

(The following is not a verbatim transcript of comments or discussion that occurred during the meeting, but rather a summarization intended for general informational purposes. All motions and votes are the official records).

PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

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

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

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

II. ROLL CALL

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

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

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

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

IV. COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER

Council President Marino:

- *Discussion regarding the Status of the citywide bridge and culvert inspections performed by Pare Corporation, including the report, its findings and plans (Cont. from 6/13/2024).*
- *Flooding events from September to current throughout the City; status of FEMA, State and other assistance; remediation and mitigation efforts (Cont. from 6/13/2024).*

Council President Marino stated that she believes some reports have come in to some specific locations and those would be shared via e-mail. She asked if there was anything else the Administration would like to add. Director Moretti stated that as of last Friday, the 14th of #14 bridge and culvert assessment reports have been received into Public Works in draft form. While Public Works is reviewing that, PAR, the people that are authors of those reports, is in the process of developing a more operative document, which would be the capital plan which will incorporate a summary of deficiencies in the areas that need to be addressed for each of the culverts in terms of priority and estimated dollar amounts and that report is expected to be in at the end of August early September and the final draft, after it's reviewed with Public Works, is expected end of October or very early November. Nothing has changed relative to the priority of identified issues, one being the Kimberly Lane bridge which has been temporarily addressed. As to the Dean St. bridge, at this point, to provide further degradation of the structure is to do a shirring up of that structure using those Lincoln logs which could last decades. Those four reports are in draft form but if any of the Council Members wish to view them, let the Administration know and they will be made available.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Drake Patten, 684 Natick Ave., appeared to speak and stated that she appeared before the Council after the floods she and many people experienced over the Winter to express concerns over what had happened not just in their neighborhood, not only to her farm, but also to the neighbors and she shared a video showing a raging river going through their property. That evening she made it clear that she had reached out to Acting Director Mateus and had had no response and she had hoped that after that appearance she would get a response from him. She did not hear back and she decided to reach out to Constituent Affairs Director, Ms. Capuano, who was very helpful and that finally led to the Deputy Director Paul McAuley reaching out and making a visit to her property, which she appreciates and he assured her that this would be addressed. What is shocking to her and hopes is shocking to the Council Members, given the importance of how we manage our City resources, is that Mr. McAuley and Ms. Capuano went to her property with a wheelbarrow in a City vehicle to move small pile of riprap up the hill and they also put some trash in the back of the City vehicle. That was kind, but the flooding in the neighborhood was because the bridge was not maintained on Natick Ave. and her property was devastated by that flood. They have elderly residents who lost part of their driveway. Acts of God are one thing, but inability to manage maintenance is something else. She did not hear back after the visit so she reached out and Ms. Capuano told her that she reached out to Mr. Rawson and Mr. Mateus and was informed it was not the City's responsibility. She is present this evening to let the Council know that that is the City's decision and she believes it is inappropriate. She believes it is bad management and as the Council, she brings it before them as a concern.

VI. NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

7-24-01 **ORDINANCE *In Amendment of Chapter 12.08.080 of the City of Cranston, 2005, Entitled 'Side, Curb and Driveway Construction' (Sidewalk Cost Share Program). Sponsored by Councilman Donegan and Council Vice-President Vargas.***

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

Under Discussion:

Councilman Donegan stated that this Ordinance would update the reimbursement rates for the sidewalk cost share program. While this will not fix all the issues, it will bring the reimbursement rates up a little bit. The larger change is that it would make it so residents that are deemed low-income, it

would make the program reimbursable 99% of the project. This Ordinance would bring us up to the current date in terms of what the purchasing power would be and reimbursement rates and making sure that the folks in the City that are struggling to get by, we as a City, are going to take care of the sidewalks.

Councilman Campopiano stated that he would like to see the 99% reimbursement rate added for handicap persons. It is a huge financial burden to someone who is handicapped and probably need it most trying to get in and out of their cars. Councilman Donegan stated that he is supportive of adding of adding that language working out what that specific language should look like, but he is supportive of that.

Chair stated that she agrees there is a huge vital need in our City to provide a program or on our end as a City to make sure our sidewalks are taken care of. She has no objections to adding language for handicap and asked legal counsel's input since there are different types of disability and handicap, how would we add that on here if there is someone that is handicapped for one reason or another? She does not want to discriminate and wants to be sensitive about this and if we are going to add that, she would like to do it the right way as well that we are going to be implementing it in a way that is either capturing all. What do we do in a case like this? Councilman Campopiano suggested that if there was language of mobility in a wheelchair or a walker or some type of mobility handicap. Chair asked Solicitor's opinion. Solicitor stated that if you are going to include handicapped as a category, he thinks you might want to have a section which either defines what is meant by that and what evidence needs to be provided, such as a certificate from a medical professional. He asked Attorney Angell to weigh in on this, but he thinks you want to include that. Another possibility might be, and he is not too well-versed in this, he does not know how handicapped may be defined on the federal statute under the US Code. There could be a reference to that as defined by the US Code, but that is something that he feels is going to take a little bit more research. He deferred to Attorney Angell. Attorney Angell stated that that is a great point. It is great if you can piggyback off of a universally accepted definition of handicap and what proof of the disability would be in lieu of that, you are going to have to define it here so that is a very good point.

Council President Marino stated that she is generally in support of this. She thinks it is a point well taken in terms of people who have mobility issues needing access to sidewalks, but to the Solicitor's point, we have to be very specific in her opinion in a position where we would be approving an Ordinance such as that because one type of example that can come up is for example someone may say if we do not spell it out specifically how it is defined as and what the requirements of proof of authentication of that mobility restriction, someone could rebuff that and say well HIPAA, you are not entitled to my medical records, I do not have to show you anything, so we need to make sure we draw it up so that it is very clear and universal for everyone of what the standard is that they need to meet.

Councilman Ferri recommended approving this Ordinance as it is written this evening and it could be always amended to add the handicap so Councilmen Campopiano and Donegan can discuss that with legal and then come up with the right way to add it. Attorney Angell stated that he and Solicitor Verdecchia discussed that very point. This would be a substantive change so if it is passed out of Committee, went to full Council and was amended at full Council, because it is a substantive change, it would have to come back, so their recommendation would be to continue it a month and get definition and add that to the Ordinance and then pass it out of Committee if that is what the Council wants to do. If you amend it on the floor of the Council, it would be substantive change, it will have to come back to Committee.

Councilman Donegan stated that he appreciates Attorney Angell's clarification because that is important to know. What he would like to see happen is if it appeases the Committee, is have the Ordinance, as written, passed through Committee and hopefully pass at the end of the month and then Councilman Campopiano and he and anyone else can work on this with legal counsel refining the language for a handicap amendment to that Code once this is passed. This way it does not hold updating the reimbursement rates as soon as possible for this Fiscal Year.

Attorney Angell stated that as to the definition of disability, you may consult the American with Disabilities Act, which is generally accepted as a universal definition of someone with disability.

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

PETITION of Narragansett Electric & Verizon New England, Inc. for new pole to hang new equipment on Country Meadow Ln (aka Country L.)

Chair stated that the Public Works Department was not able to inspect this location so this request will be continued to next Month's meeting.

No votes were taken.

PETITION of Narragansett Electric & Verizon New England, Inc. for installation of 8 new poles and relocation of one pole on Lilya Way.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to approve this request. Motion passed unanimously.

VII. COUNCIL COMMUNICATION:

Councilman Ferri:

- ***Update on Flooding /Drainage Problem Cranston Street and Wedge Street.***
This issue involves flooding from Oaklawn Ave that goes under the Bike Path through a culvert and then overflows into the property at 2316 Cranston Street and then down Wedge St. Ken Mason had a plan to correct this and it has been 2 years and nothing has been done.

Director Moretti stated that this is in process. In order for installation to be done, the stream has to be dry enough to replace the existing narrower pipe with a larger pipe of a greater width. The contractor has been awarded the task and they have purchased the pipe so they are just waiting for window of opportunity for the groundwater to be dry enough.

Councilman Ferri asked if there is any reason why this has taken two years. Director Moretti stated that he would have to check into that. Councilman Ferri stated that former Public Works Director, Ken Mason, had a plan to correct this two years ago and they had painted lines in the street and were ready to do it and then all of a sudden it just did not happen and then it got forgotten about. Why has this taken two years? Director Moretti stated that he did not confirm two years so he does not have an answer to that. He does not have the timeline from DPW. Councilman Ferri asked Director Moretti what timeframe he can tell his constituents that this is going to be taken care of. Director Moretti stated that weather permitting, sometime this year. It could be next week if weather permits. He guaranteed that this will be done.

Councilman Donegan:

- *Sidewalks around Presidential Place*

Councilman Donegan stated that Presidential Place sits on Lincoln Ave. down near the Providence line. There is an apartment complex there that has diverse group of residents and while at Lincoln Ave. sidewalks exist, on Noble St., which is another street that runs off the parking lot, there are no sidewalks on one side of the street and for many of the residents who do have mobility issues or are elderly, it makes it very difficult and at times unsafe for them to get up towards Cranston St. or anywhere else they need to go. The management of Presidential Place reached out to him and asked if the City could do anything about installing sidewalks on Noble St. to help address that for the residents there.

Director Moretti stated that this could be looked at. He noted that Presidential Place is a for-profit organization so any for-profit organization in the City we would want to treat the same. We could look at that and possibly assess other housing developments, but there are voluminous in the City along with all the businesses.

Councilman Donegan asked if there is a timeline of what he can report back to the management. Director Moretti stated that as it is it for-profit business, if they apply and meet the criteria in terms of the specifications, they could install their own sidewalk. This could be passed on along to them. This is probably hundreds of millions of dollars to assess overall. It is a big issue. If you want to play favorites, then maybe we could look at this one. He is not sure what the right thing is do to, but he would like to treat everyone the same. His recommendation, as Chief of Staff, would be to treat everyone fairly, but to say a specific timeframe, he can't give a specific timeframe. It is a big assessment. There are other priorities. Councilman Donegan stated that he understands. He would think potentially we could also use Community Development Block Grant funding as that area would qualify and that would not impact the City budget. Director Moretti stated that that would be worthwhile looking into. He would be happy to look into that.

- *Food Mediation – Poplar Dr. and Poplar Circle area*

Councilman Wall clarified that this item should be listed under his communication. He provided photos to be shown to the Committee. He stated that this is an issue of a great deal of flooding in this area as he is sure it is throughout the City. This issue was first reported to him in March and it has persisted through this very day and he and the Mayor were out there a week ago. Water goes all the way up to the homeowners' driveway on Poplar Dr. He and the Mayor talked to people and they all stated that the water goes all the way up to the foundation of their homes in front of their house. In the back of Poplar Dr. there is a drainage system behind Poplar Dr. between the Post Office in Garden City and Poplar Dr, and as of yet from March until today, he can't seem to find out who owns it, who it belongs to, who should clear it out. This is all clogged and you can't get in there. If this was draining well, this problem would not be happening. He thinks cleaning that out, the storm drains might help as well. The neighbors and himself have asked repeatedly through emails about it for a meeting with the Mayor. Down Poplar Dr. is Poplar Circle, which there are approximately five homes and when it rains more than an inch, it is like a pond with all debris and trash accumulating there. There is a drain there that has not been cleaned out. If it has, none of the neighbors know about it. The Councilman in the Ward does not know about it because they have not communicated to him. It is unfortunate that Acting Director Mateus is not present because he is the person he would like to talk to about this. Unfortunately, this has to be continued. Any answers to these concerns would be a vast improvement. Those people did not get any answer at all to this day. The closest they got an answer is when he and

the Mayor walked Poplar Dr. again together and looked at this. That was the first time anyone from the City really gave a response to these people and that is not right. He thinks going forward we have to respond to these concerns to the Councilman who represents that area and also to the constituents whose property is being affected. They deserve an answer. Director Moretti stated that prior to Councilman Wall becoming a Council Person, former Public Works Director Bernardo was out with people on Poplar Circle last year. Councilman Wall stated that he is glad to hear that he was out there. It would have been nice after he sent four emails to have him be notified. Director Moretti stated that procedurally, as everyone knows per the Charter, Council Members cannot direct staff and there is a fine line between directing and asking and asking often times is construed as directing. The best way, as he mentioned before, is invite him into the conversation. He can help the department heads prioritize things and help to communicate. Acting Director Mateus would have been present this evening, but he is on vacation and the person responsible for drains and sewers is also on vacation. What is important to say about that area is that the local catch basins in that area were cleaned December 2021 and June 2024. At those times they pulled out minimal sediments, which indicated to the Engineers that the system is flowing. They also used the camera to inspect the local drains in 2005, 2015 and 2022 and did not find any obstructions that appear to be of any concern. The issue that they pointed to in this area is the issue of downstream at the end of a large watershed where there is undersized pipes. To this situation there is no quick and easy or inexpensive solution to address the issues, but they are looking at ways of mitigating it. To do it right you would probably be looking at an investment of thousands and thousands of dollars for Engineering studies.

This item was continued to next month's meeting.

Council Vice-President Vargas: *(No votes will be taken)*

- ***Update on Ribbon Cutting for Smith St. Park and Edgewood Highland Playground***

Chair stated that parents are asking her when the ribbon cutting will be held. Director Moretti stated that he asked Mayor Hopkins his thoughts and he thought it might be appropriate, because the kids have been involved in the selection of the toys, to make it an adult event with the kids as soon as the first opportunity when the kids are back in school to have the ribbon cutting.

Chair stated that she wants to make sure that each and every one of the Council Members are invited and take part in this playground's ribbon cutting. They have all done their due diligence to make sure that this playground moved forward. She has been very heavily involved as well to make sure that that playground be open particularly also Smith St. that could be another one that we could have a ribbon cutting on. The main priority is that it is open for the kids to enjoy for the first day of school. The ribbon cutting can be done later on. She suggested holding a joint press release advising people that these playgrounds are open. Moving forward, she would like to see us continue to see progress on all the other playgrounds in the City that the Council had allocated funding for further TLC or other things that were needed. She asked that Director Moretti keep her updated on the ribbon cutting.

- ***Lights on corner of Park View Blvd. and Park Ave. (timing)***

Chair stated that the cycle lane at this traffic light when you are on Park Ave. heading West, there is a left signal at Park View Middle School and it stays green for only approximately two and a half, close to three seconds to turn left and it is causing huge backup particularly on Mondays when it is trash day and now with school starting back up again. She asked if the Traffic Engineer can look into this. Director Moretti stated that Fire Alarm handles that and he will have this looked into.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

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