

*(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, March 14, 2024 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

### **I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

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

### **II. ROLL CALL**

Present: Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli  
Councilman Robert J. Ferri  
Councilman John P. Donegan  
Councilman Richard G. Campopiano  
Councilman Daniel R. Wall  
Councilwoman Aniece Germain, Vice-Chair  
Council Vice-President Lammis J. Vargas, Chair  
Council President Jessica M. Marino

Also Present: Councilman Christopher G. Paplauskas  
Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff  
Justin Mateus, Acting Public Works Director  
John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor  
Stephen Angell, City Council Legal Counsel  
Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees  
Heather Finger, Stenographer

### **III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- **Approval of minutes of the February 15, 2024 Regular meeting**

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the February 15, 2024 meeting and they stand approved as recorded. Motion passed unanimously.

#### IV. COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER

**Councilwoman Renzulli:** (Cont. from 1/11/2024 & 2/15/2024)

- *Western Industrial Complex” - Update from the City on their knowledge of any situation at this property, both historically and currently. Explanation of what the landowner can be doing by right, what (if any) permits have been pulled, what (if any) plans have been submitted, what (if any) discussions have been had with DEM recently in regard to this property. Noise complaints and enforcement of our noise ordinance. Any and all departments involved are asked to provide relevant information so we have a comprehensive understanding of this situation currently and going forward.*

**Councilwoman Renzulli** stated that she received a call today from the Solicitor. She was to receive an email update from the Administration and has not received anything, but she’s not sure if the Administration has any update. There is nothing at Planning for this. There have been no further complaints about noise for work on this property, so he thinks it is fine to remove this item from the agenda for now unless the Administration has anything further.

**Director Moretti** stated that we are not aware of any building permits in process or applied for.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked that if the Administration hears anything through the pipeline, they give the Council a heads up and that would save a lot of problems going forward.

**Councilwoman Germain:** (Cont. from 1/11/2024 & 2/15/2024)

- *Explanation on the plowing process. What went wrong? Why many roads have not been plowed on Sunday evening when the snow stopped? New contractors? No staffing? What is the issue?*

**Councilwoman Germain** stated that she has spoken to many people that report that there has been progress, so she will remove this and does not need to be discussed.

#### V. PUBLIC COMMENT

**Martin Madden**, 131 Fordson Ave., appeared to speak and stated that he is concerned about the flooding. He served on the past Flood Committee, which was disbanded for no reason. They were told back then that there was a plan to build the wall. He would like to see that plan because he does not think that wall will ever be built to prevent the flooding.

**Dante Marinaro**, 132 Fordson Ave., appeared to speak and stated that his daughter actually resides at this address and he addressed the flood issue. He stated that approximately a dozen families have been displaced and still paying for utilities and fees to the Association without actually living there. There are some residents that are rebuilding the units because they are running out of money to live in a hotel or some place else. The reason is because they have not received any final response from either the City or State regarding the disaster restoration declaration.

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

*Council President Marino:*

- *Update from Administration regarding the status of the City's participation in the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank's Community Septic System Loan Program*

**Director Moretti** stated that the Infrastructure Bank Board approved Cranston's application for the septic loan program at the end of February. A few days ago, we received a draft commitment letter of intent which the City executed and sent back. The next step is Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank will be drafting a loan agreement to pass along to the City, which we will anticipate executing, but that would initiate the \$500,000 amount to be available under this program.

**Council President Marino** asked what the timeframe is. **Director Moretti** stated that they did not give a timeframe, but he knows that they are moving things along. If he hears anything, he will be happy to share it. **Council President Marino** stated that her understanding is that, we as a City, are to be working with the Bank, which she believes through RI Housing, through the Infrastructure Bank. We have Legal Counsel and the Bank has legal Counsel to determine the terms of the loan agreement that we will then put into place. **Director Moretti** stated that that is correct and the terms they have seen so far are consistent with what has been shared previously. **Council President Marino** stated that she knows that there are several people that have reached out about interest in availing themselves of this loan program. She is sure there will be more people that will line up so the sooner we do it, the better. Once the loan agreement terms are reached out, in terms of adding it to the City website should be a simple task to make the application accessible to residents. **Director Moretti** agreed and stated that we should be able to roll with this in a short period of time though we do not have the specific time right now. **Council President Marino** asked who the Legal Counsel is that is doing this on behalf of the City. **Director Moretti** stated that in terms of the loan, **Director Zidelis** is working with **David Ferrara**.

- *Flooding events from September to current throughout the City; status of FEMA, State and other assistance; remediation and mitigation efforts*

**Director Moretti** stated that from the last meeting, he does not have much more to add. The period for which claims have to be submitted to REMA and to FEMA and ultimately the President, regarding the September storm closed on March 7<sup>th</sup>. The period is still open for the storms for December and January, but the State is beginning to wrap up that package to submit to FEMA. In speaking to **Director Pappas** of REMA, he stated that it would take some time, could take months for the process. Speaking with all the federal representatives, particularly from the National Resource Conservation Service, they have no plans to build a wall along the rivers, whether it be Pocasset or Pawtuxet. They are in the final stages of receiving the approvals to begin to offer to take certain properties that have been defined in the flood zone particularly the Pocasset at first with funds grants shared between Cranston and Johnston to be administered through the National Resource Conservation Commission. They will be publicizing that and contacting those residences that would be applicable to the possible purchase and then elimination of those properties to restore it to green properties thereafter. They expect to get moving on that this year.

**Council President Marino** stated that, in terms of the purchasing of the properties, she asked if that might be in flood prone areas, is that concept exclusively held with the federal government stepping in and purchasing those properties and entertaining that with those private property owners or is an element of that where the federal government is going to give us, as a City, funding for us to make purchases of flood prone properties? Director Moretti stated that he believes there will be some agreements with the City once it is restored to vacant/green filed land. He is sure that there is a consideration on behalf of the City not to develop that in the future or allow it. Council President asked if there is a point person within the Administration who is organizing and tracking the federal assistance relative to the flooding and the mitigation efforts. Director Moretti stated that Chief Ryan is the EMA contact in Cranston working as liaison with Director Pappas and REMA and possibly FEMA. As to these houses or these properties, to date, the people at the Conservation Service have been dealing directly with the Mayor and himself.

**Council President Marino** indicated that currently still open is the period for people who would not otherwise qualify for unemployment as a result of the September storm. The period for them to apply for those benefits is still open. This would be people who are self-employed or other circumstances. The other thing of concern is what are we going to do on a go-forward basis? She does not think it is enough for us to just be addressing the storm as they happen, but we need to start planning long-term form how we are going to help mitigate the flooding problems. Director Moretti deferred to Director Mateus to provide more information.

**Director Mateus** addressed steps DPW has taken with different agencies to start to tackle these ongoing issues. He clarified that planning for solutions for stormwater events is almost impossible just by the irregularity of what these storms can be and the intensity of them. The specific storms we saw in September and January are unprecedented and very difficult to engineer and very expensive to even start to consider. Some tasks they have done in Public Works, which predates the recent storms in September and January, is that they have created a proactive catch basin cleaning program. That used to be purely reactive. They have been sampling data over a two-year period to calculate how much sediment is going in each catch basin. Since the major rain events, we have engaged with a Consultant, Fuss and O'Neill, who we are targeting to do some flood mitigation efforts in the Fenner Pond watershed, specifically on Garden St. We are targeting a grant path to use State and Federal funds for design and construction. This week, they met on a zoom meeting with DEM and other agencies and they laid out different grants that are available to us and what they can be used for. As far as he is aware, this is the first year that Public Works is going to be submitting in the Capital Budget a stormwater specific line item. In that line item, is funding for stormwater studies as well as stormwater construction, which will help us get some of these projects off the ground. They have also coordinated with FEMA and REMA. He submitted yesterday for claims and damages and expenses that the City has incurred from the January storm to FEMA and we are waiting to hear back on if any of that will be reimbursable so that is ongoing. They have also reached out to NRCS to do some stream bank restoration along the Pocasset River and have asked for some guidance from them and let us know what their flood plan restoration project that Director Moretti was alluding to before, is going to entail. Other areas that have been identified, Dean Estates, Wilbur Ave., Poplar Circle and Garden St. area and other smaller, but may not require capital expenses that we have on a list that we are checking and communicating with residents on a daily basis.

**Council President Marino** stated that she is sure that everyone in this room would agree that if we do not do anything about the flood problems, if we do not plan and try to come up with remedies for these problems, the problems are not going to go away and aren't short-term fixes, but long-term fixes and resources are available, such as the Municipal Resilience Program. Those are actions that we need to take. We may not see immediate relief, but long-term relief, absolutely, because it is unacceptable for us to just ignore the problem. She wants to be sure that, we as a City, are equipped and are not letting them slip us by and are taking proactive measures even now so that we are coordinating those plans. She asked if there is someone else besides Director Mateus and his department that is working towards flood water mitigation stormwater mitigation efforts for the City. Director Mateus stated, yes, there is. Council President Marino stressed that it is important to have discussions with neighboring cities and towns where some of these waterways traverse and impact multiple cities and towns and hopes that these conversations will be taking place.

**Councilman Ferri** asked if there is a plan for the specific property on Fordson. Director Mateus stated that he believes that that plan would fall in with NRCS. We do not want to do something that NRCS already has plans to fix.

**Councilman Campopiano** stated that he is concerned with new developments throughout the City. Pippin Orchard Rd. was flooded out the last two times and had to be blocked off and he was told it is a major development going in right in the area where it flooded. He asked if there is anyone he can speak to that he can assure the neighbors that this is being addressed and going forward, it likely won't happen again. Director Moretti stated that it seems to him that the issue is with the Planning Commission, that is where new developments are discussed and addressed in public hearings. As new developments come in, they start at the Planning Commission and DPR.

**Council Vice-President Vargas** stated to Director Mateus that there are some grants that we were going to go after, which is part of the OSCAR. She asked if that is something that we have engaged in not only the Finance Director, himself, but also the Grant Writer. Director Mateus stated that he has spoken to the Grant Writer about this. DPW and the Consultant, Fuss & O'Neill are going to tackle these grants internally, so they do not need her assistance in getting these grants. Council Vice-President Vargas asked when the deadline is for that. Director Mateus stated that the application process is scheduled to be available next month.

## **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni  
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees