

(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 MEETING – CITY COUNCIL

-APRIL 7, 2022-

A Special meeting of the City Council was held on Thursday, April 7, 2022, in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, Rhode Island.

The meeting was called to order at 5:40 P.M. by the Council President.

Roll call showed the following members present: Councilwomen Marino, Renzulli, Vargas (appeared at 5:42 p.m.), Germain, Councilmen Donegan, Campopiano, Council Vice-President Ferri and Council President Paplauskas -8.

Absent: Councilman Reilly -1.

Also Present: Mayor Kenneth J. Hopkins; Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff; John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor; Steven Angell, City Council Legal Counsel; Mike Igoe, City Controller; David Dimaio, City Council Budget Analyst.

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**CALL OF SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

THURSDAY, APRIL 7, 2022 @ 5:30 p.m.

Special Meeting of the Cranston City Council will be held **in the Cranston City Council Chambers, Cranston City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, RI 02910**, in accordance with Section 3.07 of the Home Rule Charter and Section 2.04.060 of the City Code for the purpose of considering the following items listed on the docket.

Remote participation is also available using the login information provided below as posted on the City's website at www.cranstonri.gov and the Secretary of State's website at www.sos.ri.gov

Technology problems should be reported immediately to:
CranstonCityCouncilMedia@gmail.com

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86346151866?pwd=SHZycmtDdXA5cDFWOGdjWUVSY2ZPZz09>

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US: +13017158592,,86346151866#,,, *176340# or
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US: +1 301 715 8592 or +1 312 626 6799 or +1 646 558 8656 or +1 253 215 8782
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International numbers available: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86346151866?pwd=SHZycmtDdXA5cDFWOGdjWUVSY2ZPZz09>

Those participating by telephone who wish to speak during the public hearing are asked to press *9 to "raise hand" to be recognized by the Council President. Those participating via the web may utilize the "raise hand" button.

YouTube Livestream

The meeting will be live streamed on YouTube. Click the link below to view the meeting. You will only be able to watch the proceedings.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtE9vwA1B1PQHuftrNPcZjg>.

In Accordance with Section 3.07 of the Home Rule Charter and Section 2.04.060 of the City Code, I hereby call a special meeting of the City Council to be held on **Thursday, April 7, 2022 at 5:30 p.m.**

at which meeting the following matters will be heard:

-APRIL 7, 2022-

Agenda and Docketed Matters Before the Council

- **Call to order** (*No votes taken*)

3-22-02 *Ordinance transferring appropriations and amending the budget for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022 (Administration Position Changes – Finance Director – General Fund). Sponsored by Mayor Hopkins. [\[click to view\]](#) (Vote to be taken)*

Advice and Consent of Mayor's appointment of Robert Zarnetske as Finance Director. (Vote to be taken)

I hereby request the City Clerk to notify all Council members of the Call of the special meeting.

Executed at Cranston, Rhode Island, this 29th day of March, 2022

/s/ Christopher G. Paplauskas, Council President

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CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that a true copy of the attached Notice of a Special meeting of the City Council to be held on, Thursday, April 7, 2022 at 5:30 pm in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, RI and via Zoom Webinar, was delivered via regular mail and electronic mail on the 29th day of March, 2022 to the addresses listed below.

Council President Christopher G. Paplauskas
14 Highland St.
Cranston, RI 02920
chrissaplauskas@gmail.com

Councilwoman Jessica M. Marino
799 Natick Ave.
Cranston, RI 02920
marinoforcranston@gmail.com

Council Vice-President Robert J. Ferri
2426 Cranston St.
Cranston, RI 02920
robferri2426@gmail.com

Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli
54 Massachusetts St.
Cranston, RI 02920
nicoleforcranston@gmail.com

Councilwoman Lammis J. Vargas
35 Betsey Williams Dr.
Cranston, RI 02910
Lammis.vargas@gmail.com

Councilwoman Anice Germain
53 Dale Ave.
Cranston, RI 02910
aniecegermain2@gmail.com

Councilman John P. Donegan
60 Packard St.
Cranston, RI 02910
JohnDoneganForCranston@gmail.com

Councilman Richard D. Campopiano
1640 Pippin Orchard Rd.
Cranston, RI 02921
RD.Camp@yahoo.com

[Councilman Matthew R. Reilly](mailto:mreillyesq@gmail.com)
[27 Dellwood Rd.](mailto:mreillyesq@gmail.com)
[Cranston, RI 02920](mailto:mreillyesq@gmail.com)
mreillyesq@gmail.com

/s/ Rosalba Zanni
Acting City Clerk

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On motion by Council Vice-President Ferri, seconded by Councilwoman Renzulli, it was voted to take the agenda out of order and discuss and vote on the Advice and Consent of Mayor's appointment of Robert Zarnetske as Finance Director. Motion passed on a vote of 7-0. The following being recorded as voting "aye": Councilwomen Marino, Renzulli, Germain, Councilmen Donegan, Campopiano, Council Vice-President Ferri and Council President Paplauskas -7. Councilwoman Vargas was not present for roll call vote.

Council President Paplauskas welcomed Mayor Hopkins into the Chambers.

Advice and Consent of Mayor's appointment of Robert Zarnetske as Finance Director.

Director Moretti stated that because of the criticality of this position and in light of some of the questions and concerns that developed last night, the Mayor requests a continuation of a week or two so the Administration can provide some supplemental information at a later time.

Councilwoman Renzulli motioned to continue this item to the full City Council meeting. No one seconded the motion.

Council President Paplauskas asked Director Moretti if he had any further statements he would like to make. Director Moretti stated that at last night's meeting, there was a concern about one prerequisite for this position and it had to do with a Charter requirement, which states that that person shall be a person skilled in governmental accounting, budgeting and financial administration. In evaluating that, Mr. Zarnetske does qualify in all respects except there was a concern of governmental accounting. Respectfully, the Administration submits that 'skilled' does not mean that the Director needs to be a practicing Accountant that does the accounting. As you know, there are other people in the department that do that work. The Administration feels that Mr. Zarnetske certainly is skilled in the area of governmental accounting. This position is too critical to the City. We are in a critical budget season. It is not politics. This is as sincere as it gets. We are putting the City in jeopardy and danger by not awarding Mr. Zarnetske in this position at this time. The City has been recruiting for this position since last year. A year went by and there were six applicants. There is no one else the Administration plans on presenting. It will be a long time, unless someone comes out of the woodwork, before the Administration is able to present another candidate. He asked for the City Council's consideration in every respect for Mr. Zarnetske and truly evaluate the person that he is and the background that he brings to the City.

Director Parrillo stated that the Administration had the same questions and same concerns of Mr. Zarnetske as the City Council has, but we have vetted him, we have met with him, we have utilized his skill set when it comes to ARPA and he is someone that we feel can do the job for the City. Like Director Moretti stated, even though we only had six applicants, Mr. Zarnetske stood out above all others. No other persons had Municipal experience that he had. We questioned the skill set, the accounting, the wording of the Charter.

Director Moretti also stated that it does not do the City Council any good not giving him the opportunity to represent the Mayor and Administration in going forward. If he is not doing a good job, the Mayor has the ability to move on from him. There is no harm in giving him the opportunity to take the job, take the reigns and move forward.

Director Moretti stated that he believes Director Strom submitted a letter to the City Clerk. He asked if that can be read into the record and be submitted. Council President Paplauskas asked Clerk to read the letter into the record.

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Councilwoman Vargas stated that she feels that the gentleman that is before us has a really intensive and strong resume with experience in the sense of what he has done in those roles. She will be voting against this appointment because she thinks that this is not a position that she thinks he will be a strong suit for the City. This is not personal or political. It is what she thinks is best for her constituents as far as making sure that the City has no structural deficit and we continue to be a financially well-established City moving forward. As Finance Director, she just does not see this resume being positioned in a finance role for the City. We have a lot at stake, we have federal dollars coming in and we are in a budget season. Hearing Mr. Zarnetske yesterday and responses to the questions that were being asked, in her mind she would not be able to vote on this Advice and Consent this evening.

Councilwoman Germain stated that all or most of her questions were answered at yesterday's meeting, but she asked Mr. Zarnetske if he ever worked as a Finance Director. Mr. Zarnetske stated that he has never held the position of Finance Director for a municipality. He managed a small business and handled the finances in that. Councilwoman Germain stated that yesterday, her colleague asked Mr. Zarnetske a question of the reason why he resigned at the Town of South Kingstown. She asked Mr. Zarnetske how his collaboration skills are. Mr. Zarnetske stated that his collaboration skills are excellent. He works well with people and worked with Finance Director in South Kingstown to great effect to a very good outcomes with the City budget and great outcomes with the general state of finances, very good outcomes with regards to the information technology program that was within that department and good outcomes with regard to contracting. One of the things that he thinks is important to recognize is that in South Kingstown he did not have a Controller. Mike Igoe was the equivalent, that positions is the equivalent to what the Finance Director did in South Kingstown. He had to work with the Finance Director on a daily basis and did so enthusiastically. Councilwoman Germain asked Mr. Zarnetske the reason why he resigned from South Kingstown. Mr. Zarnetske stated that he did not resign as Town Manager of South Kingstown because he was unhappy with conflict. He resigned because it was in the best interest of the community given the dynamics between the Council and the Manager. It just did not make sense to continue with conflict. Councilwoman Germain indicated to Mr. Zarnetske that his resume states that he resigned because the Council changed. She interprets that to mean that you have a type of Council you could work with so as a person who has skills to collaborate teamwork, you should be able to work with any Council. This is the problem for her because whoever has an experience in skills, you should be able to work with everybody. She indicated to Mr. Zarnetske that he has a really impressive resume for any other position, but she does not feel comfortable to vote for him as a Finance Director.

Council President Paplauskas asked if there were any motions on the applicant on the Advice and Consent of the Mayor's appointment of Robert Zarnetske.

Councilwoman Renzulli motioned to approve. Councilwoman Marino asked to make a motion.

Council President Paplauskas called on Councilwoman Marino.

Councilwoman Marino motioned to withhold its consent to the Mayor's appointment of Robert Zarnetske to the position of Finance Director and the Council deny the Advice and Consent concerning this nominee, Mr. Zarnetske. Council Vice-President Ferri seconded the motion.

Under Discussion:

Councilwoman Renzulli stated that she had made a motion to approve prior to Councilwoman Marino's motion. Council President Paplauskas apologized and stated that he did not hear Councilwoman Renzulli. He stated that votes can be taken on competing motions.

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Council President Paplauskas asked for Councilwoman Renzulli's motion. Councilwoman Renzulli stated that her motion is to approve the Advice and Consent. Councilman Campopiano seconded the motion for discussion. Council President Paplauskas stated that there are two motions and both have seconds. We will have discussion as normally and anyone has the opportunity to speak, but they will mirror each other and then we will vote on motion to approve first.

Councilwoman Renzulli stated that we can't one day say we have to follow the Charter, we can't just be making new decisions about Ward lines when the Charter says this. We just can't change the law today. If we want, in the future, the Finance Director to have a CPA, then we can do a Charter amendment, but we have to go by what we have today. She thinks that and hopes that everyone can be open-minded and realize that we are picking a piece of something that does not exist. It is not a requirement. This is higher than a CPA. This is a strategist, someone who is doing planning, long-term planning, creatively using technology. We have not had that in a lot of positions. This is not for us to hold back. If we do not put in a Finance Director, we are holding back the City and she does not think anyone wants to do that. She will be voting to approve.

Councilwoman Marino stated that our Charter does not ask, does not say "CPA" chief financial officer. The nominee before us has never served as a financial officer in a municipal capacity or private capacity and it is precisely for the reason that she is concerned about the longevity of the financial well-being of the City that this nominee is not the person for the job and she does not take this lightly.

Councilman Donegan stated that he does not believe he has ever voted against, not now, his second term, any Mayoral appointment because he does believe that the Mayor should have the people around them that they would like, but he shares the concern that Councilwoman Marino mentioned that the Finance Director position is so critical to the future and longevity of the City that while Mr. Zarnetske's resume is incredibly impressive, but he does not think that resume fits for this position. He has to think about what is best for the City and he is genuinely sorry, it is nothing personal, but he can't support this.

Councilwoman Vargas stated that before votes are taken, she asked for clarification of what motions are before the Council.

Attorney Angell stated that there are two motions pending. First is a motion to approve the Advice and Consent of Mayor's appointment of Mr. Zarnetske as Finance Director, which was made by Councilwoman Renzulli and seconded by Councilman Campopiano. There was another motion made by Councilwoman Marino and seconded by Council Vice-President Ferri and that motion was "I move that the Council withhold its consent of Mr. Zarnetske to the position of Finance Director and that the Council deny the Advice and Consent concerning the nominee" and that is the motion unless the two people making the motions disagree with what he has just stated. Those are the two motions that are pending presently and it is the call of the Chair which motion is voted on first pursuant to Robert's Rules.

Council President Paplauskas stated that the first motion we will take is the motion to approve the Advice and Consent of Mr. Zarnetske made by Councilwoman Renzulli and seconded by Councilman Campopiano.

Roll call was taken on motion made by Councilwoman Renzulli and seconded by Councilman Campopiano to approve and motion failed on a vote of 3-5. The following being recorded as voting "aye": Councilwoman Renzulli, Councilman Campopiano and Council President Paplauskas -3. The following being recorded as voting "nay": Councilwomen Marino, Vargas, Germain Councilman Donegan and Council Vice-President Ferri -5.

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Roll call was taken on motion to deny made by Councilwoman Marino and seconded by Council Vice-President Ferri and motion passed on a vote of 5-3. The following being recorded as voting "aye": Councilwomen Marino, Vargas, Germain Councilman Donegan and Council Vice-President Ferri -5. The following being recorded as voting "nay": Councilwoman Renzulli, Councilman Campopiano and Council President Paplauskas -3.

3-22-02 *Ordinance transferring appropriations and amending the budget for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022 (Administration Position Changes – Finance Director – General Fund). Sponsored by Mayor Hopkins.*

Council President Paplauskas stated that he believes that that item is moot. He asked for legal counsel input.

Council President Paplauskas stated that after speaking with legal counsel, we can take this up because it is for the position and not the person, unless the Administration would like to withdraw it.

Council President Paplauskas entertained a motion on the Ordinance.

On motion by Councilman Donegan, seconded by Council Vice-President Ferri, it was voted to deny this Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

Councilwoman Renzulli asked if this salary is applicable to whoever comes next or was this applicable just to Mr. Zarnetske. Council President Paplauskas stated that this is to the position and not the person.

Councilman Donegan stated that he is contemplating withdrawing the motion because his understanding is from past Council Rules, if something is brought up more than once or if something is denied, it cannot be brought up again in the same term. He is wondering if this were to be denied this evening, he would not want it to prohibit frustration from leveraging a potential salary fluctuation for any new candidates so he does not want to tie up the Administration's hands in that regard.

Council President Paplauskas stated that this is true and it is a great point. We can only take up an item once per session. He asked legal counsel if tabling this Ordinance is still an action or if we just don't make a motion it would fall off. Attorney Angell stated that, obviously, whatever you set, it is the salary schedule for the Finance Director. As a policy, decision certainly a budget decision, but procedurally, if you disapprove of this Ordinance, you are correct, you have taken it up during this session and that is it and if motion is withdrawn and you were to table this Ordinance until such time as you may think otherwise and bring it off the table and perhaps even augment that amount into a different number, but certainly whatever you would decide in this session would handicap both the Council and the Mayor for the balance of the term with respect to setting a salary on this position.

Councilman Donegan stated that his intention in this motion was not to tie the hands of the Administration. He withdrew his motion to deny and Council Vice-President Ferri withdrew his second to the motion.

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On motion by Council Vice-President Ferri, seconded by Councilwoman Renzulli, it was voted to table this Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

Councilwoman Vargas asked that how long we are able to table an item once it is tabled the first time. Council President Paplauskas stated that we usually due three months at the City Council level and if no action is taken the third month, it would fall off the agenda. He also stated that this Ordinance will also be placed on the Council Docket for the next three months.

Councilwoman Renzulli asked if the hire rate for the salary is included in the proposed budget. Director Moretti stated, yes, it is.

Roll call was taken on motion to table this Ordinance and motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following were recorded as voting "aye": Councilwomen Marino, Renzulli, Vargas (appeared at 5:42 p.m.), Germain, Councilmen Donegan, Campopiano, Council Vice-President Ferri and Council President Paplauskas -8.

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 P.M.

/s/ Rosalba Zanni
Acting City Clerk