

(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).

ORDINANCE COMMITTEE

Regular meeting of the Ordinance Committee was held on Thursday, August 15, 2024 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by the Chair.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli
Councilman John P. Donegan
Councilman Richard D. Campopiano
Councilman Robert J. Ferri
Councilwoman Kristen E. Haroian
Councilman Daniel Wall, Vice-Chair
Council Vice-President Lammiss J. Vargas, Chair
Council President Jessica M. Marino, Ex-Officio

Also Present: Councilman Christopher G. Paplauskas
John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor
Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff
Stephen Angell, City Council Legal Counsel
David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst
Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees
Heather Finger, Stenographer

III. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:

- **Approval of minutes of the June 13, 2024 regular meeting**

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

IV. COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER

05-24-03 *Ordinance In Amendment of Chapter 5.40 of the City of Cranston, 2005, Entitled 'Hawkers and Peddlers – Generally' Section 5.40.140. Sponsored by Council President Marino, Councilmen Wall and Ferri. Cont. from 6/13/2024.*

Council President Marino stated that she has spoken to the Solicitor and there are some changes to be made that the Solicitor would like some additional time to work on this and would like this Ordinance continued to next month's meeting so the amendments can be proposed at that time.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to continue this Ordinance to next month's meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

V. PUBLIC HEARINGS AND PUBLIC COMMENT

Debbie Flitman, 400 Scituate Ave., appeared to speak regarding proposed Ordinance 7-24-03 and stated that this Ordinance is way out of line. This Ordinance is set up to criminalize a very marginalized community, a community of our neighbors, people with families who are unhoused and our homeless population. People referenced in this Ordinance could be your constituents. Homeless people vote and they matter. Experts say in order to stop generating homelessness, we need to provide affordable housing for the very low-income. We need to provide free housing vouchers and have them meet with people that can help them navigate the system. We need to fund and create prevention programs geared at those people who are at a high risk of becoming homeless. Don't criminalize the homeless, work for a solution. An Ordinance such as this is not kind, it is not passionate and it is not humane. It is actually deadly. This is a human rights issue. She asked that the Council listen to their constituents who are present this evening and do not approve this Ordinance.

Tom Wojick, 11 Hall Place, appeared to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-3 and stated that there are effective ways to address the crisis of homelessness. We cannot prevent homelessness by banning it. We have to look at the causes and circumstances with individual groups and agencies that understand the problem, we can find effective and humane solutions. This City must complete a Comprehensive Plan and homelessness must be part of that Plan. Do not pass this Ordinance and he recommended creating a Housing Commission Task Force and study the issue and present options and not an Ordinance to inhumanity. This Ordinance shifts the burden of homelessness to our Police Department and would make it considerably more difficult for homeless people to find alternatives if they have arrests and fines. Cranston can become a model City that demonstrates it cares or it can pass an Ordinance to inhumanity. He asked that the Council care this evening.

Vivian Sutherland, 26 Bainbridge Ave., Providence, appeared to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03 and stated that she is involved in local renter organizing in Rhode Island. In Rhode Island it is perfectly acceptable to give someone only a month until they are homeless. Where is the housing, if we are going to criminalize the unhoused? She urged that Cranston create some type of housing task force to make sure that you can bring in the types of development that you need to actually build low-income affordable housing and the shelter types supports. Home fix the unhoused problems not criminalizing people and have them end up in our prison system. It will just be a bigger taxpayers' issue at the end of the day. She urged the Council to not pass this Ordinance.

Megan Elizabeth Jackson, 193 Tenth St., Providence, appeared to speak as a recent law graduate and a concerned private citizen, to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03. She stated that her biggest concern is the clear effect of the proposed Ordinance and would not eliminate or do anything to address homelessness. Concerns of people about safety and public health would simply push people who are already at their lowest further into the edges of their already marginalized status and further away from the resources they could access in the community that they are a part of. As Rhode Islanders, she feels we should not be kicking people while they are down. Throwing away all of someone's personal belongings and giving them a \$50 fine is not going to make them less homeless or your community any safer. It is going to exasperate the desperation of people. We need to look at solutions long-term not just as a community but as a State as what the ultimate effect of Ordinances like this are.

Pat Ford, 42 Oriental St., Providence, appeared to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03 and stated that he is representing Libertarians Mutual Aid, an all-volunteer organization that among a number of projects runs the Water Project delivering water in bulk to homeless encampments, meal kitchens and sidewalks across much of Northern Rhode Island. This organization currently supports an excess of 24 locations. The State of Rhode Island continues to waste millions unable to complete occupancy on pallet homes in Providence that costs millions. Despite millions of dollars spent, there is simply no place for these people to go. This Ordinance is nothing less than an abomination. It does not reflect the basic values of the Rhode Islanders that he knows.

Rebecca Carroll, 109 Richard St., appeared to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03 and stated that while the Ordinance refers to camping, it is a direct attack on people experiencing homelessness. She gave statistics of the number of homeless. The only solution to homelessness crisis is housing that includes shelter beds and also permanent support of housing and housing first program and policies that prevent homelessness from happening to people in the first place. Rather than expanding shelter capacity or driving affordable housing development or instituting rental protections in the City, the Mayor would rather criminalize the very existence of people experiencing homelessness, but you cannot criminalize and fine people out of being homeless. The only solution to the homelessness crisis is housing. She urged the Council to reject this Ordinance.

Kimberly Dupe, 560 Prospect St., Pawtucket, appeared to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03 and stated that everyone knows we have an affordable housing crisis. Why are we doing this by considering an Ordinance to criminalize people who can't find affordable housing? Passing this Ordinance would make the problem worse.

Megan Smith, 73 Babcock St., Providence, appeared to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03 and stated that even though the Supreme Court has legally allowed this, it does not make it morally right and it does not make it common sense. To fine someone or to throw away their belongings defies both humanity and common sense. There needs to be discussions with the people experiencing this situation to come up with a long-term creative solution. She does street outreach several times a week and anyone is welcomed to join her because when you see it and get to have conversations with people, she thinks the next conversation about this might have a really different tenor to it.

Helene Meara, 71 Applegate Rd., appeared on behalf of the ACLU of Rhode Island and as an Attorney to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03. She stated that the ACLU of Rhode Island is strongly opposed to this Ordinance. This proposal is extraordinarily cruel. Some municipalities across the Country are seeking to take callous advantage of the US Supreme Court's recent decision in the Grant Pass Case to punish the homeless in a myriad of ways, but it is unfortunate to see any municipality in Rhode Island follow suit forcing homeless people to move when they have no place to go and engaging in an attempt to fine them when they have no money. This proposal is a further heartless plan to quickly dispose of the little property that these individuals have rather than retain it for a reasonable period of time for retrieval and it raises serious Constitutional concerns independent of the Grant Pass Ruling like the City's previous ill-fated attempts to ban panhandling. Rhode Island's serious homelessness crisis cannot be solved by punishing the victims of that crisis. The ACLU urges the Committee to reject this misguided proposal and to instead encourage more useful compassionate and systematic solutions when addressing this critical issue.

Steve Ahlquist, Reporter and resident of Providence, appeared to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03 and stated that he has been writing about homelessness for many years. He recommended that everyone on the Council take up Megan on her offer and go visit some encampments because it is a life altering experience. He thinks it is really important to get to know these people before you decide you are going to destroy their lives because that is what this Ordinance intends to do.

Drake Patten, 684 Natick Ave., appeared via Zoom to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03 and stated that she has spoken regarding this issue in the past. She wants everyone to think about how close we might be to a moment when our lives are not secure. That could be a family member that may need something. These are our brothers and sisters. She assumes that this Council, who she respects, has some compassion to understand that our best selves involve solutions not the Mayor's, she thinks, thoughtless, cruel Ordinance. She asked everyone, regardless of Party, to think about what was said this evening and the people who have fallen on bad times and deserve our care, they deserve everything.

Karen Rosenberg, 46 Bow St., appeared to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03 and stated that she finds it disappointing and offensive that this Ordinance was introduced. The Administration could have done a little more research before they proposed this because it does not seem like there was much thought behind it. We elect our leaders to solve problems not to just do simple and lazy things. She personally is not aware very much of anything that has been done in the City to address the problem of affordable housing in the past few years and that is what we expect and should be able to expect from our elected officials figuring out how to solve the problem instead of just sweeping it under the rug. This Ordinance should be withdrawn.

Susan Blake, 173 Grand Ave., appeared to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03 and echoed sentiments of everyone that have spoken this evening and was deeply touched by the stories that she heard. She asked that the Council listen to the little voice inside of them saying this is not right. This is morally reprehensible and asked that this Ordinance not be passed and set up a special commission to work on the homeless situation specifically here in Cranston if we can't deal with it on a higher level.

Jess Salter, 6 Vaughn Lane, appeared to speak as a resident of Cranston and also as someone who works at Amos House to oppose proposed Ordinance 7-24-03. They serve approximately 15,000 individuals every year and among those services are shelter housing to permanent supportive housing. They also run the State's largest family emergency shelter, which right now this evening, there are fifty-seven families sleeping in a shelter. That accounts to 160 children tonight. There are sixty families on a waiting list to get into shelter housing through coordinated entry system. This is a very necessary but very cumbersome process by which people that are unhoused have to call and get on a list and navigate technology in order to be even eligible for a shelter bed. They are currently 2,000 short of shelter beds in the State of Rhode Island in order to keep everyone safe and under a roof. It is no surprise that there are tents all around the State because we simply do not have enough beds. Right now, in the State of Rhode Island, in order to afford the average two bedroom apartment you need two and a half minimum wage jobs. That is obviously not realistic for someone who is supporting their children or living independently by themselves. It is incredibly frustrating that we are putting this amount of effort and this amount of work into addressing this instead of the actual work that needs to be done. In this State and in this City, we need a short-term goal that allows for emergency housing to keep all these individuals and families safe and we need a long-term project for the State that allows us to move forward so that we do not have well over 2,000 people unhoused every single night in the State of Rhode Island. There are so many conversations that could be held right now that are more useful than this Ordinance provides.

VI. NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

7-24-02 **ORDINANCE** *In Amendment of Chapter 10.40 of the City of Cranston, 2005, Entitled ‘Miscellaneous Traffic Regulations’ (Panhandling Ordinance Repeal).* Sponsored by Councilman Donegan.

On motion by Councilman Donegan, seconded by Councilwoman Haroian, it was voted to recommend approval of the above Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

Councilman Donegan stated that this Ordinance would repeal titled panhandling Ordinance that the City Council passed in 2017. This was found that, in fact, it violates First Amendment Rights and after years of lawsuits and costing the City over \$250,000, the Mayor did make the correct decision to enter into an agreement and enforcement was stopped.

Director Moretti stated that the Mayor supports this.

No one appeared to oppose.

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

7-24-03 **ORDINANCE** *In Amendment of Title 17, Chapter 24 to the Code of the City of Cranston, 2005, Entitled “Performance Standards Generally”.* Sponsored by Mayor Hopkins.

On motion by Councilman Donegan, seconded by Councilman Ferri, it was voted to deny the above Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

Attorney Angell indicated that the motion should be to disapprove as opposed to motion to deny and then hold debate.

Motion and second were withdrawn.

On motion by Councilman Donegan, seconded by Councilman Ferri, it was voted to disapprove the above Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

Director Moretti stated that this Ordinance, as submitted, was not taken lightly at all. Cranston is home to many homeless individuals of a certain sector, obviously in Ward 6 at Harrington Hall. The Mayor has a concern for the homeless, particularly homeless families. He has tried working with the State this past year to find suitable locations for homeless families, particularly with Mr. Prior. He noted that the Ordinance in no way criminalizes or would criminalize anyone. In listening to all the speakers, if the Council feels it would like to eliminate the \$50 fine, the Administration would be willing to eliminate that language. The genesis of this has been, since taking Office over the past several years, voluminous complaints the Administration has received from neighbors throughout the City, he believes, from every Ward in the City. These were people who use City of Cranston recreational facilities and outdoor facilities in the City where homeless encampments were popping up and occurring. These people were concerned because there are people with children and walking pets there and felt they can’t live in the City of Cranston the way they want to live. Most of these encampments

are fundamentally unsanitary, unsanitary for the general public, unsanitary for the occupants. It is not a good situation for anyone to live or for anyone to be near. There is debris strewn around these encampments. There are unused syringes, needles, drug paraphernalia, prostitution. There are buckets of feces, urine, used toilet paper strewn in these areas. That is the elements we are trying to address, we are not trying to pick on anyone. The Mayor is concerned for the neighbors and the occupants of these encampments. We want to try to help them, we do not want to discard them. The Ordinance is intended to protect the citizens and the occupants. This issue has been discussed at length with Colonel Winquist and he is present this evening with Captain Dutra and they can better articulate what they are seeing out there both in terms of the residents and the occupants.

Colonel Winquist appeared to speak and stated that he agrees with Director Moretti that this is a problem that is not going to be solved this evening. This Ordinance is not going to solve the issue of homelessness in Cranston. He is looking at this solely from the public safety and health and there are some serious concerns. He has been out to these encampments himself. There are open fires, propane tanks, used needles and syringes, people using drugs, there is prostitution taking place and the Police is not going out looking for encampments. There are a lot more pressing needs that the Cranston Police Department has to handle. This is not something that the Police enjoy doing, but when they receive a lot of complaints from people that live in the immediate area of these encampments, they must respond and they must do something and can't allow this to continue. The Police do not go and arrest people that are in a dire situation. He made it clear that not one single person has been arrested in one of these encampments for not leaving the area. Every time they go out, they have a community outreach team that is comprised of a Police Officer, most of the time it is Captain Dutra, and he is accompanied by a mental health clinician as well as a social service provider. A lot of these encampments are in areas that are difficult to reach by Police or Fire. There have been situations of overdoses and a lot of these encampments, most not all, are people that came out of the ACI or other institutions that are on these State complexes and they have no where to go. There needs to be a solution and the Police Department wants to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. As to fining someone that is homeless, we are never going to collect that fine. We are not going to arrest someone who does not pay the fine. It is a civil infraction only, it is not a criminal statute as he has heard the word used several times. Many of the people in these encampments are sex offenders, they have no where to go and that creates a lot of concern if people are on the bike path or near ballfields and other locations. He asked that he would like to make it clear that there has been some media out there that says that the Police is raiding these encampments and he can state and Captain Dutra is going to explain that that is not the case. Most of the time, someone is there with a body worn camera that can show the interaction that takes place between the Police Department, the mental health clinician and also the social service provider. It is a very very respectful process and no one is running up on encampments and arresting anyone. They are offering the resources, but unfortunately, there is a component that are in these encampments that like to live off the grid because there are no rules. A lot of the shelters that are out there require that you be searched before you enter the shelter. You have to be sober and there are certain things that take place and the people that live in these encampments tell the Police that that is the reason why they do not want to go in the shelter because they want to continue to use drugs. This is a complex issue. He would be in favor, if this Ordinance did pass, that maybe they meet with some type of service providers. It is required that they meet with someone and at least we know that they are listening and they are aware of the services that we can offer them at that time. Right now the only ability the Police have, unfortunately, if someone does not leave public property and they are warned, the other option is arrest. This is actually the ability to try to address the problem, it is a civil infraction and then they would not have to arrest someone and that is something they have done so far and hope they can continue not to have to arrest the people that are out in these areas. He asked Captain Dutra to speak since he is on the front lines and explain what he sees firsthand and how the situations are handled.

Captain Justin Dutra appeared to speak and stated that the other part of his job is dealing with constituent affairs complaints regarding these encampments, conditions around the camps and the public health and safety issues. He has been to these camps around the City dozens of times. He interacts with the people living in these camps. He is the face of the Police when they are out in the camps. They are not running people, they are not running checks on people, they are not going out there to arrest them. He goes out there with his Crisis Intervention Team members, which is a program they run in the Police Department. They have social workers that go out with them and they offer a variety of services. The majority of concerns from constituents are the hypodermic needles, hundreds of needles with blood and sometimes remnants of heroin or fentanyl on these needles, human feces, propane tanks, open fire pits, rats. Conditions are atrocious and deplorable and he does have compassion for the people that are out there and he respects everyone who spoke of what they do and the work they do and respects their points of view and hope they continue with it, but the other side of this issue is that the Police Department is tasked to address quality of life issues from everybody in the City and not just the homeless population but also the taxpayers that have to live in these areas that are adjacent to these homeless camps. Unfortunately, these camps pop up in our more low-income areas of the City due to the access to the bike path, access to public bathrooms and stores and businesses and the bus routes. Unfortunately, people that live in these areas do not have the opportunity to let their children recreate out in the beautiful backyard in Western Cranston away from these issues or in a Barrington or Bristol. Their kids have to utilize the bike path and they have concerns when they are going up and down the bike path and their kids are passing by needles, prostitution, blatant sex acts going on, intoxicated persons, all element of these camps. He feels the Police Department has a responsibility to address the quality of like issues of these taxpayers. Whether the Ordinance passes or not, he does think that something has to be done to address these camps so the Police Department can effectively address and respond to the concerns of these taxpayers and constituents that have to live in these areas near these camps. He showed photos of what these camps look like throughout the City. He has never been involved or witnessed an arrest of anyone of a homeless person trespassing on public property. They go out there and work with the people and if the conditions are as bad as they are, they try to get them to a better place, obviously, it is not always successful. They do their best with compassion by offering them services, he brings food to them personally as part of some of their outreach through their non-profit. He is tasked to address the concerns of the constituents in the City so he needs an answer for those constituents whatever that answer may be.

Colonel Winquist pointed out that some of the encampments Captain Dutra just showed pictures of have been cleaned up two or three times over and Public Works cannot clean those places up because of the biohazard risk that is there so the City is forced to hire a biohazard company to go in and clean up the needles and human feces so there is a cost as well to clean up these sites. As soon as they are cleaned, another one pops up somewhere else. It is a perpetual issue that they are looking for some support to try to address.

Councilwoman Renzulli stated that as this Ordinance is being considered, she would like to know what the legal implications are that we face if we allow this unauthorized camping to continue on public land because of liability. If something happens and someone gets hurt, overdoses and first responders can't get to them in time, can the City get sued? Solicitor stated, yes. From a legal standpoint, what people need to understand and which does not seem to find its way into the discussion, is that the homeless and panhandlers are not the only ones who have Constitutional Rights. Everyone has Constitutional Rights and at some point the City is certainly on notice that there is a situation with these homeless encampments and God forbid one of those propane tanks were to explode or perhaps children were to wander down there and step on a needle, the possibilities are endless, the City is on notice and the City takes zero action, the City could be sued.

Councilwoman Renzulli stated that that is obviously a problem. We have to try and do something. This persistent issue of homelessness in many ways is a consequence of failed leadership and ineffective policies from the State. Despite massive funding allocations, we continue to see growing encampments, rising crime, deteriorating public spaces. Where is that money going? That is not a problem we can solve here as a City Council. She is not saying we can't help in some way. This Council, since she has been on the Council, has been committed to some real solutions. It has approved affordable housing and multiple different developers, we forced them to include 20% affordable housing, 10% affordable housing and 15% affordable housing. None of them have built anything so she personally calls upon the developers to start building and stop waiting for Council full of members who want to give them a tax treaty because that is why people are not building and that is why there is no affordable housing. It is not because we have not approved it and it is not because the Mayor does not want it. It is because people are waiting so that they can make more money.

Councilman Wall stated that he has compassion for the unhoused and as he reads this Ordinance, there is a disconnect between the words in this Ordinance and the compassion that was reflected in the words of Colonel Winkvist and Captain Dutra. They talked about services, they talked about help, they talked about resources offered to help these people, however, no matter how we sugar coat it, he does not think this Ordinance is the right Ordinance the way it is written. That does not mean he does not believe that there should be an Ordinance written. Listening to Solicitor Verdecchia, we are kind of bound to have something in place legally. He asked Solicitor if that is correct. Solicitor stated that what he stated is we are on notice of potentially a dangerous situation that affects not just the homeless, but also the people who live around there and we are on notice and the law is pretty clear that if we are on notice and you do nothing and something bad happens, you have a problem. Councilman Wall stated that he thinks something has to be done. He thinks there has to be an Ordinance addressing this issue, but he does not think this is quite done yet and it should be continued. He would be happy to offer his services to work on something that addresses perhaps a little bit more humane the unhoused.

Council President Marino asked, to the knowledge of the Administration and the Solicitor, are there any other cities and towns in the State of Rhode Island that have implemented any such Ordinance? Solicitor stated that, himself, he has not researched that. He knows that the US Supreme Court decision is very recent and there may be Ordinances in the works that he does not know about. Council President Marino stated that in terms of activities such as fires, shooting up drugs in public, public prostitution, defecation in public, do we not already have laws on the books that make those types of activities criminal that can be addressed on an individual basis? They are criminal offenses. She stated that she is just having difficulty understanding how that puts us in some kind of different jeopardy as we sit here today if we do not pass this Ordinance because we already have laws on the books that gives us mechanisms to address those issues. Solicitor stated that that is true except based on what he is hearing from the Colonel and Captain Dutra, it is not quite that simple. We are talking about a self-contained situation, a group of people, and the Police, to their credit, are trying to handle this not as a criminal enterprise. It is sort of a blend of criminal, civil, social, all kinds of things. From what he is hearing, the Police really do not want to go in with those types of tactics and start making arrests even though, from a legal standpoint, that would be justified. Council President Marino stated that what she is trying to understand is what has changed? Other than the Supreme Court decision, she does not know what has changed for us as a community because this has long existed. Whether or not there has been an increase in it, she does not know that. That has not been said tonight. Everyone on this Council respects and understands the need for public safety and everyone on the Council respects and understands the crisis that this State is in, not just our City in terms of homelessness and we respect everyone that has spoken this evening. Her experience with these camps and with constituents has been

over the years where it is of concern and with compassion, the Police Department has done an outstanding job over the years in addressing these situations. She is at a loss this evening to see how this Ordinance is going to facilitate some type of solution to the situation that we are in.

Director Moretti stated that in order to enforce, there are current laws on the books to enforce violations of prostitution, drug use, defecating, but you have to catch people in the act. Also, if you do catch them in the act, now we are going to criminalize them if they commit a crime. So, we are changing something that is a civil matter and we are going to criminalize the occupants of these facilities.

Councilman Ferri stated that he does not think this Ordinance, as is written, solves anything. Until we can assure the people that are homeless that there are enough beds for them to go to, all we are going to do is sweep them from one spot to another and the problem is just going to continue. We have not done enough in housing and giving shelter to these people. We have not built a single unit of affordable housing in this City in thirteen years and we have not encouraged developers to build them. This Ordinance does not solve the problem, he does not see how it changes anything, he does not see what it is going to do. Let's be part of the solution, this is just part of the problem. He totally empathizes with Colonel Winquist and Captain Dutra, but making a law that makes it illegal and fines people is not the answer.

Council President Marino stated that perhaps we can have further discussion to craft an Ordinance that makes it clear that this is not a criminal action, this is a civil action and incorporate the Crisis Intervention option. We need a much more thoughtful approach. She would be open to working with the Administration and Police Department to maybe form some type of sub-committee, conversations to facilitate solution in the form of an Ordinance if that is what our public safety believes is appropriate to make sure we do this in a more thoughtful manner.

Chair stated that she agrees that this Ordinance is not going to be a solution. As was stated by the Police Department, no one is being fined, but that is not to say we can't give them a fine. She thanked the Police Department for providing these intervention programs and working to find a systemic solution. She thinks the State has been working on the housing concerns that we have all been hearing about and want. She does not think it is going to be an overnight fix, but as a City, we also need to do our own due diligence as well and we have seen developers that have come before us and where we have put, as a Council, the 20% if not more of affordable housing. We had a Housing Board that was dormant and was brought back up. She too has the question of what other municipalities in our State are currently putting forward Ordinances because in so many other communities, they are working together with the unhoused community and finding maybe creative and innovative ways that we can help in providing some sort of mental health funding. Placing a fine would criminalize the people. This Ordinance is not going to address the situation. She would love to work with our departments to see what else we can do because the Police Department does need guidance on how to handle these situations. She will not be supporting this this evening.

Councilwoman Haroian stated that she cannot support an Ordinance with a fine in it, but she wants something. If there is a sub-committee or a task force, she would be honored to serve on it to work with the Community Outreach. We need to bring a lot of different groups together at the table and work together. She hopes this Ordinance will be continued and rewritten in a better version.

Chair stated that in 2022, there was a proposal that came before the Council about the pallets that were to be placed down in Cranston. There were a few that did not want it. We had the opportunity to vote for it. That could have at least provided temporary housing for some of the unhoused community particularly during the Wintertime, as we will be approaching. It was proposed at one time and did not pass.

Councilwoman Renzulli stated that that is incorrect. The Resolution that she wrote was not to have the pallet houses and it was voted against to have them. Chair stated that there was that opportunity to go on the pallet. There was a big conversation and she voted that we should be having those pallets in the City of Cranston.

Councilman Donegan stated that he strongly disagrees with the Ordinance as proposed this evening. We are very fortunate to have both Colonel Winqvist and Captain Dutra at the helm here in Cranston. His disagreement with this, as a matter of policy, is not a commentary on anyone's sort of moral character. There is more we have to do and he does not see how by passing this Ordinance actually addresses the root causes of homelessness. It is issues of economics, mental health, housing, public health. Nothing in this Ordinance is going to address those. He thinks we should continue discussing the matter. He would rather see this continued than voted down. If a sub-committee can start working on this and work with the public safety, Administration, Council leadership and legal, he would rather see that happen so the conversation does not end on how to address what we see in public places. We have to focus on addressing the root causes of this and not the symptoms and we need to do it in a compassionate manner.

Council President Marino stated that if this is going to be continued, she thinks it should be continued for at least three months for us to tackle this with the appropriate stakeholders involved. Other option is if motion to deny carries forward, then it does not preclude us from having another Ordinance because the language will be significantly different.

Chair questioned if the Housing Board that we have is still active. Councilman Donegan stated that several years ago, he worked with Annette Bourne from RI Housing Works to revive the dormant Cranston Housing Commission, and this was to bring people from the Health Equity Zone, RI Housing, the Planning Department, Finance Department, community stakeholders together to work on addressing the issue of housing and housing affordability here in Cranston. We have had great members of the public, experts in the field as members of that Commission and they would also recognize that it has not been as fruitful as they would hope and that is due to many speed bumps in the way both, he thinks, institutionally and culturally politically here within Cranston. There has been a significant turnover in membership that they are trying to fill.

Councilman Campopiano stated that he agreed with Council President Marino that this needs to be looked into further.

Motion and second to deny were withdrawn.

On motion by Councilman Donegan, seconded by Councilman Ferri, it was voted to continue this Ordinance to the November meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees