgency that the Council has informally expressed at all the meetings. It was determined that structurally the pool is obsolete, the bath house does not work with all the requirements and it is not ADA accessible. With that, along with deficiencies with the structural deficiencies within the pool, it was determined that the pool was not practically salvageable. After discussions, the Mayor with the urging of the Council, went out with Mark Saccoccia from Saccoccia Architects, to develop an artist rendering of the pool and that information as shared with everyone that the pool renovation pertaining to a renovate bath house, pool, potential for a splash pad and other amenities. The renderings were shown to Councilwoman Germain and she told the Mayor it was wonderful and with that assumption, the Mayor put forward and introduced those rendering to the Council with that support and enthusiasm. They were shared with the Council with feedback thinking that do the whole thing was too much to take on and the Mayor heard the Council and went back and proposed, via this Ordinance, to scale back as Council requested to a minimal facility which would basically get necessity of renovating bath house and installing or building a pool a third of the current size. In the interest of time, the Mayor heard the urgency to have the pool opened for next year. Most prudent thing to do is initiate the process to lead to the construction of the pool. To save thousands of dollars, the recommendation or request, if this Council so desires, is to have a pool ready for next year is to secure the timing of it by going to engineering design and development if approved by the Council. Those would be for the engineering drawings. The Mayor heard the message, he heard the support for the pool, but also heard people that don't want the pool to be that size, scale it back, so the Administration is presenting the opportunity tonight, if the Council wishes to proceed with the pool, by going to engineer drawings. The more we wait, the more we run the risk of supply and availability of contractors.

**Councilwoman Germain** stated that, as everyone knows, she has been advocating for the Budlong Pool for quite a while, but this Ordinance requires everyone's full attention. She is not in favor of using \$350,000 from ARPA money. She firmly believes that every member of this Committee would be against that as well. The Administration has presented a feasibility study to the Council on April 2022. This study afforded three options to consider. Although she did not trust the study at first and still does not because there are a lot of discrepancies. Option one is to maintain as much as possible as is and focus on bringing all elements of the pool compliant and ensuring all issues are rectified and to ensure the equipment is working as designed. The pool itself will be comprehensively overall to correct all deficient and to address the structural failures of the pool shell and the substance that is causing the piping valves to crack and leak. This will require the removal of the liner, excavation and removal of the unsuitable soil, installing new materials and reinstallation of the new pool basin with new joints and completion of the interior pool finished liner, upgrading the existing building and focus on rectifying the environmental issues, upgrading the restrooms and locker room with the intent of increasing the capacity and updating the accessibility issues, repairing roof and properly identifying and abating the other materials on site. This proposal will preserve as much of the existing functions and does not focus on avoiding or changing the overall size. This proposal will cost between \$2.5 and \$2 million. She did some research, she listened to people and some experts about the pool. There are some things that do not add up, but at the time this study was performed, she did have many questions. She called everyone's attention to a series of discrepancies she discovered following the request of \$350,000 from the Mayor to conduct another study for the pool: 1) at the last Public Works Committee meeting, Director Parrillo stated that the Mayor had agreed, with the will of the Council, in making the original project smaller, so it is going to be a pool and a bath house for the original price of approximately \$3.7 million. So, when this was stated at the last meeting, there was no Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 5. There was no requests we were going to do another study because if we stay in this range, we see keeping the pool at the way it is. We just changed what we have to do. we do not need to construct a new pool. She would like to know why the Mayor can't make use of this study paid with taxpayer money. If you want to move forward with Option 1, we do not need to spend \$350,000. After many reflections and with use of the feasibility study, she sees a need to hear from certain people. She would like the person who produced this report, the Federal Hill Group, appear before the Council to answer some of the questions she has. She would like to know if this study is valid or not valid and why; 2) we need to have the Cranston Inspector of Buildings come before the Council because things we do not know is the bath house has to be under the Inspector to be up to Code; 3) we need to hear directly from former Parks and Recreation Director, Tony Liberatore, because we do not know the true nature of the Budlong Pool. We are going around and around for one year and now we are talking about designing. She also stated that she wants to hear from the person who ran the pool in 2019, how it could be leaking or not leaking because since it has been closed, the water level is the same. Paying again for a study for a pool that can be fixed is a waste of time and money.

**Council Vice-President Vargas** asked if Administration can respond to Councilwoman Germain.

**Director Moretti** stated that the architect's study report, upon the engineers looking at it, it is a fatal pool, it is not the Mayor making that up that the pool is irreparable. What is very disappointing is for months and months and months we have been saying, as everyone here was party to, that we had the concept of the architectural concepts. We did not hear any objections to proceed down that direction versus going back to the study. That is fine if you want to resurrect it and want to go in that direction, but you are telling the Administration one thing and coming back at a different way. If you do not want to proceed in that direction, that is fine, but last time we met he believes he made a statement that there was a consensus that the Council wanted to proceed in the direction we were talking about with new design. So, we are trying to get feedback from the Council and we want to move forward, if you do not want to do it, that is fine. The Councilwoman from Ward 2 congratulated the designs and was elated in the Mayor's Office over what she saw. It is a shame comments made tonight were not presented to the Mayor then.

**Councilwoman Germain** stated that she went to the Mayor's Office to talk about when the pool was going to open and what we can do. She said that that design looked good, but the question is can we afford it. She did not say it did not look good, because last time she asked the question of can we afford the original \$7 million, because last time she asked the question of where we are going to find \$7 million. She never received a response to this question and she asked that the Administration be realistic. Her constituents want a pool. The consensus is that they want a pool. She questions the status of the pool and the current condition of the pool and we need to know the truth.

**Chair** stated that over the next five weeks we are going to spend a lot of time together. He asked everyone to keep comments on topic.

**Director Moretti** stated that not one person here came forward and voiced opposition and asked the Administration to go back to look at the original pool and just fix what we got. He has to defend someone who is not in this room and he does not want anyone questioning Director Parrillo's integrity with the assertion that he may have been lying. Director Parrillo is a man of integrity and does not believe he was lying to anyone.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked if the \$350,000 is included in the \$2.5 to \$2.7 million estimate. Director Moretti stated that it is included in that. Councilwoman Renzulli stated that we all want this pool, but she sat at the Planning Commission meeting and was the only one there and there was debate whether to take that pool right out of the Capital Budget, As far as she understands it if it was taken out of the Capital Budget, we would not have been able to put it back and use bond money, so she spoke at that meeting and stated the will of the Council and as far as she understands, the will of the Mayor is to do something with this pool. If we wait until we go through the budget process, then it is July 1<sup>st</sup>, then every time we have a meeting it is another month and then it is September, then it is November, then it is snowing and can't do anything. We are just wasting time. That pool was built in 1940. Every other pool built in WPA era has already been closed or redone. We can't plug holes in the pool anymore and now we have ARPA money we can use and a bond.

**Councilman Ferri** stated that this is a very important decision and we really did not ask the people of Cranston what they wanted. He sent out 400 emails asking people to watch the press conference video. He received 125 responses, which were very lengthy. He read and responded to every one them. He stated that 22 people who responded are in favor of the Mayor's plan to spend \$4 million on a pool; 38 people who responded feel we can fix the existing pool; 52 people who responded are dead against spending that kind of money on a pool; 7 people who responded feel there are not enough facts to make a decision and 2 people who responded did not leave him an answer, but made comments. He stated that he cannot see how we can spend \$350,000 so we can go out and borrow \$4 million. He has spoken to people who worked for the City and know about pools, he still believes that that pool can be fixed and open. He is listening to his constituents and they are telling him not to do it.

**Councilman Paplauskas** stated that if the pool gets fixed up and back open, he asked if it is going to be open to the Summer Camp Programs for the kids to use. Director Moretti stated that he certainly does not see a reason why not to, so yes.

**Councilman Paplauskas** stated that on July 18<sup>th</sup>, this Council passed a Resolution unanimously to spend money on the pool, so this Council has already said once on the floor together, spending ARPA funds. Now, we are here to move forward. We can't build anything without architectural specialists look at it. He came here with the expectation of voting on this tonight, but he does not know which way he is going to vote now because after hearing Councilwoman Germain, going a different direction, he wants to help. He asked if this is approved this evening, will the money be spent by the time the Council approves the Capital Budget. Director Moretti stated that we would contract the services to begin to commit that spending.

**Council President Marino** stated that she is frankly embarrassed that we are here at this point. Something so simple, something that we all agree, all should be operational, and yet we still have not begun to accomplish that goal. Councilwoman Germain is correct in having her reservations and concerns. We have a Charter that requires contracts to go out to bid. We started this process with Federal Hill Group report from someone we did not know. We were given this and it was worthless. Now we know that finances are tight, we do have ARPA funding, the Administration is coming to the City Council asking to approve \$350,000 for this design and construction plans and yet from her account she thinks it would put some of the Council members more at ease if the Administration would have, it is putting the cart before the horse. The proper process would have been and would have created more trust in the actions being taken in terms of the design, if the City puts out this bid and gets proposals and then we will know how much it would cost and then come to the Council and say it went out to bid and three different companies bid and these are the bids we got and she would be a lot more comfortable in saying ok and we can all decide whether or not we are going to spend that money, but to just be sitting here asking the same Council to just trust the Administration is going to use \$350,000 of plans when \$10,000 was spent on worthless plans, that is asking a lot. The fact that the Mayor had plans drawn up, the Mayor took it upon himself to have those plans drawn up. He did not ask for a Public Works workshop with the Council. she is not saying we should spend the \$7 million or the \$3 or \$4 million, but what she is saying is we should make an honest effort to doing a request for proposal to find out design plans, how much they are going to cost and at least make the effort and then we can have a discussion of whether or not we should use ARPA funds.

**Council President Marino** asked Solicitor if she is correct in stating that the Charter requires competitive bidding per Section 7.09 before this is approved. Solicitor stated that the best way he can answer this this evening and he just needs a little more time to look into this, because it is a close issue because there is a professional services exception when it comes to competitive bidding. The question is, does this fit under that exception and he would really need to take a much closer look at the Charter.

**Council Vice-President Vargas** stated that she appreciates the Mayor putting something before us, but she also wants to make sure that we ask questions when it comes to the funding to find out if this is going to be a financially stable project that we can actually do or not do. She wants to see this pool opened, she thinks it is a need in our community, it is a matter of how we are all going to collectively get there while also making sure that we keep taxpayers money, residents and business owners and everyone who invests in our City, in mind as we are moving along with this project. She would be fine if this were to be continued, but would like to hear from the Solicitor. She asked if we can RFP or RFQ whether this passes or not. Solicitor stated that in his opinion, that is correct.

**Solicitor** addressed Council President Marino's question she asked earlier and stated that initially, there is a presumption that everything goes out to bid, however, it gets a little hazy and gets you in a gray area when you are talking about professional services or you are talking about some type of services that involves unique services. The Charter lists six or seven factors for the Purchasing Agent to consider and make a judgment as to whether or not in his or her opinion it should go out to bid or it is the type of activity or the type services that is not really appropriate to bid because it involves a unique talent or unique service. He does not know enough about the company that has been proposed, the precise type of work they are going to do. these are questions that need to be answered before we can make a decision as to whether or not it should go out to bid or the type of thing that in the judgement of the Finance Director should go to a particular firm or business because of their unique qualifications. It boils down to what is the nature of the service that is being offered or being sought by the City. Only then, he can give an appropriate opinion.

**Councilman Reilly** asked where the Administration got the \$350,000 number. Director Moretti stated that it was estimate from the Engineers that designed the architectural drawings along with Director Bernardo and he estimated the cost by getting some loose quotes as a starting point.

**Councilman Campopiano** stated that since this came out, he has gone back and forth on this issue. On the pro side, we did pass a Resolution to spend ARPA funds for the pool and also on the pro side, we have \$750,000 in Bond for it and also to his knowledge, this is the only thing that was proposed that would go directly to the people. He does not think the size that the pool is now is right for this day and age. Other cities have pools that are not nearly that size and to staff the pool safely at that size is a daunting task in today's society in getting people to work. It is concerning to him that it did not go out to bid for the drawings and plans. He does not know how he is going to vote. He hopes the pool gets done and gets done for next year.

**Chair** stated that he knows everyone wants the pool open. What that means to each person is going to differ. We have to find some sort of consensus on that. He recognizes that for the pool to get done, the study has to be done. He also came here tonight with the same concerns former Council President Farina had, would we be approving \$350,000 to go towards a project that we have not yet approved? He proposed to the Committee and Administration to continue this and do the RFQ to get exact price and this gives us time to go through the budget process. If necessary, we have a special meeting of the Finance Committee to be forwarded to the Council so there would not be any further delay. It could possibly be addressed in May.

Council Vice-President Vargas, seconded by Councilwoman Germain, it was voted to continue this Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

**Director Moretti** stated that the concern is it does not sound like a lot of time, but those five weeks will further jeopardize having the pool ready for next July.

**Council President Marino** stated that it is unfair to say a delay of five weeks, when the Administration comes to us in April for next year for the pool, that somehow is going to be on our backs if this does not happen. That is not fair. Wanting competitive bidding is advantageous to us as a City because we will yield the benefit of saving money. If there is, as there was with this Resolution, a firm in mind, that could have been communicated to the Council so we could have vetted that firm in advance of tonight and we all have good reason to question this because we are looking at up to \$350,000 and we all do want this done and done the right way. We want it done the fiscally responsible way for the most part.

**Chair** stated that he does want the pool open as soon as possible.

Chair asked for roll call vote on the continuance of this Ordinance and motion passed on a vote of 5-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Donegan, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilwoman Germain, Councilman Campopiano and Council President Marino -5. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilmen Ferri and Paplauskas -2.

***Real Estate Tax Abatements***

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

***Motor Vehicle Tax Abatements***

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

***Tax Interest Waiver Approvals***

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Campopiano, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Interest Waiver Approvals. Motion passed unanimously.



***Tax Interest Waiver Denials***

On motion by Councilman Paplauskas, seconded by Councilman Campopiano, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Interest Waiver Denials. Motion passed unanimously.

- **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Rosalba Zanni  
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees