

*(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).*

## **PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE**

Regular meeting of the Public Works Committee was held on Thursday, September 15, 2022 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

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

**Council President Paplauskas** stated that Chairman Ferri has an excused absence and he will be Chairing the meeting this evening. He also stated that Councilwoman Renzulli will be late.

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 P.M. by the Council President Paplauskas.

Present: Councilwoman Jessica M. Marino  
Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli (appeared at 6:30 p.m.)  
Councilwoman Lammiss J. Vargas  
Councilman Matthew R. Reilly  
Councilman Richard D. Campopiano, Vice-Chair  
Council President Christopher G. Paplauskas

Absent: Council Vice-President Robert J. Ferri, Chair

Also Present: Councilman John P. Donegan  
Councilwoman Aniece Germain  
Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff  
Richard Bernardo, Public Works Director  
John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor  
Rosalba Zanni, Acting City Clerk  
Heather Finger, Stenographer

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

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

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

None.

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

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

**Steven Stone**, 70 Chiswick Rd., appeared to speak regarding the issues of speeding on his street and presented a petition through Councilwoman Vargas for the record.

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

#### ***Request from Rhode Island Energy for pole location at Koutsogiane Dr. Ratification***

On motion by Councilman Reilly, seconded by Councilwoman Marino, it was voted approve the ratification of above request. Motion passed unanimously.

#### **Councilman Donegan:**

- ***Discussion of measures to reduce speeding in Laurel Hill neighborhood.***

**Councilman Donegan** stated that approximately two years ago during a budget, there were funds approved for traffic calming measures on, he believes, Pepper Mill. He is wondering, especially on Laurel Hill Ave. and Cranston ad Dyer, what we can do to slow traffic down and make those streets safer for not just vehicular traffic but pedestrians, or people on bicycles.

**Council President Papluskas** stated that he believes the street Councilman Donegan is referring to is Peveril and he does not think some of the neighbors like what they did, but he is not sure how those bump-outs are working. He asked Public Works Director for any insight.

**Director Bernardo** stated that, unfortunately, this is a common issue throughout the whole City. If the money were available for the flashing speed limit signs, they do get you attention, but it is usually only for 500'. The only proven method of reducing speeding is enforcement. He probably says it every month he attends the meetings, the rodent control, the littering and speeding, are not civil engineering issues that Public Works really addresses. We need to have people start following the rules. In speaking to the State Traffic Commission, they agree that enforcement is really the only thing that is going to change things.

**Councilman Donegan** asked if there is any evidence that potentially narrowing some of the roads to create bike lanes, would decrease speed. Director Bernardo stated that it has the potential, but he was at Chiswick today and he was watching people going over those speed bumps where they have defined bike lanes. It is a human behavior thing. He has said it before, the speed cameras in some zones work, they are set for 31 miles an hour and if you go 31, you get a ticket.

- ***Traffic Calming measures on Dyer Ave and Cranston St.***

**Councilman Donegan** stated that on Cranston St. next to D'Evan Manor, there is a pedestrian activated light to cross. On Dyer Ave., at the Riverbend Apartments, there is not a pedestrian activate light and a woman was unfortunately killed last year. He asked Solicitor if it takes an Ordinance to get a pedestrian activated light put there or is that something that can be done administratively.

There are a lot of kids in that area and it should be placed there. Solicitor stated that that is probably an administrative function. He does not think an Ordinance is necessarily needed for that. There is a crosswalk already there and under State Law, whether there is a pole, electronic light or anything like that, State Law requires that when there is a crosswalk, traffic has to stop if someone is trying to cross. In terms of physically putting up some type of a signal or control signal, he thinks Public Works would probably know better than he because that is in the same category, he thinks, as putting up stop sign or no parking signs. Councilman Donegan asked Administration if that is something that can be done. Director Moretti recommended that the Administration speak to Police and Traffic Engineer to give their assessment from the experts and based on their advice, then that decision he would think would be prudent.

- *Explanation of the Request to move the Utility Pole at 77 Crescent Drive. Who is responsible for the expense?*

**Councilman Donegan** stated that there is a utility pole literally in the middle of the driveway of the owner of 77 Crescent Ave. at the point where they and their neighbor had to collaboratively reconfigure the neighbor's retaining wall and take part of it out and pave it, take some of the grass on the side so that way the cars could get around. The neighbor, who does not own 77 Crescent, is elderly and it is becoming increasingly difficult for her to maneuver leaving the driveway. The Public Works Committee members had approved this pole move last month or two months ago and then the resident received word that they would be financially responsible for paying the cost for that pole to be moved, which he believes is approximately \$2,000 and cable company would also charge them to have the wires removed. That is just ridiculous. For a family, that is a lot of money and for these giant corporations is chump change. He does not know what we can do or if there is standard practice, but it is ridiculous that they are having to be hit with that bill and it won't be moved unless they pay it. He is wondering what we can do. Director Bernardo stated that the Public Works Committee approved the relocation of the pole. It was a request from the property owner to National Grid. National Grid has to request the approval of the relocation on any pole. Under no circumstances, on any pole, does the City of Cranston pay for relocation or the installation of new poles. The pole obviously was there. He does not know if it precedes the driveways, but this is a private matter between a resident and a utility company. This does not affect the City of Cranston.

**Councilman Reilly** stated that we are all in this together whether you are a public utility, a neighbor, a City Council, so we are all expected to act how we would want others to act around us so if they are not going to be helpful to our residents, they do put a lot of requests to put things up before us. Until they do right by the neighbors, maybe we have a slight moratorium or look at their requests a little more closer. Director Bernardo stated that he is not sure how much they can do. They are regulated through the P.U.C. so it may not just be a simple matter of Rhode Island Energy deciding that they are going to spend public money when it is a request from a property owner. Councilman Reilly stated that he understands, but he really has very little sympathy for these utility companies and what the P.U.C. allows them to do and how they allow them to just take over and do whatever they want to the residents of the State. He would like them to work with them rather than just say it is on the neighbors.

**Councilwoman Vargas** asked if a letter could possibly be sent to the utility company on behalf of the City Council possibly from the Chair of the Public Works Committee or from the Administration regarding today's meeting and what was brought up indicating to them that we are here to work with them in hopes that that is looked at. Director Bernardo stated that if directed by the Administration, he would be happy to send the letter, but he just wants to be realistic on what the expectation would be.

He thinks it is a good next step. We are trying to at least try to help out the resident in Cranston, but again, they have guidelines that they have to follow too and this relocating of utility pole, because of personal interest, is something that the City has not gotten involved with because it is more of an issue between the utility company and the resident so we would be setting precedent of getting involved with a personal matter that we normally do not get involved with.

- ***Rodent Program.***

**Director Bernardo** stated that we are still making progress with the time for a call and receiving back the indemnification form to an appointment varies depending on the district that it is in and it has come way down. There has also been a reduction in requests, but as he stated in July, the biggest problem is human behavior. As he stated in July, he is not going to ask this Council for another penny or another staffer because until human behavior changes, we would be throwing good money after bad, but we are getting out to everyone.

**Councilman Donegan** stated that one question procedurally about residents trying to access that program that he found is that if you are a tenant and have a rat issue, you can't request the bait and if you have a landlord that is unresponsive or just is busy and can't find the time to do it, they are not going to get the traps and that is concerning. Also, he asked if there are ways that we can streamline that where the indemnification form is online to download and submit electronically. That would cut down on the need to call, get the letter sent out and then sending it back. It would also free up time for the Rodent Control Officer as well as streamline the process for residents seeking this vital City service. Director Bernardo stated that while this sounds good, he would highly recommend against that. We are dealing with poison and we are dealing with rules from D.E.M. The reason why we have the systems in place is to make sure that the legal property owner is the one that sends that and is authorizing access to that property. We are audited by D.E.M. The process is not onerous. A phone call anytime during the day. You do not need to deal with the Rodent Control Officer, you deal with one of four people in the Office on staff. Everyone of those people in the Office from the Clerk to the Engineers, know how to take that information. When a request comes in, the indemnification form goes out that night. The biggest thing is getting the form back. There are times when forms do not come back for a month, but the form goes out that night. As quick as we get that form back, that application is put in the schedule for the next available appointment. We are dealing with poison and we have to protect the city so it has to be the property owner. We have to track those forms and we have to be able to be audited by D.E.M. periodically.

**Councilman Campopiano** stated that this is a matter that is concerning to him. He has some education in this area because of his properties. He thinks education is where we have to tackle this versus abatement. He thinks that if we send a flyer out or a mailing out about the rat issue with some pictures like the Director mentioned with the food on the ground and bird feeders and real graphic stuff that will catch the peoples' eye. We have to educate the people. It would be less expensive than sending out baits. We are throwing good money after bad with these bait traps.

- ***No Turn On Red - Cranston St.***

Discussed earlier in the meeting with the Dyer Ave. traffic calming measure issue.

**Councilwoman Marino:**

- *Status of inspections and debris cleanup of Yardworks.*

**Director Moretti** stated that Deputy Chief McAuley has been on this with Inspections. Inspections has been to the property, but they found no obvious violations. As a result, there is no further action on that. Councilwoman Marino what that date was. Director Moretti stated that he does not have the date. Councilwoman Marino asked if that is something Director Moretti can obtain. Director Moretti stated, sure.

**Councilwoman Marino** stated that the previous meetings there were photos showing debris that clearly did not belong there and some of that debris could only be viewed on adjoining properties unless the Inspections Department was given express permission to enter the property. She asked if Inspections go to any of the neighboring properties to in fact view those areas that the photos showed. Director Moretti stated that Deputy Chief of Staff McAuley did not report that back to him. He said he worked with Inspections and they went to inspect the property and they were welcomed down to the property, but did not see anything.

- *Discussion/status of traffic safety concerns on Prospect and Fenner Streets.*

**Councilwoman Marino** stated that there is a large amount of utility work being conducted in this area right now. She asked where things stand. Director Moretti stated that he was not aware of what Councilwoman Marino wanted to discuss. There was discussion on this before the bridge was finished that was used as a cut through so the concern was the high volume of traffic. The feeling was that once the bridge was finished, the traffic problems would be alleviated. Councilwoman Marino stated that it was not just the volume of traffic, it was the speeding itself and people ignoring stop signs.

- *Discussion/status of retaining wall in basketball court area of Aqueduct Road/Budlong Pool facility.*

**Councilwoman Marino** stated that she sent an e-mail with photos of the retaining wall. Deputy Director McAuley had then contacted her a few days later and said that the Mayor, himself and she believes Director Bernardo as well and not sure if Parks and Recreation Director Tessaglia was there or not and had gone to the location and said that it was a concern and that they would be erecting a fence through wooden wire not using concrete blocks, but actually drilling into the ground and blocking off that area. She was also told, at that time, that the basketball hoops were removed from the basketball court nearest to that retaining wall. She accepted him at his word that that was done, only to find out that that did not occur. She asked where that stands. Director Moretti stated that he was not privy to that conversation, but what he does know is the basketball hoops on that court have been removed and there is going to be erected, safety fence around the perimeter. The non-proven scientific engineering study, but an opinion, was that this has been occurring over many many years. There will be hazard signs installed and the area will be cornered off to prevent people from going there. Councilwoman Marino stated that she understands mistakes can happen, but she would hope that in the future, it is not stated that something is actually done when in fact it is not done. Director Moretti stated that he was not aware of those promises, but he promises that by the next meeting, there will be a safety fence cordoning it off with a sign probably saying 'hazard' or 'caution'.

- *Status of Cranston's participation in the Rhode Island Community Septic Loan Program and Sewer Tie- in Program)*

**Director Moretti** stated that the Administration supports this as mentioned and believes we can solve the financing of this. There is an application process or qualification with D.E.M. to be qualified to administer this program. That is probably approximately a \$20,000 bill, but we believe that would merit to fall within the Sewer Enterprise Fund. As he stated at the last meeting, it did lose some steam by losing a Public Works Director and Finance Director. The interest is just as it was before. He and Mr. Igoe had a Zoom meeting with the people at Infrastructure Bank. He thinks that once it is up and running, it should be very very seamless to the City, but it is just going to take a little time of investment to develop that plan. Right now, he just wants to make sure that we are confident that this is going to happen. We were told that it is going to be taking approximately three or four months with the financing application process. One of the first priorities would be to develop that plan. He is guessing that approximately half a year from now it could be implemented, but he just does not have the resources. We are spread out right now.

**Councilwoman Marino** asked Director Moretti if he thinks once we have a Finance Director he will have the administrative support to implement the financial piece of it. Director Moretti stated that he is quite sure.

**Councilwoman Vargas:**

- *Chiswick Traffic Study*

**Councilwoman Vargas** stated that there is tremendous amount of speeding this area. Chiswick is being used as a cut through street for people making deliveries to other streets in the area. In her conversations and meeting with the residents, they are hoping that the Administration, after researching, can appeal and write a letter through Google Maps or Waze and request that they reroute and not have their deliveries going down Chiswick and have it used only for local traffic, but not have anyone who has to get through the RI Yacht Club or Edgewood Yacht Club go through streets like Norwood Ave. versus going down all the way to Broad St. and then taking a left on Chiswick. She asked if the City can put a letter together requesting to the companies if they can reroute people that are entering an address to get to one way and remove Chiswick Rd. as a cut through.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** stated that she just googled it as Councilwoman Vargas suggested and there is a way to how to remove a private road from GPS apps. Councilwoman Vargas stated that they have tried already and Google has responded and they need a letter from the City.

**Councilwoman Vargas** stated that the neighbors have a petition and asked that it be made part of the record.

On motion by Councilman Reilly, seconded by Councilwoman Vargas, it was voted to accept the petition as part of the record. Motion passed unanimously.

**Director Bernardo** clarified that this is not a speeding issue. Multiple studies have shown from the Police Department that the enforceable violations are between 1% and 4% with an average speed of 24 miles an hour. This really does not look like a speeding issue as much as cut through traffic. He cautioned that we are talking about a system that is in place to remove a private roadway from Google and Waze. This is not a private road, this is a public roadway. If the Administration wants to,

he would be more than happy to send a letter to both of them, but it has to be a request because these are public roadways and we would have no way of enforcing, stopping cars, they are public roadways. When you do things like that, you are going to take the burden of this traffic off of Chiswick and you are going to relocate it somewhere else.

**Councilwoman Vargas** stated that if Director Moretti would like to weigh in, she would be happy to even co-sign that letter if needed. Director Moretti stated that he has spoken with the Police and Colonel Winqvist was not big on such a letter. He feels that this is going to cause another problem and if there are more complaints it is on him, however, Director Bernardo would be happy to write that letter if Councilwoman Vargas would like to co-sign it.

**Council Vice-President Ferri:**

- *Update on Costco being developed in Chapel View and Traffic Concerns.*

**Council President Paplauskas** indicated that since Council Vice-President Ferri is not present this evening, this item will be continued to next month's meeting.

- **ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting adjourned at 7:10 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Rosalba Zanni  
Acting City Clerk