

(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).

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Regular meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Monday, July 1, 2024 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 7:25 P.M. by the Chair.

II. ROLL CALL:

Present: Councilman Robert J. Ferri
Councilwoman Kristen E. Haroian
Councilman Richard D. Campopiano
Councilman Christopher G. Paplauskas
Councilman Daniel Wall
Council Vice-President Lammis J. Vargas, Vice-Chair
Councilman John P. Donegan, Chair
Council President Jessica M. Marino

Also Present: Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli
Anthony Moretti Chief of Staff
John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor
Thomas Zidelis, Director of Finance
David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst
Michael Favicchio, Director of Personnel
Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees
Heather Finger, Stenographer

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Minutes of the June 3, 2024 regular meeting

On motion by Councilman Paplauskas, seconded by Councilman Ferri, it was voted to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the June 3, 2024 meeting and they stand approved as recorded. Motion passed unanimously.

B. Minutes of the June 13, 2024 special meeting

On motion by Councilman Wall, seconded by Councilman Paplauskas, it was voted to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the June 13, 2024 special meeting and they stand approved as recorded. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER

12-23-01 *ORDINANCE In Amendment of Title 3 of the Code of the City of Cranston, 2005, entitled "Revenue and Finance", Chapter 3.110 – Ten (10) Year Tax Stabilization for Property Located at Oaklawn Avenue (Plat 17-3, Lot 670) (Oaklawn Avenue Tax Stabilization). Sponsored by Council President Marino. (Cont. from 1/8/2024, 2/5/2024, 3/4/2024, 4/1/2024 & 5/6/2024)*

Chair stated that sponsor has asked for a two month continuance.

On motion by Council Vice-President Vargas, seconded by Councilwoman Haroian, it was voted to continue this Ordinance to the September Finance Committee meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

12-23-02 *ORDINANCE In Amendment of Title 3 of the Code of the City of Cranston, 2005, entitled "Revenue and Finance", Chapter 3.111 – Ten (10) Year Tax Stabilization for Property Located at 320 Scituate Avenue (Scituate Avenue Tax Stabilization). Sponsored by Council President Marino. (Cont. from 1/8/2024, 2/5/2024, 3/4/2024, 5/6/2024)*

Chair stated that sponsor has asked for a two month continuance.

On motion by Council Vice-President Vargas, seconded by Councilwoman Haroian, it was voted to continue this Ordinance to the September Finance Committee meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

V. CORRESPONDENCE/COMMUNICATIONS

None.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Patrick Sweeney, 25 Belle-Isle Way, appeared to speak in favor of proposed Ordinance 6-24-01 and the ARPA funds proposed for Brayton Park. He also stated that he is present to represent CLCF, which serves girls softball and approximately 300 families a year all across Cranston. They also serve West and East. Their programs are topnotch. For their program itself, they have the Gals, which is their Rec Program and their travel program is the Bombers. They host approximately six tournaments a year, which people travel from Maine to New York to get to Brayton and they serve approximately 120 teams that come in so there is a lot of economic development for Cranston people coming in. They go to TopGolf and Garden City. CLCF are all volunteer organization. Reason he is present regarding this is because in the Fall of 2023, they had buckets and buckets of rain. They had four tournaments in the Fall and they had to cancel two. He knew that because of the rain and the climate, it was not sustainable so he reached out to the architect that did the RIC Sports Complex and he and Steve Morocco met with him at Brayton Park and he had handed over his vision of what he would love to see Brayton Park and one of the big things is that they have three fields there, regulation fields. One of those fields is 80% clay and 20% sand, which means any drop of rain, you can't play on that and then it costs a lot of money to repair so they have to use bags and bags of quick dry and have to realign the fields, the maintenance the cutting, etc., so he looked into turf at Brayton Park and the architect stated that this plan is going to cost \$10,000 and he stated to him that they are all volunteers and he went back to his boss and came back and

stated he would do it for free and he came back with a plan on January 29th. He knows Mayor Hopkins is on board with the vision and subsequent to that he met with Council President Marino and discussed how this would impact the 300 families in Cranston and what it would mean for all tournaments and what it would mean for less maintenance from the City's perspective and less monies from their perspective. This money that would go toward Brayton Park would basically be to turf two fields so any time it rains they would not have to cancel, they would not have to use quick dry, they would not have to get up and five in the morning to get the fields prepped. They have a plan he showed the Mayor and the Council President and the big piece about this is that this would help all the girls in Cranston, it would help all our visitors coming into Cranston and if they have a good experience in our tournament, it means that they would come back so that is revenue into the CLCF Softball Program.

Steven Marocco, 2 Belle-Isle Way, appeared to speak in favor of proposed Ordinance 6-24-01 and stated that this project is really like \$5.6 million and this is like the first phase. Originally, Brayton Park was built for the CLCF Softball Program and like everything else in life, the City evolved and they realized that the School Department needed fields so CLCF went to second fiddle, but since the 1990's, CLCF has pumped in over \$400,000 into Brayton out of their own money for lights, clubhouse and storage facilities. They are truly a partner with the City when it comes to athletic youth sports in this City so they do have a right of first refusal, but he thinks it is very important that as a non-profit they are basically the ones that have been doing the upgrading. He thinks that this is a great way to show the City and the people in the City how you can use ARPA funds and it really could make a difference. As to the CLCF building, on October 12, 2023, they had a groundbreaking and everyone was invited and Councilwoman Renzulli was there, Council President Marino was there and the Mayor was there. CLCF was started in 1953 by Leo Castiglione. They went from two sports to now having fifteen sports. They take care of every child within the City and basically run what he calls the Recreation Program for the City. Any other City or Town, they have a budget of between \$250 to half million dollars to run just their recreational programs. They are a pure non-profit and no one gets paid. In 1974, they built the building on Pontiac Ave., which has meeting rooms upstairs, a small waiting area and a gymnasium. In 2010 when the flood hit and they had six feet of water in the building, they took out an SBA loan to fix it because they had no flood insurance. At that time, he applied in 2012 to the Champlin Foundation and was fortunate to get a grant for \$239,000 to renovate it. In 2016, he again applied to renovate the building more and was denied. Pre-COVID 2019, they were fortunate and again applied and received another grant for \$176,000 to renovate approximately 1,100 sq. ft. of the existing building. One of the other past Presidents stated to him that he thought that what would really make an impact was if they put an addition on the building and he agreed. He applied for Champlin again to get more money and was denied so they started to raise money after August 1. This past December, they had raised approximately \$770,000 and did not ask the City for any money. In December he decided to raise money to take care of the gymnasium too, which is another \$280,000. Right now. they are up to \$1.15 million totally raised with no City money. At the groundbreaking, Mayor Hopkins stated to him that whatever they needed, the City would try to help in any way that it could. He received a call from him approximately a month ago and he said he could not believe how the building was coming along and took a tour of it and asked him what he needed and he stated that they could use some asphalt and he stated to him that he thought he could get the support of the City Council to help. He really thinks that this is something the City Council should vote on this evening. He does not think this should be tabled for whatever reason. This does not have any impact on the pending lawsuit or the Administration lawsuit. He realizes it is Election year and this should not be a political football.

VII. NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

A. Ordinances

6-24-01 *ORDINANCE Allocating \$2,500,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act Funds for the Purpose of Supporting School Projects, Upgrading City of Cranston and CLCF Properties and Providing Finance Assistance to Small Businesses. Sponsored by Mayor Kenneth J. Hopkins.*

Chair recommended motion to continue this Ordinance to the September Finance meeting.

On motion by Councilman Wall, seconded by Council President Marino, it was voted to continue this Ordinance to the September Finance Committee meeting.

Under Discussion:

Director Moretti stated that right now there is a bit over \$2.5 million probably in excess of approximately \$300-500,000 on top of this available from ARPA funds. That number is after all actions by the Council have been encumbered. This does not incorporate any money acted upon previous to this evening. What the Mayor is proposing is to use ARPA funds. As we know, the funds must be committed by the end of this year and spent by the end of 2026 and the Mayor is proposing to the Council that the use of funds, \$1 million be allocated to the Public Schools for their various projects. Mr. Collins is present and he has worked with Director Zidelis and has a list of projects that could help out a lot that are not part of the RIDE Reimbursement Program. There is also \$150,000 proposed for local stormwater projects. This is in addition to anything that is included in the Capital Funds that the Council approved and budgeted going forward. Also, in this would be Small Business Grants and Director Paulino is present and can speak to that. He is proposing to use \$2,000 individual Grants affecting 100 businesses. As to Brayton Park, the \$1.1 million, they could actually use more money if they wanted to complete all three of those fields, but this would be what they can see as for two of those fields to be turfed. As Mr. Morocco mentioned, the CLCF parking lot, the Mayor is proposing assisting them with \$50,000 to help pave that parking lot on the Pontiac Ave. facility. As to authority, the Administration would like to stress that they believe that the Council can take action and that it is not prohibited as a result of the TRO that has been agreed to and that could be handled independent of this \$2.5 million proposal and that one is not contingent upon the other and he would defer to Legal on that.

Chair stated that copies of the School list were disseminated previously and asked for motion to accept this document prepared by Mr. Collins on 5/31/2024 into the record.

On motion by Councilman Paplauskas, seconded by Council President Marino, it was voted to accept the document prepared by Mr. Collins on 5/31/2024 into the record. Motion passed unanimously.

Ed Collins, Cranston School Department Chief of Facilities Management and Capital Projects, appeared to speak and stated that the list provided are the more precedent items that are on a list probably five times in size. It starts off with the fire box replacement, which the Fire Department has been asking them to do this for probably three years. Other things such as HVAC upgrades, some replacement of refrigerant that is no longer legal to use. Some maintenance on some parking lots, furniture and two new alarm systems at East and West. These are more than bare necessities on the list and are the top things on the list.

Director Moretti stated that as to the Brayton Fields, this is not Cranston West Girls Softball, it is City of Cranston Girls Softball.

Franklin Paulino, Director of Economic Development, appeared to speak and stated that the Department of Economic Development is requesting use of \$200,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act to assist small businesses that have been negatively impacted due to COVID-19 Pandemic. Funds

will be used for grant program, which businesses will be able to apply to the Department of Economic Development. Why these funds are necessary is the Cranston Department of Economic Development has helped over the past year over 200 Cranston businesses with grant funding which has allowed businesses to stabilize and continue to add to the City a rich environment. These funds are a one-time deal and will provide immediate economic stabilization and support for small businesses struggling with recovery and getting their company up and running. The Department requests the use of \$200,000 in ARPA funds to be allocated to the Department with the intention of creating a grant program that will assist the City's small businesses.

Chair asked Director Paulino to forward the Council the specifications for the grants.

Director Moretti asked Solicitor to give his opinion if funds can be acted upon at this time.

Solicitor stated that he is aware of the pending Superior Court litigation and he does not see a legal basis for not acting on this this evening because he believes that the Superior Court Action concerns are a completely different issue that is confronting the Committee this evening. He believes the Superior Court Action is very narrow in scope and it is strictly limited to a question of whether or not the Council in appropriating ARPA funds to the Operating Budget would need a request from the Executive Branch prior to allocating those funds. This particular Resolution by the Mayor does not come close to touching that issue. The two issues are completely different. He does not see the Superior Court action constituting a legal impediment to the Committee taking a vote on this this evening.

Chair stated that he had a discussion with Attorney Angell and he recommended continuing this Ordinance to the September Finance meeting.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked how much is left in the ARPA funds. Director Zidelis stated that the amount of money of principal and interest is a little over \$2.6 million and that fund will continue to earn interest. What Director Moretti was trying to project was after the \$2.5 million recommendation before you, it would be over \$100,000 plus additional accrued interest, roughly an additional \$300,000. Council Vice-President Vargas asked if the interest accrued has to be obligated by this year and if this can be confirmed for the next meeting. Director Zidelis stated yes and he will confirm that. Council Vice-President Vargas asked Mr. DiMaio to address this. Mr. DiMaio stated that he will also confirm some of the regulations and changes.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked that for the September meeting, the following information be provided: of the 200 businesses that we provided assistance with as a City, she would like a list of those businesses and what the dollar amount was that was given to them.

Chair asked that for the September meeting, a list be provided of all businesses in the City of Cranston that received a grant through the City of Cranston, name of the business, date of grant and the amount.

Councilman Paplauskas stated that he will be voting against the continuance of this Ordinance because he does not think we have time to wait even if we did pass this out of this body and if it was passed to the full Council, it might give some more time. He is leaning on Legal Counsel, Attorney Verdecchia, that spoke this evening and stated that we could do this.

Councilman Campopiano stated that he is concerned about the time sensitivity of this. If the funds are there and it is legal, he would not be in favor of continuing this.

Chair stated that he supports the continuance to the September meeting. He thinks it is difficult and impossible for the Council to remove this from the larger context of the litigation involving the ARPA funds and if there is only \$2.6 million remaining, then he thinks we need to have a thoughtful conversation and discussion as a Finance Committee on what we are going to do and we are not going to get an answer as to what is left until after that litigation that was filed against the Council by the Mayor until that end of August date.

Motion and second to continue the above Ordinance to the September meeting passed on a vote of 6-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilman Ferri, Councilwoman Haroian, Councilmen Wall, Donegan, Council Vice-President Vargas and Council President Marino -6. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilmen Campopiano and Paplauskas -2.

6-24-02 *ORDINANCE Ratifying the Memorandum of Agreement with IBPO (International Brotherhood of Police Officers), Local Union 301 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2026).*
Sponsored by Mayor Kenneth J. Hopkins

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

Under Discussion:

Director Moretti stated that several months ago the Colonel came to the Administration and explained their recruiting efforts for this last class and he is present this evening to explain in more detail, but he created quite a convincing scenario indicating how difficult it has become over the years, in particular this year, in recruiting sworn Police Officers. Competition has been increasing and there are other departments that have been trying to lure in new recruits with various incentives and we are in a very highly competitive marketplace and the Colonel felt the City needed to do something. The Administration had discussions with the Colonel and his command staff as to what we think would be prudent to attract more people, better qualified people to the department. The Administration and the Colonel are requesting the Council to approve an MOU that the Mayor has with the Union. Relative to the contract, they are in the middle of it. The Union is strongly in support of this MOU. What this MOU does is adjusting the salary scale, shrinking the amount of time it would take a Patrol Officer from entering the Police Department to getting to the top step. The existing contract calls for an entry level salary, a year step increase, another year after that and a year after that to get the salaries in the base level to a little over \$80,000 and it would take three years to graduate to that level. What this does is it accelerates the step increases so where there was after waiting one year now it is waiting six months to get to the next step and then it is waiting another six months to get to that two year step that is existing and then waiting one year to get to the three year step. In total, it is really bringing it down for a three year wait period to two year wait period with accelerations in between those two years that were not there before. He asked the Colonel to speak regarding this.

Colonel Winqvist appeared to speak and stated that as Director Moretti mentioned, the recruitment has been very difficult and the years of getting hundreds of applicants are far over at this point in time. A lot of that has to do with the job market the way it is. There are jobs that pay much more than Police Officers, jobs you can work remotely from your home, no weekends, Holidays and nights and lot of the younger generation are not aspiring to be Police Officers like many of the people were when he first started in 1990. They are much more in tune with the competition. They are looking at not only starting salaries, but also when they can get to the top step. This basically accelerates the process to get to the top step. A lot of the departments have done this. This is a national crisis. This is a way to attract more applicants. When he first came to Cranston they had 400-500 applicants. This last process they had 73 applicants, which is a big decrease and only 18 passed the agility test and written exam. By the time they did their oral interviews they were down to five applicants and one applicant failed the pre-academy agility test so they are down to four applicants and they have five vacancies and they completely extinguished their list. They used to have a hiring list of 60-65 qualified applicants that they did keep in place for up to two years and what is happening now is they are recruiting every six months and that is at a cost of approximately \$2-3,000 per recruitment process. Starting tomorrow they will probably start recruiting again and they are hoping that this passes so when perspective employees look at the comparison between Cranston and Warwick or another department they are going to look and say that rather than wait four years to be at top step they can be at top step in three years.

Councilman Paplauskas stated that he will be supporting this this evening. He is glad this is being addressed.

Council President Marino stated that she sees a fiscal note from Director Zidelis stating that there would be sufficient resources available to fund this.

On motion by Council President Marino, seconded by Councilman Paplauskas, it was voted to accept into the record the fiscal note signed by Director Zidelis. Motion passed unanimously.

Roll call was taken on motion not recommend approval of this Ordinance and motion passed unanimously.

B. Resolutions

None.

C. *Real Estate Tax Abatements*

Chair stated that he received an email from City Assessor, Kenneth Mallette last week indicating that there was an error on the list provided and one of the properties needs to be removed from the list. He asked for a motion to enter that email into the record.

On motion by Council President Marino, seconded by Councilman Paplauskas, it was voted to accept the Tax Assessor's email into the record. Motion passed unanimously.

On motion by Councilman Paplauskas, seconded by Councilman Campopiano, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Abatements except for #46 location 665 Scituate Ave. Tanya Michelle Haynes, as recommended by the City Assessor. Motion passed unanimously.

D. Motor Vehicle Tax Abatements

None

E. Tangible Tax Abatements

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilwoman Haroian, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Abatements as recommended by the City Assessor. Motion passed unanimously.

F. Tax Assessment Board of Review assessed December 31, 2022.
(Informational Only – No Vote will be taken)

None

G. Tax Interest Waiver Approvals

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilwoman Haroian, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Interest Waiver Approvals. Motion passed unanimously.

H. Tax Interest Waiver Denials

None

VIII. COUNCIL MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS

Council President Marino:

- ***Open Discussion- Discussion on the status of the contract for Teamsters Local Union No. 251 affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Municipal Employees Term beginning July 1, 2024.***

Council President Marino asked for status of the contract.

Director Favicchio appeared to speak and stated that they are just at the very beginning stages. The Administration has heard what the Union would like to see. There have been meetings held and basically have set ground rules and discussed what the potential asks are on each side.

On motion by Councilman Paplauskas, seconded by Council President Marino, it was voted to go into Executive Session pursuant to RIGL 42-46-5(a)(2). Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting went into Executive Session at 8:40 P.M.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Upon open call by an affirmative vote of a majority of the members present, the Committee will convene in a closed session pursuant to RIGL 42-46-5(a)(2) for collective bargaining.

Executive or closed session pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-46-5(a)(2) for collective bargaining re:

- *Discussion of the contract for Teamsters Local Union No. 251 affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Municipal Employees Term beginning July 1, 2024, including the Administration's negotiations and contract details.*

RETURN OPEN SESSION

**Upon return to open session, the Committee Chair will report out any motions made in Executive Session, and may call for a motion to seal the minutes of the Executive Session*

On motion by Councilman Paplauskas, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to come out of Executive Session. Motion passed unanimously.

Chair indicated that no votes were taken in Executive Session.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees