

(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 18, 2022
(BUDGET HEARINGS)

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Monday, April 18, 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 6:25 pm)
 Councilman Richard D. Campopiano
 Councilman John P. Donegan
 Councilman Matthew R. Reilly
 Councilman Vice-President Robert J. Ferri, Chair
 Council President Christopher G. Paplauskas

Absent: Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli

Also Present: Councilwoman Aniece Germain
 Councilwoman Lammis J. Vargas
 Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff
 Christopher Millea, City Solicitor
 Daniel Parrillo, Director of Personnel
 Michael Igoe, City Controller
 David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst
 Rosalba Zanni, Acting City Clerk

Public Speakers:

Steve Frias, 107 Garden Hills Dr., appeared to speak and stated that e would like to bring to the attention of the Council an issue. He is a member of the Planning Commission and on the list of Capital projects that are before the Council, there is a \$1.5 million Budlong Pool modernization project. This project was never submitted to the Planning Commission for its review. This is a significant problem because Section 6.12 of the Charter states that the Mayor has to provide the Planning Commission a list of the Capital Budget projects that he submits to the Council, which it states “no project shall be included in said project o program which has not been favorably considered by the Planning Commission”, so that project cannot be considered by this Council because it was never reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission. Section 6.18 of the Charter states “in part every payment made in violation of the provision of the Charter shall be deemed illegal and every officer who completely authorizes or makes such payment or take part therein and every person who shall knowingly receive

such payment or any part thereof, shall be jointly and inseparably liable to the City for full payments so paid or received". He encouraged the City Council not to approve this project. He is not talking about the merits of the project, but he wanted to make the City Council aware, as a member of the Planning Commission, that this particular project has not been approved by the Planning Commission and you should not approve it because you would be in violation of the City Charter.

Arthur Jordan, 35 Lincoln Park Ave., Business Manager for Laborers Local 1322 in the City of Cranston, appeared to speak and stated that he represents employees of the Public Works Department and also Parks and Recreation. He referred to page 40 of the budget and stated that there is a position called Labor Equipment Operator and that position is an employee who operates heavy equipment for the City of Cranston. If you look at the Labor Equipment Operator position, you will see there are six. There is probably no City that has one Operator for every piece of equipment, but we should do a little better than half and when you look at this we really only have five because you will see a zero next to one of them. It is not budgeted. He believes it should be funded and as a taxpayer and a labor leader, these positions provide the most essential services to the City on a day to day operation. He understands that this is a difficult budget in difficult times, but he asked that the City Council look through this budget and see if a position that provides first line City services that this City is proud of. This is an essential position and hopes the Council finds a way somehow to fund this essential position.

PUBLIC, WORKS DEPARTMENT
HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE, BUILDING MAINTENANCE, ENGINEERING, FLEET
MAINTENANCE, BUREAU OF TRAFFIC SAFETY, REFUSE

Council President Paplauskas asked if there is anything that the City is buying this year that is a unique or out of the ordinary that is in this budget. Mr. Igoe stated that the Capital Budget is on page 27, which outlines what we are getting. We will be buying a four-wheel, a six-wheel dump truck and a crew cab pickup, a street sweeper road paving for \$4.5 million, which is the biggest.

CARE OF TREES

Chair stated that he feels the budget for this line item should be increased based on what he sees. He asked if we spend the entire budget every year. Mr. Igoe stated, yes, we do. if there was a snowstorm or windstorm, we have to go out and clean up the mess after a storm. This is an obligation to the City just like snow removal.

Chair asked if the entire \$215,000 is going to a private contractor. Mr Igoe, stated, yes.

Chair asked if a tree falls, do we send out our own people to clean it up or would the contractor go? Director Moretti stated that it depends on the tree and where it falls and how large the tree is and if it is kind of over our safe skills level, then we will go to the outside contractor.. Sometimes National Grid will pick up the tab. It depends on where the location is.

Councilman Donegan indicated that anyone can get a free tree from the RI Tree Council Planting Program here in Cranston.

SEWER ENTERPRISE FUND

No discussion was held.

PLANNING AND CAPITAL BUDGET

Jason Pezzullo, City Planner, appeared to speak and stated that this proposed budget is pretty much the same from last year.

Discussion took place on the expense for the Comprehensive Plan. Councilwoman Renzulli asked if the City has looked at using ARPA funds for this. Maybe this is something for the City Council Auditor or Mr. Igoe to look into. Director Pezzullo stated that the Grants are not easy money to go find. We have not been searching for those because just the sheer amount of Administration for those type of Grants is unattainable. We have the Grant from Commerce Corporation, which is the \$125,000 and that is something he thinks we can work with,

Council President Paplauskas indicated to the 2022-2023 Capital Budget as submitted on page 28 and asked if everything in this column was voted on by the Planning Commission. He asked because of the statement made earlier about the pool. Mr. Igoe stated that we have submissions from every department and then the Mayor puts his final stamp on it. The Pool Revitalization Program was the Mayor's project that he wanted added to the Capital Budget and we have done this several years in the past. Probably, technically, Mr. Frias is correct, but just like many many other instances in the Charter, the items that are in the final Capital Budget are what the Mayor proposes to you and, again, the Council has the opportunity to change that as well with amendments on amendment night. So, it is not just what the Planning Commission puts in, it is what the Planning Commission puts into the Mayor, what the Mayor submits to you and what you finally approve.

Council President Paplauskas asked legal opinion regarding the \$1.5 million for the Budlong Pool, and answer could be provided either by email or at the full Council meeting next week. He wants to make sure that that is not in violation of Charter Section 6.12 and he would also like legal to look into Section 6.18 because if we are wrong in Section 6.12, he does not want anyone to be on the hood for the \$1.5 million.

Mr. Dimaio asked Director Pezzullo if the Grant received from Commerce is only reimbursable to the City after the project is complete or is there a separate Grant based on progress. Director Pezzullo stated that as far as he knows right this moment, it is reimbursable. As he did not believe it was a step it would be reimbursed to the City once we are complete with the project. Mr. Dimaio stated that that is something we might want to look into to see if it is reimbursable when it is complete or reimbursable when you expend it least \$125,000 because that also would increase with the cashflow of the project over three years for budgetary purposes. Director Pezzullo stated that as far as he understands it, it is reimbursable at the end of the project to their satisfaction, but he will check that.

Councilman Reilly stated to Director Pezzullo, that currently, in the Department's funds, you have a Commerce Budget for \$125,000 that can be used towards the Comprehensive Plan, is that correct? Director Pezzullo stated, yes, we were granted the \$125,000 reimbursable at the end of the project.

Councilwoman Vargas asked if that Grant has an expiration date. Director Pezzullo stated he does not believe it does. Councilwoman Vargas stated to Director Pezzullo that his opinion is that we should not hire a consultant yet until we are first fully staffed and once we are fully staffed, then we should pursue having a consultant come in to do the Comprehensive Plan for us. She asked if that is correct. Director Pezzullo stated that there are two different issues. His office is not fully staffed and we also need more staff to do long-range planning like the Comprehensive Plan.

PARKS & RECREATION

Raymond Tessaglia, Director of Parks and Recreation, appeared to speak and stated that there is not much of a change from last year's budget. There may be a slight increase of approximately \$150,000 - \$160,000.

Council President Papluskas asked Director Tessaglia for an explanation of the line item in the Capital Budget. Director Tessaglia stated that the Interscholastic League and in working with Michael Traficante, there is a desperate need to get the tennis courts finished up and the Cranston West Track. Those were the ones we wanted to get done this year. One of the projects that is most concerning is the track at Cranston West. He has been told that if we do not seal that, protect that we could lose that. The same goes for the tennis courts. They are the Park View tennis courts and Cranston West tennis courts.

Councilman Donegan indicated to the Overtime line item and stated that it is level-funded again at \$100,000. In the large binder of the budget, it states that it is only used for Revenue generating. For FY 2022, it is running at 111%, but receipts are only running at 51%. He questioned why if Overtime is only for Revenue generating, why is that so high up and the receipts are so low. Director Tessaglia stated that some money does not come in on time. There are some groups that rent on a season and they get a little big at a time.

Councilwoman Marino indicated to the Pool Preventative Maintenance and Pool Supplies line item and asked if during the offseason there were any expenditures relative to the preventative maintenance. Director Tessaglia stated, not to his knowledge, there were not. Councilwoman Marino asked if there is any particular reason why preventative maintenance would not have occurred in the offseason or at all during the year. Director Tessaglia stated that in a real year gearing up for the pool, there would be stuff to be done, but with the pool not opening that was not done. Councilwoman Marino stated that she has been owner of a pool well over twenty years and she knows that there are expenses that come up and it is nothing like the Budlong Pool. Her question is that she read in the paper that the Mayor has different plans for the Budlong Pool and her question relative to the budget, has any expenditures been paid for anyone making any assessments of what is needed for the pool to get up and running and functional since he has made a determination that it is not going to be open. Director Tessaglia stated that as we speak, that is being done. That report will be completed the 21st or 22nd and the cost is approximately \$13,000. Councilwoman Marino asked where in the budget this cost will be coming from. Director Tessaglia stated he is not quite sure. Councilwoman Marino stated that with respect to the budget and the Budlong Pool, she asked if there has been any outreach to see if we could have a public private/partnership in terms of helping to fund that pool. She can envision something like we do where we would get corporate sponsors or private companies to maybe put up advertising along the fence or different locations to help offset the costs while we would still be providing a significant benefit to the community by keeping that open. Director Tessaglia stated that it is something we can look into. It is always something to raise money. He does not know if it is going to help our immediate situation, but long-term, it is a great idea.

Council President Paplauskas questioned if right now the plan is not to open the pool this year or wait to see what the report says. Director Tessaglia stated that we would like to wait for the feasibility report and how it is going to guide us and then it is up to the Administration, himself and anyone else to direct.

Chair questioned why we are spending more money on fertilizer when we actually have less grass to fertilize. Director Tessaglia stated that fertilizer is up the wall as far as prices. Chair asked Director Tessaglia if he feels we need turf at two baseball fields at West and Cranston East. Director Tessaglia stated that he thinks it should be done. The trend is everyone is going turf. There has been a substantial amount of games and practices that are lost through the rain. Most of the revenues was lost because of that.

Council President Paplauskas asked Director Tessaglia, if those fields get turfed, what is the plan to secure them? Director Tessaglia stated that this time of year, those fields are locked.

Councilman Donegan stated that when we think about what we are doing with our Capital Funds, he asked who is going to benefit from them and is it possible to find projects where we are revitalizing parks that already exist where the public can access them freely. Director Tessaglia stated that when putting the Capital budget together, he thought of things that could enhance the City.

Councilwoman Marino stated that she would much rather have her kids roll around and play in good old-fashioned dirt and mud than playing on plastic. Sometimes simplistic is a lot better and it will save a lot of money.

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Rosalba Zanni
Acting City Clerk