

(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 14, 2023 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:10 P.M. by the Chair.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Councilman John P. Donegan
Councilman Richard G. Campopiano
Councilman Robert J. Ferri
Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli
Council Vice-President Lammis J. Vargas, Chair (left meeting at 7:25 p.m.)
Council President Jessica M. Marino

Absent: Councilwoman Aniece Germain, Vice-Chair

Also Present: John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor
Justin Mateus, Chief Engineer
Raymond Tessaglia, Director of Park and Recreation
Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees
Heather Finger, Stenographer

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On motion by Councilman Donegan, seconded by Councilwoman Renzulli, it was voted to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the September 14, 2023 meeting and they stand approved as recorded. Motion passed unanimously.

Chair asked for motion to take docket out of order to hear Public Hearings on Docketed Items first.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilwoman Renzulli, it was voted to take docket out of order and hear Public Hearings on Docketed Items. Motion passed unanimously.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Sonya Poydras, 190 Aqueduct Rd., appeared to speak regarding a claim she filed for her retaining wall and presented a packet. She stated that she feels the City should be partially responsible for repairing the wall. To her, the City is conflicted about who is responsible for this wall because they continue to maintain the wall, but now that it is partially collapsed, she has been told that it is her responsibility. She would like Public Works to help her to clear that up. Not only is it being painted and maintained by the City, it is on the property line. The trees behind the wall are the City trees. She put a request in to have those trees removed because the Engineer stated that roots of those trees are pushing on the wall and causing it to buckle out and within one week those trees were removed. She has emails in the packet she presented that implies that the City agrees that these trees are a public safety issue affecting that wall. She received a demand letter from the City that she is in violation of retaining wall Code and that she needs to fix it. She made that attempt and she is now out \$14,000. She does not have the means to do it. She also stated that Solicitor Millea went out to her house the day after this was on the news asking her not to speak to the media about it and he was going to try to help her. She sent him two emails about the things he said he would help her about and he did not respond to either emails. He also told her he would help her get into a loan program and that did not happen. He told her he knew the Attorney General and he was going to try to help her get the money back that she is out and that did not happen. She is at a loss. She is present this evening to appeal to the Committee to help her with this. She does not think it is fully her responsibility.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilwoman Renzulli, it was voted to accept into the record the packet Ms. Poydras presented to the Committee. Motion passed unanimously.

Aubrey Collins, 136 Sharon St., appeared to speak and stated that she, along with other members of the Edgewood Highlands Elementary School PTO Committee, are present this evening to hear conversation regarding the playgrounds issue and they are available to help in any way.

Ani Maitra, 33 Welfare Ave., appeared to speak regarding street flooding issues and stated that Parkman and Welfare was repaved and an accessibility ramp installed in 2022 and prior to this roadwork, rainwater did not come up to the sidewalk from Parkman St. in the past year or so, she and her partner, Matt Papino, have been in contact with Chief Engineer, Justin Mateus, and Council Vice-President Vargas to discuss how to remediate this very serious problem. On August 25th, Mr. Mateus informed them that Public Works has a plan to address the issue, which is to raise the elevation of the wheelchair ramp a few inches at the intersection of Parkman and Welfare to stop the water from coming onto the sidewalk and Mr. Mateus also informed them that this work will be included in the next round of paving. She and her partner are very appreciative of this response and plan they are hopeful that this mitigation will work. They are yet to receive any kind of concrete information on when this project will be undertaken and completed. Meanwhile, they continue to be extremely concerned and frustrated about the current state of the sidewalk because just this summer they have had their basement flooded five or six times with rainwater from the sidewalk and this flooding occurred even after they installed various systems on their own to try and mitigate the situation. They spent over \$50,000 installing a permeable driveway, a new retaining wall, new french drains, drains all around the perimeter and multiple sump pumps. They have done their part, but they are seeing this volume of water coming down the sidewalk into the driveway still too much for the systems to handle. She stated that she indicated to Mr. Mateus that she and her partner would be available to talk to someone from the City and explain the situation from their end and no one contacted them. She is present this evening to urge Public Works for mitigation and the City do its part.

Chair asked Mr. Mateus to address the issue of street flooding and give possible updates on the location mentioned by Ms. Maitra.

Mr. Mateus stated that in reference to the drainage issue at Welfare and Parkman, like Ms. Maitra stated, the City is going to be taking care of that with the next round of paving, which was scheduled to start this Monday, September 25th. Chair asked if Mr. Mateus could reach out to the constituent at some point between now and then to provide them with any additional information. Mr. Mateus stated that he would be happy to.

Chair asked Legal Counsel for any legal advice in terms of the constituent that appeared before the Committee with her concerns on the 190 Aqueduct Rd. issue. Solicitor stated that he thinks that this would be best addressed in Executive Session since it is potential litigation.

Chair asked Committee Members if they are in agreement to bring this before the next Council meeting for an Executive Session.

Council President Marino stated that this issue was placed on this agenda with the intention to just hear from the Public Works Department as to some information relative to the wall. She asked Solicitor if he still thinks, at this time, it is best to defer this and have this heard in Executive Session. Solicitor stated that he thinks there is a two step process. The first step is essentially a referral to Public Works Department or City Engineer to go out to investigate and observe and do a report and bring it back. Beyond that, any further discussion, it should take place in Executive Session. The purpose of this should just be a referral to undertake an investigation.

Councilman Ferri stated that since the Engineer is present, he asked if there is a timeline on getting out to the site to figure out whether or not the wall is on the property line and whether the City has any responsibility. Mr. Mateus stated that he has been out there a few times and has looked at the survey plan that is in this packet presented by the constituent. This is not a design plan, it is a survey plan of existing conditions showing the wall leaning over the property line, built on private property over the property line onto the basketball court. This is what he has determined so far. He can go out there again, but he has been there a few times already.

Council President Marino asked if the City has paid that wall in the past because she heard reference to that. Solicitor stated that he would prefer that this should be discussed in Executive Session.

Councilman Donegan stated that this issue has been before the City Council in another Committee. He asked if Mr. Mateus can attend the next Claims Committee meeting when this is scheduled to be discussed in Executive Session. Mr. Mateus stated that if he is needed there, he will be there.

The Committee Members were in agreement to bring this item up at the next City Council meeting in Executive Session even though it is still going to be listed on the Claims Committee agenda in Executive Session for next month's meeting.

IV. COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER

Council Vice-President Vargas: (Cont. 8/17/2023)

- *Assessment of all City of Cranston Parks & Recreation - is there an ongoing priority list and who's keeping up with its maintenance.*

Chair asked that this item be removed from the agenda.

Councilwoman Renzulli: (Cont. 8/17/2023)

- *Basketball Hoop at Sivo Park and other Cranston Parks”.*

Discussed later in the meeting.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Addressed at the beginning of the meeting.

VI. NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

Resolution To enter into a Construction & Maintenance Agreement with RIDOT for Safety Improvements on Atwood Ave. Sponsored by Mayor Hopkins.

Discussed later in the meeting.

8-23-01 *Ordinance in Amendment of Title 10, Chapter 12 of the City of Cranston Code of Ordinances, 2005, Entitled "Vehicles and Traffic" - Dyer Avenue Pedestrian Activated Signal.* Sponsored by Councilman Donegan.

Discussed later in the meeting.

Councilwoman Germain:

- *Discussion on the Sewer infrastructure bond? What is the amount available?*
- *Discussion on Streets Flooding issues: Richard St, Clarence St, Arthur St Greenwood St, Garden St, Magnolia St, and Budlong Manor areas. Do we continue to wait and see or do something? What should we do?*

Chair stated that since Councilwoman Germain is not present, all of her items on the agenda will be continued.

Council Vice-President Vargas:

- *Update on Edgewood Highland Playground*
- *Requesting a comprehensive list of the conditions of all our playgrounds including details of name of playground, location, condition, last time items (toys/mulch/rubber/fence/courts) were replaced.*

Chair asked that pictures she took over the past few weeks and provided to the Committee be shared on the screen. She stated that these pictures are of playground at Edgewood Highlands, which are in terrible condition and has been deteriorating. She brought this up last year and the year before as well and that facility has been closed for repairs for approximately three weeks. She also addressed the Smith St. and Commercial St. park, which is also in very bad disrepair and unsafe. The City needs to make sure that it does a better job with its parks. There is a recent Grant that was released by the RI Department of Environmental Management. She has reached out to the Council Grant Writer this week and she told her what was needed and she asked her for additional specifics. At this point, she is requesting that the Administration work with the Council Grant Writer to find out how we can seek funding for these playgrounds. She was told that it would cost approximately \$40,000 to remove the rubber mat and possibly add the mulch at to the Edgewood playground. We should not be waiting for a full year to do that. \$40,000 is a lot of money, but she is sure we can find that money there. She would like to know how the \$40,000 was assessed and what is our assessment on all of our parks and how do we actually start prioritizing and figuring out how to bring our playgrounds up to date so that our kids can actually enjoy them. She has a lot of other questions and she wants to make sure that the Administration understands and hears our community. She would like this item continued to the next Council meeting. She also stated that she has requested a meeting with the Mayor tomorrow and she has invited the School Committee Member from Ward 1 as well. She asked Director Tessaglia what we can do to start off in at least start the assessment, the cost analysis and what we can do through any type of funding that we possibly have to start bringing our playgrounds up to what she would say Code, particularly that playground that was recently closed. She also asked Director Tessaglia what his plans are of his potential recommendations and suggestions. Director Tessaglia stated that they are trying to work that out, but it is still an option to have done that playground. As far as Edgewood, he agrees that it is not an acceptable playground. It is his job with the City Council's help to get this done. \$40,000 could be more than that.

Council President Marino stated that this is a frequent complaint from constituents. To the point of funding, it is not going to solve all the problems, but it is something that we definitely need to take advantage of. The State is having applications for Recreational Grants. She has spoken to the Grant Writer about this and she attended an informational meeting herself held by the State on the 13th and the deadline to apply is December 6th. So, we could possibly qualify for more than one park of the \$2 million that is available through the State. What she would like to see is that at that meeting tomorrow, the Administration should have a plan of assessing the priority of improvements to the parks and then work with the Grant Writer with the Director for all the qualifications and information necessary to put in more than one application for Grant funding to help improve our parks. The awards will not be awarded until the Spring of 2024, but that is something that would be an absolute waste if we let that fly by without attempting. On a go-forward basis, there should be a more proactive effort at assessing the conditions of all parks and making improvements rather than waiting until they are too dangerous and then we shut them down.

Councilman Ferri stated that he hopes that going forward, we are not going to build any more parks until we can take care of the parks we already have.

Councilman Donegan stated that we do have \$5.9 million of ARPA funds remaining and this sounds like a really good way to use that money. Director Tessaglia agreed and stated that he was not aware that there were funds still left.

- ***Bike Lane Delineators flexible post in Narragansett Blvd.***

Council Vice-President Vargas stated that there was someone that was almost struck last week on Narragansett Blvd., which she witnessed. She questioned if something can be done to make this safer. Director Tessaglia stated that he can look into this, but he is not sure whose jurisdiction this would be. Mr. Mateus stated that that is a Public Works situation. There are a lot of different ways to separate a bike lane from a travel lane and one being bike delineators. The flexible delineators are personally not his favorite because they are bolted into the asphalt, which creates a way for water to get in there and deteriorate the asphalt pretty quickly. Other options are, the MUTCD has approved green paint as bike lanes and that is an option that he has seen in Providence and abundant in Boston as well. It is an option he can look into, but there are other options as well that he can look at.

- ***RIDOT's Municipal Road & Bridge Program Opportunities***

Chair stated that there are some Grant opportunities. She asked Mr. Mateus to check to see if there are any potential funding for any potential projects that we have. Mr. Mateus stated that we will be applying for that. That will be primarily road paving and bike path delineators might be included in that. Since the last meeting, he had a meeting with D.O.T. Cranston is eligible for a total Grant amount of \$3,453,000, which is 66% paid for by the City, which comes to approximately \$2.3 million. That application is due about a month from today, October 15th on which we will have applied for that whole \$3,453,000.

Council Vice-President Vargas stated that she has to leave the meeting and handed gavel to the Majority Leader and also stated that she will not be present for the Ordinance Committee meeting.

Council Vice-President Vargas left meeting at 7:25 p.m.

On motion by Council President Marino, seconded by Councilman Ferri, it was voted to appoint Councilman Ferri to serve as Chair for the remainder of the meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

Councilwoman Renzulli: (Cont. 8/17/2023)

- ***Basketball Hoop at Sivo Park and other Cranston Parks***

Chair indicated that Director Tessaglia has left the meeting.

Mr. Mateus stated that after speaking with Director Tessaglia on the phone, he has indicated to him that the hoop will be put back up.

Resolution To enter into a Construction & Maintenance Agreement with RIDOT for Safety Improvements on Atwood Ave. Sponsored by Mayor Hopkins.

On motion by Councilwoman Renzulli, seconded by Councilman Ferri, it was voted to recommend approval of this Resolution.

Under Discussion:

Mr. Mateus stated that this Resolution is for a D.O.T. project on Atwood Ave. It will run from Phenix Ave. to the rotary. Right now, the road is a 4-lane road and it will be trimmed down to three lanes, one going each direction and a center left-hand turn lane. Traffic volume there does not require the four-lane road. This should make it safer in particular across Wayland Ave. across Atwood Ave.

Roll call was taken on motion to recommend approval of this Resolution and motion passed unanimously.

8-23-01 Ordinance in Amendment of Title 10, Chapter 12 of the City of Cranston Code of Ordinances, 2005, Entitled "Vehicles and Traffic" - Dyer Avenue Pedestrian Activated Signal. Sponsored by Councilman Donegan.

On motion by Council President Marino, seconded by Councilman Ferri, it was voted to recommend approval of this Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

Councilman Donegan asked if this would require a Traffic Report seeing that this is a Traffic Ordinance. Solicitor stated that he believes a Traffic Study is a requirement. There may also be a fiscal note required. Councilman Donegan requested a fiscal note be provided as well as a Traffic Study and asked for a continuance to next month's meeting.

Motion and second were withdrawn.

On motion by Councilwoman Renzulli, seconded by Councilman Ferri, it was voted to continue this Ordinance to next month's meeting.

Under Discussion:

Councilman Donegan stated that there have been numerous pedestrian related incidents and other vehicular incidents on Dyer Ave. for years. This is the area that is proposed crosswalk for a school, it is directly outside of a large housing development, Riverbend. This will help residents access both sides of Dyer Ave. more safely.

Mr. Mateus stated that he realizes this is being continued, but first step would be to do a warrant analysis, which we would have to hire a Traffic Engineer for that. He questioned if he is to move forward with that or are we waiting until next month? Councilman Donegan stated that we typically have the Traffic Study and per the Code, he believes he has 60 days to provide it and then the Finance Department needs to put together a fiscal note. Mr. Mateus stated that he is not sure a Traffic Engineering Department has the expertise to do a warrant analysis inhouse. The City's Traffic Engineer gives his opinion on the proposed installation. Adding a traffic signal would require a warrant analysis, which basically is a Traffic Study of that area and that intersection. There isn't an expense with that, so that is why he is not sure.

Councilwoman Renzulli asked if there was any Traffic Study done by the developer of that area that would warrant any of this. Councilman Donegan stated that the most recent Traffic Study completed, to his knowledge, was one conducted during the months of this Summer by the Police Department. That does not necessarily speak to this proposal, but it is regarding Dyer Ave.

Council President Marino suggested to Mr. Mateus that we are required to have a Traffic Study for the Ordinance, so she would suggest he check with the Traffic Engineer to see if he can do a Traffic Study and then if it passes, then there is an exorbitant expense with the more intricate study that is required, then you incur that additional expense. Also, as part of this, as relayed by the Solicitor this evening, part of the approval of this Ordinance also requires a fiscal impact study, so if in fact there is additional fee incurred with that additional study, then that would be incorporated in the fiscal impact note from the Finance Department.

Councilwoman Renzulli asked if it would also be prudent to find out from the fiscal note where they are taking the money for this and how much is left in that line.

Roll call was taken on motion to continue this Ordinance and motion passed unanimously.

Council Communication:

- ***190 Aqueduct Rd. Retaining Wall***

Discussed earlier in the meeting.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees