

(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, November 1, 2021 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island and via Zoom Webinar.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 7:55 P.M. by the Chair.

Present Councilwoman Jessica M. Marino
 Councilman John P. Donegan
 Councilman Matthew R. Reilly
 Councilman Richard D. Campopiano
 Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli, Vice-Chair
 Council Vice-President Robert J. Ferri, Chair
 Council President Christopher G. Paplauskas

Also Present: Councilwoman Lammis J. Vargas
 Councilwoman Aniece Germain
 Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff
 Robert Strom, Director of Finance
 Daniel Parrillo, Director of Personnel
 John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor
 Stephen Angell, City Council Legal Counsel
 Rosalba Zanni, Acting City Clerk
 Heather Finger, Stenographer

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:

On motion by Councilman Donegan, seconded by Councilman Reilly, it was voted to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting and they stand approved as recorded. Motion passed unanimously.

I. COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER

9-21-06 *Ordinance in amendment of Chapter 3.24 of the Code of the City of Cranston, 2005, entitled "Revenue and Finance – Real Property for Tax Freeze for Elderly". Sponsored by Council President Paplauskas. Co-sponsored by Councilwomen Marino, Renzulli, Vargas, Germain, Councilmen Donegan, Campopiano, Reilly and Council Vice-President Ferri. As amended in Committee 10/4/2021.*

No one appeared to speak in favor or to oppose.

On motion by Councilman Reilly, seconded by Councilwoman Marino, it was voted to recommend approval of this Ordinance. Motion passed unanimously.

- *Update on ARPA money coming in and utilization of it. (Councilwoman Vargas)*

Councilwoman Vargas asked that this be deferred to later in the meeting since there are two other matters on the agenda regarding this.

II. PUBLIC HEARINGS* and/ or NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

No one appeared to speak.

A. NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

10-21-01 *Ordinance in amendment of Title 3.24.080 of the Code of the City of Cranston, 2005, entitled "Revenue and Finance – Income Qualifications". Sponsored by Council President Paplauskas.*

On motion by Councilman Reilly, seconded by Councilwoman Marino, it was voted to recommend approval of this Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

Council President Paplauskas stated that this is the second part of the Ordinance passed earlier this evening. This Ordinance changes the numbers to what was done in Committee last month and indexed HUD index limits for Providence County so the Council does not have to come back every few years and adjust it and he urged passage.

Director Strom gave an update and stated that this requires application to be filed with the Tx Assessor every, year even current participants. This has to be done yearly both by current and new applicants.

No one appeared to oppose.

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

10-21-02 *Ordinance of the City Council the enactment of the City of Cranston Administrative Unit Employment Benefits Book. Sponsored by Mayor Hopkins.*

On motion by Councilman Reilly, seconded by Councilwoman Renzulli, it was voted to recommend approval of this Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

Director Parrillo stated that this consists of approximately twenty-five people, mostly Directors, and their benefits are being increased simultaneously as the Laborers and Teamsters. There are some changes in wording in this document regarding title changes on page 3 regarding Director of Administration, which no longer exists, it is now Chief of Staff, some pay grade changes that this Council approved during the budget season, a few positions that no longer exist in the Admin package, such as the Highway Maintenance Superintendent positions, which is now a Teamster position. The biggest change that is comparable to what the Laborers and Teamsters have is providing the Directors an extra Holiday, Juneteenth and one extra Personal Day. It is also asking for a change to Life Insurance from \$50,000 to \$100,000 to match the Laborers and Teamsters. The cost of that is approximately \$6,400 to the City. As to the retirement or separation from the City, the request is to increase Vacation Time cash out from 45 days to 70 days. Also looking to increase Schooling Allowance from \$750 to \$850, an increase of \$100. Page 15, the entire last sentence regarding NAGE is being deleted.

Councilman Donegan asked what the fiscal impact is of the change in Vacation Time cash out at time of retirement. Director Parrillo stated that, obviously, the people that have been with the City longer will benefit the most. Most start out with 10 the first two years and then goes to 12 year three and four. Most Administrations are four years, eight at the most, so very few people are going to be at that 70 number.

No one appeared to oppose.

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

10-21-04 *Ordinance ratifying the Teamsters Local 251 contract for term July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2024. Sponsored by Mayor Hopkins.*

On motion by Councilman Reilly, seconded by Councilwoman Germain, it was voted to recommend approval of this Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

Director Parrillo gave the following highlights of the contract:

- A big change was we went from an exclusive list to an inclusive list. The old contract had positions that were not part of the contract.
- Updated some language such as employees of the Hamilton Building that are now at Sockanosset.
- Raises – given the same as the Laborers – 2% for six months, 1% for six months and 3% for the next two years.
- One extra Holiday and one extra Personal Day.
- Increase in Life Insurance from \$80,000 to \$100,000.
- Increase in Dental coverage from \$2,000 to \$2,500 per year.
- Increase in Pension Contribution – in year 2 up to 4% and up to 5% in year three, same as the Laborers.

- The City did get some Management Rights.
- The City got a slight increase in the Prescriptions that they pay.
- Change in the 40-day trial if someone gets bumped out of their job down to a 30-day trial.

Director Parrillo stated that he thinks this is a good contract and their membership approved this contract, he believes 75-3 of a membership of 125.

Director Strom addressed the Fiscal Note, which consists of:

- Salary of 2% as of 7/1/2021, 1% increase 1/1/2022, 3% increase 7/1/2022 and 3% increase 7/1/2023 for total of 8.75%. Total salary is \$63,736 over three years.
- There was a step increase for some of the employees of \$500 over fifteen years of service.
- Increase in Delta Dental \$2,000 to \$2,500.
- Increase in Life Insurance from \$80,000 to \$100,000.
- Pension – 401A – 3% this year, 4% year 2 and 5% year 3.
- State Pension is based on what we receive from the State. Right now, it is at 10.7%. He does not know that it is going to be next year, so he used 10.7.
- Increase in Teamsters Pension – from \$1.85 to \$2, which they are now paying, \$2.16 and \$2.33 over three years.
- Payroll Taxes. Over three-year period, it comes out to \$889,687, which is very close within \$15,000 -16,000 to what they received last contract.

Director Strom stated that he thinks this is a fair contract and the City certainly can afford it.

No one appeared to oppose.

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

10-21-05 *Ordinance in amendment of Chapter 3.04 of the Code of the City of Cranston, 2005, entitled “Revenue and Finance – Fiscal Provisions”. Sponsored by Councilwoman Marino and Council Vice-President Ferri.*

Chair indicated that there are three scrivener’s errors in this Ordinance. Lines 24, 46 and 49, it should state ARPA and not APRA and he thanked Director Strom for indicating that to him.

Attorney Angell indicated that there are two same additional scrivener’s errors on line #24.

On motion by Councilman Donegan, seconded by Councilwoman Marino, it was voted to recommend approval of this Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

Councilwoman Marino stated that this Ordinance is setting forth, with respect to the ARPA money, the allocations as urged by the US Treasury and clarifies for us as a City that the funds being allocated will be through the City Council and this is consistent with our Ordinances already, such as 3.04.060 with respect to any money being received by the City being approved by the City Council and being allocated in that manner.

Director Moretti stated that the Administration is in agreement certainly materially. There is a

concern that this Ordinance does not further restrict the use of the funds for the City versus what the Act already has in it.

Councilman Reilly stated that these laws already exist. #1 through 5 is already listed in the Act itself. Part B is also part of the Act. The Section stating that nothing should be spent unless or until the City Council approves it, we have a Charter that does that. While he fully supports the intent of this, we should follow the Act in its entirety. He does not see what the point is in passing this Ordinance.

Councilwoman Marino stated that this Ordinance best protects us. It makes it clear that we are moving in a direction that the Federal Government expects us to. We are simplifying for our residents how money generally is supposed to be used and how the money is supposed to be held and allocated.

Director Moretti stated that perhaps the Ordinance could be amended to refer to the ARPA Act itself and leave it at that.

Councilwoman Marino suggested changing the language on line #25, after “of the same”, and add “as currently enacted and as the US Treasury Department guidelines may modify with respect to these ARPA funds”.

On motion by Council President Paplauskas, seconded by Councilman Donegan, it was voted to amend line #24 and delete “strict”. Motion passed unanimously.

Council President Paplauskas motioned to amend the Ordinance as follows: line #25, insert “the” between “with and US Treasury”. No one seconded the motion. Motion was withdrawn.

Councilwoman Marino motioned to amend this Ordinance as follows: line #25, after “of the same”, delete “as follows” and add “currently enacted and as the US Treasury Department may modify the ARPA funds”. No one seconded the motion.

Roll call was taken on motion to recommend approval of this Ordinance as amended and motion passed on a vote of 5-2. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilwoman Marino, Councilmen Donegan, Campopiano, Council Vice-President Ferri and Council President Paplauskas -5. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Reilly and Councilwoman Renzulli -2.

Resolution “American Rescue Plan Act Funds – Prioritizing use and public input”. Sponsored by Council Vice-President Ferri, Councilman Donegan and Councilwoman Marino.

Appearing to speak via Zoom:

Stacey Nunes, 1390 New London Ave., appeared to speak in favor of this Resolution and stated that she thinks it is important that we have the ability to have the public have access to have transparency on what is going on and also to give their input as to what they think the money should be used for.

Annette Bourne, 51 Community Dr., appeared to speak in favor of this Resolution and stated that she strongly supports the idea of getting public input.

Sheila Resseger, 50 Malvern Ave., appeared to speak in favor of this Resolution.

Candace Brown Casey, 68 Knollwood Ave., appeared to speak in favor of this Resolution and stated that she thinks it is critical that we give members of the community an opportunity to make their voices heard and speak up as to what their needs are.

Gianna Pacheco, 16 Cavalry St., appeared to speak in favor of this Resolution and stated that this is a great opportunity to invest in Cranston and include residents in the conversations on how this money should be spent for their benefit.

Michael Beauregard, 136 Bluff Ave., appeared to speak in favor of this Resolution and also proposed Ordinance 10-21-05 and stated that he thinks it is important that the Council listen to the publics' testimony and formulate a set of recommendations to really drive the impact of this funding.

Chair stated that there are scrivener's errors in lines #38, 61, 67, 68 & 72 – it should state ARPA and not APRA.

On motion by Councilman Donegan, seconded by Councilwoman Marino, it was voted to recommend approval of this Resolution.

Under Discussion:

Councilman Donegan stated that the funds we have here truly are a once in a lifetime opportunity to address many of the systemic inequities that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The point here is to have workshops and special meetings to get public input from business leaders, non-profit leaders and government stakeholders to come up with ideas on how we, as a City, best decide how to use this money, to best address what our City has faced and what our City will continue to face and how to best alleviate those issues.

Director Moretti questioned if this is trying to exclude the Administration's input into this. Councilman Donegan stated, no.

Director Strom questioned #2, and suggested that maybe it should be a Committee to compose a report rather than the City Council.

Councilman Donegan stated that that is an oversight. Perhaps that could be more specific on who the City Council would like to compose that report.

Councilman Reilly stated that similar to the Ordinance, he does not support legislation for legislations purposes. We do not need a Resolution that already sated what the law is. He supports this and agrees that it is a once in a lifetime thing, but he would rather just get to work.

Chair stated that he is offended by Councilman Reilly at this suggestion that this is not necessary. He stated that there have been many hours spent meeting to discuss this and trying to get this right. Councilman Reilly questioned when those meeting were held because he was not aware of any meetings.

Council President Paplauskas motioned to move the question. Councilman Reilly seconded the motion. Motion failed on a vote of 3-4. The following being recorded as voting "aye": Councilman

Reilly, Councilwoman Renzulli and Council President Paplauskas -3. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilwoman Marino, Councilmen Donegan, Campopiano, and Council Vice-President Ferri -4.

Chair urged passage of this this evening and urged everyone involved in the process. He stated that the intention is to have one public meeting in November and one public meeting in December so we can all work with the Administration in putting forth a report on how we should spend the money to benefit the City of Cranston.

Councilwoman Germain stated that she is not on this Committee, but stated that this should be passed. It is a call from our residents. They want to have their voices heard, they want to be involved and she believes that from many perspectives, we can find a better solution for our community.

Councilwoman Renzulli stated that she is in favor of the public input and transparency and accountability to our response efforts. She would hope that we include in some kind of online way for the public to also submit ideas because some people cannot attend in person or through Zoom.

Council President Paplauskas stated that he will be supporting this. Transparency is the key and having these meetings is the key and we need feedback from the public.

Chair stated that the intentions of these meetings is to have them here in the Council Chambers and offer Zoom to the public that cannot attend in person and it will be done through the Finance Committee.

Councilwoman Vargas asked if the workshops are open to anyone of the Council Members as well as the residents and any stakeholders in the City. Chair stated yes. Councilwoman Vargas asked if when these workshops are being held, will there be surveys discussed at those workshops and who will be heading the actual workshops? Chair stated that it would be during the Finance Committee meeting. Councilwoman Vargas stated that she would like to see these workshops held not just during the Finance Committee meetings, but the workshops also accessible other than just the Finance Committee meetings. She would be open to have these discussions through workshops or surveys and not just through the Finance Committee meetings.

Councilwoman Marino stated that the intent is to draw in as many people as we can. We can be creative in how we do it. From past experience, surveys take time and money that we may be running up against time and the amount of participation that you get back from the survey is something of concern too.

Councilwoman Vargas stated that when she was a member of the Diversity Commission, they used the Police Department to put out a survey at no cost to the taxpayers. While we are doing the workshops, if cost is a factor, would we at all be able to get the survey going with the assistance of someone to get that going online? Survey Money is really not that expensive.

Councilwoman Renzulli stated that she has seen places use Google form and that is free. We could do that.

Chair stated that all the suggestions stated this evening, they have discussed for many hours and the situation is it is November and we need to have this done by January and we have discussed the survey, we have discussed having public meetings at the library, we did all that. We came to the conclusion to have it here, we have the technology and we can invite everyone in the City and that is

why we decided not to do the surveys and do in in the Council Chambers because this needs to be done by January before the budget process starts because we cannot be as effective in what we can't to accomplish.

Councilwoman Renzulli stated to the Chair that she is offended because he has repeatedly stated this evening that “we have discussed this for hours”. She hasn't, she was not invited. That is not fair to say that “we have discussed for hours”. For him and a few other people to have made a decision that now we all have to agree with, you are representing the fact that everyone has been working on this for hours and we have gotten nowhere because that is not true.

No one appeared to oppose.

Roll call was taken on motion to recommend approval of this Resolution and motion passed on a vote of 6-1. The following being recorded as voting “aye”: Councilwoman Marino, Councilmen Donegan, Campopiano, Councilwoman Renzulli, Council Vice-President Ferri and Council President Paplauskas - 6. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Reilly -1.

- ***Real Estate Tax Abatements***

No one appeared to speak in favor or to oppose.

On motion by Council President Paplauskas, seconded by Councilman Reilly, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Abatements as recommended by City Assessor. Motion passed unanimously.

- ***Motor Vehicle Tax Abatements***

No one appeared to speak in favor or to oppose.

On motion by Councilman Reilly, seconded by Council President Paplauskas, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Abatements as recommended by City Assessor. Motion passed unanimously.

- ***Tangible Tax Abatements***

No one appeared to speak in favor or to oppose.

On motion by Councilman Reilly, seconded by Council President Paplauskas, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Abatements as recommended by City Assessor. Motion passed unanimously.

- ***Tax Assessment Board of Review assessed December 31, 2020.***

Informational only. No action needed.

- *Tax Interest Waiver Approvals*

No one appeared to speak in favor or to oppose.

On motion by Councilman Donegan, seconded by Councilwoman Renzulli, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Interest Waiver approvals as recommended by City Treasurer. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/S/ Rosalba Zanni
Acting City Clerk