

*(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 – MAY 16, 2020**  
**(BUDGET HEARINGS)**

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Saturday, May 16, 2020 via web-ex.

**CALL MEETING TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 A.M. by the Chair.

Present                    Councilmember Paul J. McAuley  
                                 Councilmember John P. Donegan  
                                 Councilmember Edward J. Brady  
                                 Councilmember Christopher G. Paplauskas  
                                 Councilmember Kenneth J. Hopkins, Vice-Chair  
                                 Council Vice-President Michael W. Favicchio, Chair  
                                 Council President Michael J Farina

Also Present:            Councilmember Steven A. Stycos  
                                 Councilmember Lammis J. Vargas  
                                 Daniel Parrillo, Director of Administration  
                                 John Psilopoulos, Deputy Director of Administration  
                                 David Igliazzi, Assistant City Solicitor  
                                 Robert Strom, Finance Director  
                                 David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst  
                                 Rosalba Zanni, Acting City Clerk

**PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

**Director Strom** appeared to speak and stated that right now, looking at actuals, the Library is slightly under budget. Revenues are where they should be.

**Edward Garcia**, Library Director, appeared to speak and stated some of the things they have been doing during the pandemic: they have been offering over 100 virtual programming to the community; they have been helping parents run online distance learning, among others. He also stated that he cannot be any prouder of his staff for all their work during this crisis. Starting Monday, May 18<sup>th</sup>, they will be starting to offer contactless pickup for people in Phase I. Phase II will start at the approval of the State with limited opening and access to the public. There is a small increase in Part-Time line item in this budget. They will be going fine free for all their materials.

**Councilmember McAuley** questioned the \$639,000 from the State and asked how realistic that is. Director Garcia stated that that is the number from the formula until the General Assembly puts the State budget together. He indicated that he, unfortunately, would have to make cuts if the funds do not come through.

**Councilmember Vargas** stated that if that funding does not come through, she asked where the cuts would be made. Director Garcia stated that, traditionally, if any funding was cut, he would need to go back to the Board of Trustees to decide what cuts would need to be made because he cannot make those decisions himself.

**Councilmember Donegan** questioned the increase of \$15,000 in line item #56609. Director Garcia stated that this is a new HVAC and boiler maintenance contract since the prior contract expired.

**Council President Farina** thanked Director Garcia and his staff for the tremendous work they have been doing year round and especially during this crisis.

**Councilmember Brady** echoed the sentiments of Council President Farina.

**Chair** asked Director Garcia if there is a Reserve Account at the end of this Fiscal Year. Director Garcia stated that last year they did not put any Revenues in their Reserve Account. Currently, they have \$68,000 in their Reserve Account. Now that they are starting to reopen, he will have to speak with Director Strom to see how much of their budget they have accessible. Director Strom stated that the Reserve Account does have money in it, he shows a little more than what Director Garcia stated. Going forward, there will be some excess.

**Chair** asked Director Garcia, since he has been using the online programs for kids, if he plans to continue to use some of these tools. Director Garcia stated that he thinks that the virtual programs will be part of their services going forward, especially story time, because they have been so successful.

**Councilmember Hopkins** reiterated the statements made by other Committee Members regarding the quality of the libraries and the great job everyone is doing.

**Councilmember Brady** stated that he would be interested in participating in the virtual reading program.

**Councilmember Hopkins** stated that he also would be interested in participating in the virtual reading program. Director Garcia stated that he will go back to his staff and will be in contact with the City Council regarding doing some virtual story time.

**Councilmember McAuley** stated that if there is a surplus and there was a shortfall with the State funding, he asked if they could use that money to add to their budget? Director Strom stated that there is talk, but it is not official that surpluses in municipalities could be rolled over into the next budget year.

**Councilmember Paplauskas** thanked the Library for all they do.

**Councilmember Stycos** stated that last year, the City Council voted to establish a line item of allocated to Reserve of funding for the Library and that is not in the budget. He asked if this can be corrected. Director Strom stated that he is not aware of any Reserve line item for the Library, but there is a Reserve Fund. This is something that we may be able to set up sometime in the Fourth Quarter. It was not set up in this year's budget, but he will check into this.

**Councilmember Stycos** stated that in regards to the discussion yesterday regarding code violations, he asked Mr. DiMaio to research and report back on the number of code violations and fines other cities and towns similar to Cranston are collecting.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Director Strom** appeared to speak and stated that this budget is level funded and the only increase are contractual for pay raises for Teamsters and other related benefits. This year, they are tracking where they should be and they are on budget.

**Lawrence DiBoni**, Economic Development Director, appeared to speak and stated that a highlight of what this department has done to date was forwarded to the City Council. He stated that this department is working with businesses with various programs and also on compliance and the highlight speaks for itself.

**Councilmember Hopkins** addressed the issue of Rolfe St. and stated that he and Councilmember McAuley have been working on redevelopment of that area. He also stated that he would like to work with Economic Development to try to revitalize the area of Park and Budlong.

**Council President Farina** echoed Councilmember Hopkins's statements and for the hard work this department has been doing for the entire year and especially for the last few months during COVID in meeting with these businesses.

**Councilmember McAuley** questioned the status of the Chamber of Commerce. He asked if we have a Chamber of Commerce. Director DiBoni stated that they are in transition and the question should be addressed to Steve Boyle, former President of the Cranston Chamber of Commerce, who took a position in Providence.

**Councilmember Papluskas** asked Director DiBoni what his Department has been doing in reaching out to restaurants in regards to COVID. Director DiBoni stated that he has reached out to over 150 restaurants over three times by phone and by e-mail last week regarding the Mayor's Executive Order and the Governor's Order in regards to outdoor seating and currently, only twelve have taken advantage of the outdoor seating. He will be in contact with them periodically.

**Councilmember Donegan** stated that a year ago, the Council passed a plastic bag Ordinance. He stated that as the City Council enacts Ordinances that deal with businesses, he asked what this department will do to make them aware of such things as the plastic bag Ordinance. Director DiBoni stated that it would have to be either going business by business or if a packet could be put together and e-mailed. You could also advertise in the Cranston Herald, which this would be a great help.

**Councilmember Donegan** stated that there has been a lot of discussion about tourism before this pandemic and we had Providence Convention Bureau put together a two-year agreement of \$10,000. He asked if that is something that this department, going forward, would be willing to work with Providence Convention Bureau and creating a line item for tourism would be appropriate. Director Parrillo stated that the Mayor is definitely willing to move forward with that. Once the economy is back to where it should be, we will start discussions again.

**Councilmember Stycos** asked if the Administration has done anything to inform businesses about the plastic bag ban. Director Parrillo stated that to date, no. This has not been forgotten, but we will get that done prior to the July 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. Councilmember Stycos asked if we can have Director DiBoni copy the City Council when he e-mails the business who have a Victualling License. Director Parrillo stated, yes. Councilmember Stycos stated that this should be done as soon as possible because if we wait until last minute, we do not want to have businesses left with all these plastic bags. This is why the time limit was extended.

**Councilmember Paplauskas** stated that he did speak to a few businesses in the last few weeks in Ward 5 and they are concerned that they have not used up their plastic bags because of this pandemic. He is concerned about putting more burden on these businesses.

**Councilmember Vargas** stated that she has received calls from businesses in her Ward and they are concerned about all the bags that they have left and they are closed and what do they do with all the bags they have left. She questioned, as a City Council, do we continue with the July date and not enforce it and be a little more lenient? Maybe we could add this to the next Council agenda item to discuss. Besides Mr. DiBoni's e-mail to the businesses, maybe we should place this on the City's website and newsletters.

**Councilmember Vargas** questioned what the \$2,000 for Program Activities is used for. Director DiBoni stated that he uses that in conjunction with the marketing budget. also, he had to have brochures made recently.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

**PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT (HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE; BUILDING MAINTENANCE; ENGINEERING; FLEET MAINTENANCE; BUREAU OF TRAFFIC SAFETY; REFUSE; CARE OF TREES)**

**Director Strom** appeared to speak and stated that Kenneth Mason, Public Works Director, is also present to answer any questions.

**Director Strom** stated that currently this department is running under budget. Snow removal, we had a gain of approximately \$300,000 this year. There are a few things in the Building Maintenance budget that are COVID related. Refuse Removal is a little over budget. Overall, all the Divisions are under budget for this year. Next year, the increases are due to contractual obligations for various Unions. There is an increase in Refuse Removal Fees and Tipping Fees, which are both contractual.

**Councilmember Donegan** thanked Director Mason and his department for all the work they do. He asked for an explanation of the \$100,000 in the Capital Budget for the Burnam Pump Station. Director Mason stated that that project is adding a by-pass.

**Councilmember Brady** thanked Director Mason and stated that he is always very responsive and helpful.

**Councilmember McAuley** echoed Councilmember Brady's remarks. He indicated to the tipping fees increase and asked if there is a formula as far as recycling and how that would help in the tipping fees and can the City Council help in any way. Director Mason stated that up until three years ago, tipping fees were delegated by the General Assembly and somehow they have been able to get around that.

**Councilmember Hopkins** stated that Director Mason does a fantastic job in this budget and is very professional. He questioned where in this budget can we find lighting fixtures of the Rolfe St. area. Director Mason stated that he would think that that would be a Capital Budget item. We could also look into a Grant for the revitalization.

**Councilmember Paplauskas** asked if we will hit the mark in Revenues for Street Opening Permits due to the pandemic. Director Mason stated that the majority are from Providence Water and National Grid. We may end up being a little short on that, but Providence Water has a lot of work on their books that they are going to do.

**Councilmember Stycos** indicated to line item #1300 "Rodent Control" and questioned the increase. Director Mason stated that he believes the rodent problem is weather dependent. Due to the mild winter, we have had a bit of activity this year.

**Councilmember Stycos** questioned \$150,000 for Public Buildings in the Capital Budget and asked what this money would be used for. Director Mason stated that in the last Fiscal Years, one area the money was used for was the Senior Center where the entire building's old florescent lights were replaced with LED lighting; HVAC rooftop units were replaced with new higher efficiency projects at the Senior Center. He also stated that going forward, any projects will have lighting changed to LED.

**Councilmember Stycos** questioned the importance of "Pavement Management Study" in the Capital Budget. Director Mason stated that we try to do pavement management study of every road approximately every five years. Councilmember Stycos asked what would happen if you put that off for a year. Director Mason stated that he could live with that.

**Director Strom** emphasized that every year we increase funding for the Sidewalk Program.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

### **SEWER ENTERPRISE FUND**

**Director Strom** appeared to speak and stated that this budget is likely to exceed as far as Revenue. Expenses are under budget for this year.

**Councilmember Stycos** asked Director Mason when the Veolia contract will expire and would he recommend continuing with a contract or returning to a City run facility. Director Mason stated that he believes the current contract with Veolia expires in 2028 and, under no circumstances, would he recommend going back to a City run operation. It is much more detailed and we should leave it to the experts.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

## **PLANNING AND CAPITAL BUDGET**

**Director Strom** appeared to speak and stated that this year, we are under budget and they are tracking well. Part-time help is a little over and we adjusted it for next year. As far as Revenues, there were no Grants in this coming year's budget so we zeroed it out for next year. We increased a few line items because of the need for part-time help and some overtime as well.

**Jason Pezzullo**, City Planner, was present to answer any questions.

**Councilmember Stycos** asked if this department is adequately staffed now. Director Pezzullo stated that the City hired an Associate Planner and do not have that position now and it was eliminated in this coming budget. As to the fully staffed question, the answer is no, but with the understanding that we are in a crisis right now.

**Councilmember Stycos** asked if there are any major projects that this department is working on at this time. Director Pezzullo stated that there are approximately forty projects at various stages. He also asked that they are still behind in the Comprehensive Plan.

**Chair** stated that there has been discussion of areas the City Council can help to streamline work from the Planning Department or eliminate. He reiterated that to the Planning Director.

**Councilmember McAuley** asked if TopGolf is still on schedule. Director Pezzullo stated, yes. It is moving forward, but because that site is being used as a triage hospital for COVID-19, construction will not start until next year.

**Councilmember McAuley** stated that there has been discussion about COTSCO. He asked if this is one of the projects. Director Pezzullo stated that discussion has started. The department will be organizing some type of application process, but they will be coming before the City Council.

**Councilmembers Brady, Hopkins and McAuley** all thanked Director Pezzullo for all the work he does and his staff does.

No one appeared to speak from the public.

## **CAPITAL BUDGET**

**Councilmember Stycos** asked how essential the bucket truck in the Fire Department is. Director Strom stated that based on his discussion with the Fire Department, that is something they felt it was a necessity, however, he explained to them we may have to hold off until next Fiscal Year. He recommends waiting until next year. He can speak to the Fire Chief and Superintendent to see if it can be held off another year and there is no emergency.

**Councilmember McAuley** questioned the \$100,000 for Open Space. Director Pezzullo stated that it was \$500,000, but reduced to \$100,000. It was just if we have a project, we have the funds.

**Councilmember Hopkins** stated that we need to thank Director Strom, not only for putting the budget together, but also putting these department hearings together and organizing them during these virtual meetings.

**Councilmember McAuley** thanked the Chair for everything he has done and has done a phenomenal job as Finance Chair over the years and appreciates everything he has brought to the table.

Discussion took place on a date for the Budget Adoption. Chair stated that the Amendment meeting is for May 20<sup>th</sup> and he questioned if the Adoption meeting should be held the same evening.

**Councilmember Stycos** stated that the Adoption meeting should not be the same evening as the Amendment meeting.

**Chair** suggested holding the Adoption meeting on May 26<sup>th</sup> after the regular Council meeting and possible Override meeting on May 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Mr. DiMaio** stated that conducting these meetings via video conference, the Council may need time between the Amendment meeting and the Adoption meeting.

**Director Strom** asked that the Council keep in mind that amendments can be made the night of the Adoption as well. The City is scheduled to send out tax bills, he believes, the first or second week of June. He would have to confirm that.

It was agreed to hold the Adoption meeting on May 27<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm and possible Override meeting on June 3<sup>rd</sup> at 6 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 1:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Rosalba Zanni  
Acting City Clerk