

*(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 FINANCE COMMITTEE – APRIL 13, 2022**  
**(BUDGET HEARINGS)**

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Wednesday, April 13, 2022 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, Rhode Island.

**CALL MEETING TO ORDER:**

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

Present                    Councilwoman Jessica M. Marino (appeared at 6:20 p.m.)  
                                 Councilman John P. Donegan  
                                 Councilman Richard D. Campopiano  
                                 Councilman Matthew R. Reilly  
                                 Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli (appeared at 6:15 p.m.)  
                                 Councilman Vice-President Robert J. Ferri, Chair  
                                 Council President Christopher G. Paplauskas

Also Present:            Councilwoman Aniece Germain  
                                 Councilwoman Lammis J. Vargas  
                                 Christopher Rawson, Assistant City Solicitor  
                                 Michael Igoe, City Controller  
                                 David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst  
                                 Rosalba Zanni, Acting City Clerk

**FIRE DEPARTMENT & FIRE ALARM**

**Chief James Warren** appeared to speak and stated that the Fire Department has 196 firefighters, 13 civilians. They do fire suppression, EMS, they have two marine boats that are in full-time all year long, they have the regional hazmat team for this part of the State, we have Fire Prevention, which investigates fires, we also have a program where we install smoke detectors in homes for free, we have Fire Alarm dispatchers which takes all calls from 911, we also have metro control dispatching for all the metro area and the Narragansett Bay Task Force so we send boats out all throughout the State. We also have a line crew which handles 25 traffic lights and all the solar powdered speed reduction flashing signs. This budget is pretty much the same from the year before. There is not much change in it and everything is pretty much level-funded other than in the Fire Alarm Division where we did ask for more money for traffic signals.

**Council President Paplauskas** asked what kind of equipment the Fire Department is buying this year and what work is planned for the fire trucks and rescue and are we paying for that out of the Capital Budget or we going to use that out of the Operating Expenses. Chief Warren stated that we buy a rescue a year, usually. This year, we are doing a little differently. We are buying five for the price of one so we are taking a rescue, we are taking the box off the rescue and putting a new cabin chassis so basically we are getting two rescues which one was just delivered. It should be in service Friday in Garden City. They took the other truck down to Houston, Texas and they are doing the same thing and that should be back by June 30<sup>th</sup>. We have another \$300,000 for anew rescue for next year and that will be coming out of the Operating Budget.

**Council President Paplauskas** stated that, obviously, we are looking at a really tough budget and he asked if that rescue is a necessity to buy. Chief Warren stated, yes, we go through rescues. They get used constantly and they are very busy and they do get beat up.

**Councilman Donegan** asked for reason why Overtime is running so high this year. Chief Warren stated that they are down a lot of people for a lot of reasons, such as IOD, injuries, sickness, and a lot of FMLA has been a problem.

**Councilman Donegan** indicated to the Fire Alarm Budget and questioned the increase for Traffic Signal Repairs from \$25,000 to \$85,000. Chief Warren stated that they have had to replace a traffic light at Wellington and Park which did not meet federal guidelines. We are estimating \$40,000 to do that.

**Councilwoman Germain** asked for explanation of line item #53114 Homeland Security Expense. Chief Warren stated that this is for generators we signed contracts for all six Fire Stations and we have done school work using the generator account for the schools because we use them for emergency shelters.

**Councilman Donegan** questioned the reduction in Revenue – Federal and State Grants. Chief Warren stated that last year we anticipated in getting the SAFFER Grant, but we did not get the Grant last year. Council President Paplauskas asked Chief Warren when he would know if we get the Grant this year. Chief Warren stated, late June early July.

**Council President Paplauskas** questioned increase in line item #51106 Longevity. Mr. Igoe stated that it is contractual and also based on the compliment of the Fire Department.

**Council President Paplauskas** asked which Fire Station is the busiest. Chief Warren stated Station 3.

**Council President Paplauskas** questioned the increase in Rental of Hydrants. Chief Warren stated that this is the rate Providence Water charges.

**Chair** asked Chief when he anticipates being close to near or at full staff. Chief Warren stated that they were when they hired the last group of 15 and they got on the trucks in January. We had probably the full staff then very close to full staff. They had a couple of retirements, they had a couple more coming up. They believe they are going to have probably six or seven more in July or August and that is going to affect them.

**Councilwoman Vargas** questioned if Part-Time Help decreased or zeroed out. Chief Warren stated that someone retired and they decided not to fill that position.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

### **CANVASSING**

**Nicholas Lima**, Registrar, appeared to speak and discussed what this department is responsible for.

**Council President Paplauskas** asked Mr. Lima if he plans on doing early voting this year in City Hall. Mr. Lima stated that this is not finalized yet. It worked well in City Hall in 2020 because the schools were on distance learning so there was parking and spaces to do it here in City Hall, but the space we have in the foyer on the first floor is not adequate for what we would like to do. The plan is, which would still have to be approved, would be to use the Pastore Youth Center, which would involve at least one of our staff being there for most of the day. We would have to speak to Parks and Recreation to see if they can work with us on that. As far as extra costs for that, in terms of early voting, we have a few thousand dollars that is included in the \$46,000 to help us out with any supplies we need directly for that.

**Mr. Dimaio** asked Mr. Lima if he has received any Grants lately and are there any Grants that he may be able to apply for during the Election in November. Mr. Lima stated that they actually just applied for and received the Grants in the Herald this week \$50,000 for Election Cybersecurity. They will go directly to the IT Department not just for Elections upgrades but upgrades for our entire City infrastructure and training for all City personnel in IT and the reason we can justify that it is Federal Elections money through HAVA, the Help of America Vote Act that was allocated by Congress to the Secretary of State's Office to use at the Secretary's discretion and the Secretary set up a program where cities and towns could identify needs in terms of cybersecurity preparedness that effect Elections Offices directly or indirectly.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

### **POLE DEPARTMENT; ANIMAL CONTROL; HARBOR MASTER**

**Colonel Winquist** appeared to speak and stated that right now the Department is down six Officers, four of those are contractually left open by agreement between the Union and the Administration and Mayor's Administration, four or five expected retirements in the next few months. We do have a hiring list in place right now. We have begun the process of background checks and things of that nature to replace the one position in anticipation of the other positions that are coming up. We recently were re-accredited both State and National Accreditation and received letter last week that we are accredited for another four-year period. That is a point of pride for the Department. We are one of nine Police Departments in the State of Rhode Island that have achieved National Accreditation. That is our fourth accreditation award since they sought accreditation before he became Chief. This Budget is more or less level-funded. There is a slight increase in some areas such as salaries. That has always been as a result of contractual raises that were bargained and agreed upon a few years ago. There is an increase in Crossing Guards although they fall under the Police Department Budget, we do not negotiate that contract. Rent on the building also went up to \$1.4 million.

**Councilman Donegan** stated that Overtime is running at 91%. He asked if there is anything that can be done to reduce that. Colonel Winqvist stated that we watch that pretty closely and see that over the years it increased slightly, but it has not increased incremental with the raises that are built in so in reality, the Overtime Budget, he would say is less than where it should be. We are also down, by agreed upon contractually, six Officers.

**Councilman Reilly** stated that looking at the Municipal Court Budget Revenues which pertains to traffic tickets, prior to the pandemic in 2019 the Revenue was \$687,409, then it dropped down during the pandemic to just under \$500,000, but this year, it is only being budgeted for only \$475,000, which would be in essence less than what the actual was during the pandemic. He questioned if there were different policies in 2019 or is there a way that we can get back to where we were pre-pandemic. Colonel Winqvist stated that he thinks that they will. It has taken the Officers a while to shift gears, if you will, and get out of the pandemic mode where they weren't stopping anybody. He does feel that we will get back to where we need to be. He is starting to see an increase and he does track that on a regular basis.

**Council President Paplauskas** stated that he sees that the Explorer Program is still being budgeted. He asked if we still have the Explorer Program. Colonel Winqvist stated, yes, we are fully back up and running. He thinks that it will be expanded further. He just added two more Officers to be Explorer Advisors and to make it a little more diversified, will have a female and a minority Officer that will be joining the Explorer Program. It is fully back and running and meeting. Council President Paplauskas stated that this program is and has been for a while, funded at \$5,000. He asked Colonel Winqvist if he feels that \$5,000 is enough to still run that program. Colonel Winqvist stated that he believes it will be. The biggest cost of that program really is the Uniforms. They have gotten money donations that help that program continue. He does think that that is sufficient.

**Chair** stated that Animal Control and Harbor Master will be taken together since they are pretty much level-funded.

**Colonel Winqvist** appeared to speak.

**Councilwoman Vargas** stated that as to the Harbor Master are there any potential increases? Colonel Winqvist stated that the underwater recovery team shares the vessel with the Harbor Master so over the years we have been good about updating the GPS and different mechanics of the boat so we are in pretty good shape. It is an old boat, but we recognize the hard financial times and we are always looking for Grants.

**Colonel Winqvist** stated that as far as Animal Control, we posted last week for a new Animal Control Shelter Manager and we are down one Animal Control Officer so we do have to fill those positions soon because it is a pretty busy place.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

## MUNICIPAL COURT

**Chief Judge Mathew Smith** appeared to speak and stated that also present is Elizabeth Bettis, Clerk of the Court. He stated that they have actually had a fairly good year given that the number of tickets being issued is down, but we hope to gradually increase this as we get out of COVID. There has been an increase in parking tickets, been doing well in collecting from businesses on false alarms and we also continue to do very well with housing and absentee landlords and bank-owned properties in the City. Personnel wise, they are asking the council to accept them doing away with two part-time positions. They are asking the Council to approve a single full-time position listed under Administrative/Court Interpreter. We presently have one part-time Interpreter and without any hesitation, Ms. Nuns is invaluable to both the Court and the Police Department. It saves them an average just for Court hearings, anywhere between \$300 pre clip for their services. She handles Spanish speaking constituents at the front desk and any number of phone calls from Spanish speaking constituents. They are also proposing a new technology system which would allow automatic inputting of data one-time for tickets written. It would alleviate the necessity right now of hand-written ticket system we have which requires a minimum three sometime four different personnel in inputting the same information. We had available to us, although that opportunity passed, to run this Pilot Program for free for a year as a demonstration pilot like Cranston the first City to employ that technology. It is still a relative bargain at \$12,000 to implement as opposed to \$28,000 to \$30,000 for paper tickets we recently had to purchase to continue with the same old system.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

**Councilman Reilly** addressed the technology program and asked why we did not take advantage of the free trial. Judge Smith stated that they were told that there were technical impediments to, lack of better term, adopting the new system. It turned out not to be the fact. We are hopeful going forward that we are going to be able to get buy-in from our Police partners.

**Judge Smith** indicated that technically, Court Administrator Bettis is not the Clerk of the Court. That is actually a Council appointment. For consistency sake, he would like to have her appointed by the Council at some point either now or with the new incoming Council in January, as the Clerk of the Court with no extra cost. She's basically doing the duties now, but we do not have an official Court Clerk. That hinders us in response to the ARPA requests, they do not have a seal, they do not have a Clerk. They have actually had some of their ARPA requests rejected by the Secretary of State because technically she is not a Clerk of the Court, she is the Court Administrator. He thinks this is a relatively easy fix. He asked that the Council consider that and consider appointing her the Clerk of the Court with no additional money for her to perform that, but it is necessary.

**Councilwoman Germain** indicated to line item #52004 "Departmental Expenses" and questioned the tremendous increase of \$25,000 budgeted for this year. Judge Smith stated that a big part of the increase he has already discussed. They thought they were going to have buy-in from the partners in the Police Department on the new ticket system so they had to purchase, a one-time purchase, of different tickets.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** stated that the Council increased the number of Judges, which it slightly increases the money that is going out. She asked Judge Smith if he feels as though he is getting a good return on that investment or that we really do not need the extra Judges and that money could be used elsewhere. Judge Smith stated that he thinks that all the appointments are outstanding people and they all bring different legal backgrounds and legal experience to the Court, but in all honesty, do we need nine Judges, no. Councilwoman Renzulli asked Judge Smith how many he would think he would need. Judge Smith stated four or five would be sufficient and have one Auxiliary as a reserve. Councilwoman Renzulli stated that if the number of Judges were to be reduced to five, it would save approximately \$20,000. She asked if that is correct. Judge Smith stated that that would be correct. His suggestion would be to have a Chief Judge, Senior Associate Judge and three Associate Judges and maybe one Auxiliary Judge as a reserve.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Rosalba Zanni  
Acting City Clerk