

(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 23, 2024
(BUDGET HEARINGS)

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Tuesday, April 23, 2024 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, Rhode Island.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 P.M. by the Chair.

Present Councilman Robert J. Ferri
 Councilwoman Kristen E. Haroian (appeared at 5:32 p.m.)
 Councilman Richard D. Campopiano
 Councilman Christopher G. Paplauskas
 Councilman Daniel Wall (appeared at 5:32 p.m.)
 Council Vice-President Lammis J. Vargas (appeared at 5:40 p.m.)
 Councilman John P. Donegan, Chair
 Council President Jessica M. Marino

Also Present: Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli
 Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff
 Thomas Zidelis, Finance Director
 Christopher Rawson, Assistant City Solicitor
 Stephen Angell, City Council Legal Counsel
 David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst
 Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees

Chair asked if there were any members of the public who would like to speak. No one appeared to speak.

Chair presented a handout of proposed amendments and stated that these amendments will have no impact on the overall tax burden or tax levy. These are just changes between line items that balance out completely. Total figure of Mayor’s budget will not change. Based on these amendments, money that is left over would go to additional City Maintenance of Effort towards the Schools and that would total \$213,179.78, if all approved this evening.

Chair asked for a five minute recess for the Committee to review the handout he presented.

The meeting recessed at 5:35 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 5:40 p.m.

AMENDMENTS

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1111-42172 Revenue “Department of Inspections – Administrative Penalties” increasing it by \$15,000, amended amount of \$40,000.

Under Discussion:

Councilman Paplauskas asked Director Zidelis if he thinks raising this is attainable. Director Zidelis stated that it was an expense properly classified. Without doing more research, he cannot give a definite answer.

Chair clarified that this is increasing the revenue line item.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 7-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -7. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Paplauskas -1.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1108-51100 Expense “Board of Canvassers – Salary Schedule” increasing it by \$4,400, amended amount of \$241,317.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that this is to adjust the job descriptions brought up by the Director.

Director Moretti stated that this is a case of selective reward. There were a lot of Department Heads that wanted increases and this is certainly squeaky wheel gets the grease in this case, not that these people are not deserving, but we also have hundreds of other City workers that deserve increases also and not being selected based on a squeaky wheel upside people coming independently. Since these are Teamsters positions, he suggested that since we have collective bargaining coming up starting in the next month or two, these increases be incorporated into that because he thinks it weakens the City in dealing on the other side of the table with the Teamsters Union and not squeaky wheel be rewarded.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked the reasons for this. Chair stated that his understanding is that there is a desire to make a change to two job descriptions and job title within the department which would amount to the increase that would be account for in this amendment that is before the Committee at the request of the Director.

Attorney Angell stated that he is assuming that the motion is to amend the funding only to increase not to amend the position description. Chair stated that that is correct.

Nick Lima, City Registrar, appeared to speak and stated that the two staff positions in the office that he is requesting change to have not had any adjustments in the last fifteen years. Board of Canvassers voted in December to authorize him to purse the adjustment to those two positions, which involves a one grade increase and even though they are Teamsters, they are unique because they are employees of the Board of Canvassers per the Charter. They are the only unclassified Teamsters in the entire bargaining unit. Their positions are unique because they are appointed by the Board of Canvassers and approved by the full City Council. the Board requests the one grade increase so that we

can then file, upon adoption of the budget, the job description update, which incorporates all the new duties that they are already doing that have been added to their tasks in the last fifteen years and would also incorporate their actual job title changes from the Data Entry and Maintenance Specialist to Election Operation Coordinator and from Canvassing Adi to Deputy Registrar, which was authorized by the Board.

Director Zidelis stated that of the department or divisions under him, three had requested upgrades and they all are coming up for negotiation and the suggestion that that would be the venue so that everyone could be treated the same way was somewhat his recommendation to the Mayor. He echoed that you should consider that be the venue to review all of these throughout the City and not just select departments.

Councilman Campopiano stated that when the Planning Director appeared before the Committee, he asked about a job description change. Is this the same type of change? Chair stated that he did not recall.

Councilman Paplauskas stated that as a procedural question, the agenda posted and before the Committee this evening does not state Councilwoman Haroian’s name on it. Would this be in violation of Open Meetings with her participating? Attorney Angell stated that there is no meeting violation on the agenda.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1108-51300 Expense “Board of Canvassers – Payroll Tax” increasing it by \$337.00, amended amount of \$18,673. Motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1112-49130 Revenue “Finance Department – Other Revenue” increasing it by \$750.00, amended amount of \$15,750.00. Motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1202-44500 Revenue “Police Department – VIN Verification” increasing it by \$15,000, amended amount of \$515,000.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that this is based on the revelation during the budget hearing of both closures in Providence and increase in revenues coming in over the past several months.

Councilman Paplauskas stated that he will support this, but he is leery that we will be hitting this number.

Director Moretti stated that during the Council meetings it was this body that expressed concern that if Providence opens up, Cranston is going to be in trouble in terms of their budget. The Administration expresses that and thinks we are taking a risk enough. He thinks this is further risking our ability to meet our budget next year and opposes this.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 7-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -7. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Campopiano -1.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1300-44101 Revenue “Department of Public Works – Street Opening Permit Revenues” increasing it by \$15,000, amended amount of \$75,000.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that the background for this is the annualization is running high for this number and it is running at about \$75,000 and the historical average is above that so remaining conservative, he would like to bump this up a little to \$15,000 to meet what it is running at for FY24, but still keeping it under what the five year average is.

Director Moretti stated that this is one and all these, he thinks revenues have been pushed enough throughout the budget collectively and if you want to increase any of these revenue line items, he thinks if you want to cool down some other revenue line items would be the prudent thing to do financially for the City of Cranston versus just keep on raising revenue line item because he thinks it has been all over social media that members of the body have expressed their concerns for revenue being too hot. He thinks this is a great opportunity to reclassify all those revenues and put them all more in line where you believe they should be versus selectively choosing line items to increase and without decreases on the other side to be consistent with what social media has been saying.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 6-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilman Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -6. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilmen Campopiano and Paplauskas -2.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1302-44200 Revenue “Division of Highway Maintenance – Public Works Highway Misc.” increasing it by \$30,000, amended amount of \$180,000.

Under Discussion:

Director Moretti recommended for the financial prudent of the City, you find offsets in other revenue line items rather than this line item.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 7-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -7. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Paplauskas -1.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1303-44300 Revenue “Division of Engineering – Inspection Fee Sub-Divisions” increasing it by \$1,500.00, amended amount of \$6,500.00.

Under Discussion:

Director Moretti asked that same argument he made a moment ago be recorded.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 6-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilman, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -6. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilmen Campopiano and Paplauskas -2.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1400-45000 Revenue “Department of Parks and Recreation – Parks and Recreation Receipts” increasing it by \$25,000, amended amount of \$450,000.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that he had a conversation with Director Tessaglia and simply based on if last year’s numbers stayed the same, there would be a \$15,000 increase and FY24 ran at \$424,000. The Director stated that he anticipates increase in numbers given the Garden City location.

Director Moretti stated that prudence dictates reclassifying. He thinks it is fine if you want to increase that if you want to decrease revenue elsewhere where you think it may be aggressive.

Councilwoman Renzulli asked that the Chair specify what he is talking about when he mentions the Garden City location. Chair stated that due to the new location at Garden City, there is an anticipation of increase of Summer campers, which on top of the already increase of expected \$15,000 based on flat lining numbers. With the additional campers, he felt that that is an honest projection.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1101-52001 Expense “Executive – Printing and Duplicating” decreasing it by \$500.00, amended amount of \$2,000.

Under Discussion:

Councilman Campopiano asked the Chair what he is basing the decrease on. Chair stated that it is based on the annualization for FY24 as well as the FY19 through FY23 and based on the way FY24 is running. FY19 through Fy23, the five year average was \$2,047.27

Director Moretti stated that the Administration is proposing a flat budget of \$2,500 so decrease of the prior year. This would put in a decrease of \$500. He hopes the City Council does the same thing to their budget.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 7-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -7. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Paplauskas -1.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1101-51110 Expense “Executive – Salary Schedule” decreasing it by \$55,833.25, amended amount of \$414,359.75.

Under Discussion:

Director Moretti asked if there is a particular position or is this amendment cutting salaries amongst the department? He asked for further details. Chair stated that that this would eliminate the Confidential Assistant to the Mayor position. Director Moretti stated that the Administration would hope it remain in the budget. The Administration thinks this position could serve the people of the City a lot better and serve the City Council a lot better. We have been going a long time with this position not being filled, but he believes where they could do a better job would be on responsiveness to the City Council, requests we could do a better job and also with Grants. They do a lot of work regarding Grants and they do not want to miss out on those opportunities and he sees this as strengthening that opportunity that he thinks the money that we receive by having this person and distribution of workload in the office would more than pay for itself in gaining Grant opportunities. He definitely sees loss of opportunities that we could be gaining. Also, in his opinion, what we are lacking is more involvement with the State Legislative Affairs and being up to speed with what they are doing and the impacts on the City of Cranston. He thinks it is punitive to the Mayor. The staff is not big at all.

Chair stated that nothing about the amendments he is attempting to make this evening are punitive. They are well thought out, they are sound financial decisions based on the numbers that he has in front of him, but to characterize them as punitive, he would not. It is not how he operates, it is not how he is running this Committee and it is not how he is trying to go through this budget. The position is vacant, it has been vacant and as the Mayor described in his budget, everyone is asked to do more with less. It is a vacant position and he would like to move that money elsewhere.

Councilwoman Haroian asked how long this position has been vacant. Director Moretti stated one and a half years to one year and nine months. Councilwoman Haroian asked who in this office does Grants. Director Moretti stated that he and people in the office pitch in. This person would free up more time for him and the rest of the staff.

Councilman Paplauskas asked if the raises for the staff correlate to the raises that were given to other clerical positions in the City other bargaining units. Director Moretti stated that it was 2½ % across the board for all Administrative staff, affecting approximately 25 people. Bargaining units were different. It is what they bargained for for different time.

Motion and second were withdrawn.

On motion by Councilman Wall, seconded by Councilwoman Haroian, it was voted to amend Group #1101-51110 Expense “Executive – Salary Schedule” decreasing it by \$47,860.25.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that this amendment would leave the pay raises in for the Executive staff, but would remove the Confidential Assistant position.

Council Vice-President Vargas stated that the position has been vacant for at least a year. At this point, she wished that the Administration would have done some sort of restructure. She hates to see positions eliminated if there is potential in a position, that’s for any position in general. The Administration has had the opportunity to fill this position and has not been done. The fact that this position could have been doing Grants or could have been doing other things such as legislative trackers, as Director Moretti stated, is a really missed opportunity on the Administration’s side to not fill that.

Council President Marino stated that she is in support of this amendment. There have been statements made by the Administration that when the position was filled there was more responsiveness, more communication to the Council and more effectiveness to Grant opportunities. Her experience has been that when that position was filled, she has not seen an improvement in those areas.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 6-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilman, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -6. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilmen Campopiano and Paplauskas -2.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1101-51300 Expense “Executive – Payroll Tax” decreasing it by \$3,661.31. Motion passed on a vote of 6-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilman, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -6. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilmen Campopiano and Paplauskas -2.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1101-51304 Expense “Executive – Group Life Insurance” decreasing it by \$192.00. Motion passed on a vote of 6-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilman, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -6. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilmen Campopiano and Paplauskas -2.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1101-51301 Expense “Executive – Pension” decreasing it by \$4,814.74. Motion passed on a vote of 6-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilman, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -6. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilmen Campopiano and Paplauskas -2.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1101-51302 Expense “Executive – Hospitalization” decreasing it by \$24,884.48. Motion passed on a vote of 6-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilman, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -6. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilmen Campopiano and Paplauskas -2.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1105-51203 Expense “City Clerk – Clerical Assistance” increasing it by \$5,000, amended amount of \$40,000. Motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1105-51300 Expense “City Clerk – Payroll Tax” increasing it by \$383.00, amended amount of \$27,800. Motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1109-52015 Expense “Department of Planning – Education Program” increasing it by \$750.00, amended amount of \$3,000. Motion passed on a vote of 7-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -7. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Paplauskas -1.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1112-52900 Expense “Finance Department – Bank Charges” decreasing it by \$2,000, amended amount of \$500.00.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that annualization this year is at \$480.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 7-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -7. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Paplauskas -1.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1201-53113 Expense “Fire Alarm – Traffic Signal Repairs” decreasing it by \$35,000, amended amount of \$50,000.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that the reason for this amendment is the FY24 annualization is at \$10,000 including encumbered expenses, the five year average is \$35,000. This reduces it by \$35,000 to \$50,000 and still leaves a \$17,000 cushion from what the average has been for the last seventeen years.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 7-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -7. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Paplauskas -1.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1202-53209 Expense “Police Department – Rent” decreasing it by \$15,612, amended amount of \$1,397,686. Motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1302-54201 Expense “Division of Highway Maintenance – Snow Removal Equipment Repairs” decreasing it by \$15,000, amended amount of \$60,000.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that the rationale for this would be a change from \$75,000 to \$60,000. The five year historical average is \$52,000. FY24 is annualized at \$49,000. This still leaves a \$8,000 cushion from the historical average and is still \$11,000 higher than it ran annualized for this year.

Director Moretti stated that this year we have been fortunate that we have had good experience in terms of good weather. In terms of dollar amounts, he thinks it is flaw to look at a five year average or anything like that. Inflation and particularly with cost of vehicles, cost of parts has skyrocketed about 40-50%. He does not think this amount is enough.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 6-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilman, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -6. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilmen Campopiano and Paplauskas -2.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1304-54008 Expense “Division of Building Maintenance – City Supplies” decreasing it by \$5,000, amended amount of \$15,000.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that the FY24 annualization is running half of that \$15,000 and it seems like a place that we can move some money.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 7-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -7. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Paplauskas -1.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1304-54401 Expense “Division of Building Maintenance – Electrical Supplies” decreasing it by \$8,000, amended amount of \$42,000.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that this would level fund this line item. The current FY annualization is running at \$32,000 so this still leaves it at \$10,000 more than what it is currently running.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 7-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -7. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Paplauskas -1.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1500-51200 Expense “Public Libraries – Part-Time Help” increasing it by \$50,000, amended amount of \$450,000.

Under Discussion:

Director Moretti stated that his suggestion would be to ask for a salary schedule leading to the \$50,000. The prudent thing to do is to review and make sure those numbers are correct.

Chair stated that the number was a specific number requested by Director Garcia. The Libraries, similar to the School Department, we allocate their total amount, what they do with it is ultimately under their jurisdiction.

Councilwoman Renzulli asked if we know if they get what they need from the State similar to the Schools. Chair stated that he would have to ask the Director for a response on that.

Council President Marino stated that in discussions with Director Garcia, this is needed with respect to particularly the change in the rate and meet their requirements for payroll. The funding they receive from the State currently has decreased from what they received last year and they do not know if they will get an increase. They had additional asks beyond this and as it is, even with their reserve fund and with State Aid, that is still going to be a shortfall including increase in utilities.

Chair stated that Director Garcia is on the call and asked that he speak.

Ed Garcia, Library Director, appeared via Zoom and stated that as to Councilwoman Renzulli’s question regarding State Aid, he thanked the Council for passing a Resolution supporting additional State Aid to the Libraries, but unless that amendment passes at the General Assembly, we will lose \$22,000 in State Aid. The Trustees have matched that number in the revenue that is in this budget from the Reserve Fund, but the funds that they are requesting here, he does not want to say additional funds, but not covered by the loss in State Aid.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1500-51100 Expense “Public Libraries – Salary Schedule” increasing it by \$5,600, amended amount of \$2,083,227. Motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”:
Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wal, it was voted to amend Group #1500-51300 Expense “Public Libraries – Payroll Tax” increasing it by \$2,400, amended amount of \$161,338. Motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1901-52063 Expense “Miscellaneous Boards and Commissions – Diversity Commission” decreasing it by \$3,000, amended amount of \$5,000.

Under Discussion:

Chair stated that the rationale behind this is it is \$8,000. The money has never been spent, anywhere ever and he is trying to move what he can find to the Schools. The Diversity Commission would still have \$5,000 to spend in FY25.

Councilwoman Haroian asked if this Commission is meeting and how long it has been since they last met. Chair stated that without having review of the minutes, he does not think they are meeting regularly.

Councilman Campopiano asked if that number is in line with other Boards and Commissions in the Budget. Chair stated that the Diversity Commission right now has \$8,000, the Historic District Commission has \$2,000, the Cranston Conservation Commission has \$1,000, the Tax Assessment Board of Review has \$9,000, the Cranston Arts Commission has \$7,400 and the Pawtuxet River Authority has \$5,000. Right now they have more money than any other Board except the Tax Assessment Board and the Tax Assessment Board members receive a stipend.

Council Vice-President Vargas stated that she will be voting against this amendment this evening. She knows no money has been used, but as a woman of color, she truly believes that we need to get this going in the City. This was to be an established Commission. The issue of the funds being reduced has come up every year. She is frustrated that it has not been used. The Administration should be proactive in making sure that these funds are used and the Commission actually gets reactivated,

come together, confirm everyone who is on the Commission whether or not they want to stay on or not because there is a lot of work to do with diversity throughout the City. Every year that these funds stay in the books, it gives the Administration additional free cash for fourth quarter transfer to do whatever the Administration would like to do.

Council President Marino stated that there was a Resolution passed before she was on the Council and then when she came on the Council she fully supported the need for Diversity Commission and respect the prior Council people that put together the Resolution. She worked with Council Vice-President Vargas at the time to pass an Ordinance to make sure that the members were representative of the community. She has been saddened to see that they have not used the money and they merely convene. It is the head of Personnel that is Chair by Ordinance of that Commission so it is Executive driven and most of the Committees have \$5,000 and some have a lot less. Given the historic nature that they have not used those funds, she would be in favor of the reduction because it still gives them \$5,000.

Councilman Paplauskas stated that he will be voting against this amendment. He recalls a few years ago the Commission needed twice the amount of money because they wanted to do some training. He does not think the training ever happened because they did not have the money and we were looking for a Grant to offset that. Taking money away is a step backwards.

Councilman Ferri stated that if they meet and spend the \$5,000 and ask for \$10,000 next year, he does not think there is a person in this room that would not give them \$10,000 or even \$15,000. He is sad to see that they have not spent any money. The Schools need money right now, the Library needs the money right now. He will support the reduction, but he encouraged that they meet, spend the \$5,000 and ask for \$10,000 next year.

Chair stated that he fully agrees with Councilman Ferri.

Councilman Campopiano stated that he understands Council Vice-President Vargas's concerns, but Council President Marino and Councilman Ferri stole his thunder. If we make this reduction and they do meet and next year they prove that they need these funds, he will be all for it. Our goal is to get money for the Schools.

Chair asked Attorney Angell, procedurally, if he were to make an amendment to a line item right now, would he be able to make subsequent amendments to that line item this evening if more money were to avail to appropriate to another line item? Attorney Angell stated that it would be more for clarity sake to do it at one time, but you would have to have a motion to reconsider if you were going to change it in the same night. He recommended doing it once for clarity sake.

Chair asked Attorney Angell, on the budget adoption meeting, would we be able to make an amendment to a line item that we amended this evening? Attorney Angell stated that you could. Chair stated, at the budget adoption meeting, hypothetically, would an amendment of less than \$10,000 which would have no impact on the final number of the overall budget, be a substantive amendment? Attorney Angell stated that without more facts, it is difficult for him to say. He thinks it is prudent that obviously it has to be revenue neutral and it has to be expense neutral so you would have to find a source of revenue to support whatever you wanted to do. That is outside of the tax stream of revenue or other revenue that the City receives that has been budgeted for.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 6-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Wall, Donegan and Council President Marino -6. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Paplauskas and Council Vice-President Vargas -2

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to amend Group #1800-59000 Expense “School System – Additional City Appropriation” increasing it by \$198,904.76.
Under Discussion:

Director Moretti stated that he appreciates and believes that the funding, particularly the Schools is very noble and well-intended. He cautioned that collectively with the amendments that are being made, he believes we are jeopardizing the 2025 budget in terms of running a potential deficit.

Chair stated that the amendments made this evening have zero impact on the bottom line of what this budget is. The total dollar amount that was proposed by the Mayor has not changed. This money that was found by working hard looking through the budget with the intention to put as much money as we could towards the Schools, Schools that need it. They asked for approximately \$1.9 million and they are still \$1.7 million short. That is the budget that was given to the Council. We did our best because we support the Schools.

Roll call was taken on above motion and motion passed on a vote of 8-0. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Campopiano, Paplauskas, Wall, Council Vice-President Vargas, Councilman Donegan and Council President Marino -8.

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees