

*(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 Thursday, October 2, 2023 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

### **CALL MEETING TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M. by the Chair.

Present                    Councilman Robert J. Ferri (left at 7:35 p.m.)  
                                 Councilwoman Aniece German (left at 9:40 p.m.)  
                                 Councilman Richard D. Campopiano  
                                 Councilman Christopher G. Paplauskas  
                                 Council Vice-President Lammis J. Vargas, Vice-Chair  
                                 Councilman John P. Donegan, Chair  
                                 Council President Jessica M. Marino

Also Present:            Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli  
                                 Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff (left at 8:15 p.m.)  
                                 John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor (left at 9:30 p.m.)  
                                 Steven Angell, City Council Legal Counsel (appeared via zoom)  
                                 Thomas Zidelis, Director of Finance  
                                 David Dimaio, City Council Budget Analyst  
                                 Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees  
                                 Heather Finger, Stenographer

### **I.        APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

#### **A. Minutes of the September 11, 2023 regular meeting**

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilwoman Germain, it was voted to approve the above minutes. Motion passed unanimously.

### **II.       COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER**

#### **Councilman Donegan: (Cont. from 6/5/2023 & 9/11/2023)**

- *School Building Construction Update*

No discussion held.

**Councilman Donegan: (Cont. from 8/7/2023 & 9/11/2023)**

- *Exploration of Liability Policy for the City (Cont. from 8/7/2023)*

**Director Zidelis** asked for continuance of another month.

**Councilman Donegan: (Cont. from 9/11/2023)**

- *Update from Administration on status of hiring for Planning Department position starting January 1, 2024.*

**Director Zidelis** stated that they are focusing on the Planning Tech and the plan was to sometime late October, early November, post new position for January commencement.

**V. CORRESPONDENCE/COMMUNICATIONS**

None.

**VI. PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Aubrey Collins**, 136 Sharon St., appeared to speak and stated that she is advocating for her community playgrounds and specifically the remediation and reopening of the Edgewood Highlands Playground. The Mayor's proposal is to allocate available funds equally throughout the six Wards in Cranston and before making that decision, it is important to acknowledge that not all playgrounds are equal by way of condition nor necessary remedies and not all Wards are equal. She strongly believes that stalling repairs and prolonging reopening of the Edgewood Highlands Playground until after all the Cranston playgrounds are inspected is unfair and asked question whether issuing an emergency procurement order is at all possible. She also stated that once an agreement has been reached on this matter in order to maintain accountability and transparency reasonable expectations amongst the City and its residents, we need to make sure that start and end dates of any work to be done to the playgrounds is discussed, committed to on record as soon as possible.

**Bridget Graziano**, 191 Wentworth Ave., appeared to speak and stated that she attended the September 25<sup>th</sup> Council meeting advocating for the Edgewood Highlands Playground and after that meeting, she is confused why we are going ahead this evening with the Finance Committee to allocate funds equally to six Wards that have not come forward with any cost proposals for any other playgrounds. Ward 1 has come forward and have had a great showing by the parents and as she mentioned at the September 25<sup>th</sup> meeting, she obtained documents that the City of Cranston has, the cost proposals for what costs to do the in place PIP and the cost to do the mulch and she does not think \$100,000 could ever come close to what it would cost the playground. Some of the residents' concerns are these proposals are not even fully vetted and that was never even discussed at the City Council meeting. She does not understand how you can go ahead and make a decision that each Ward needs \$100,000. It is not equitable to her in the sense of need. She obtained a cost proposal from O'Brien & Sons, which happens to be a friend of hers, to get help on the playground and come to find out the City had already obtained a cost proposal for some of these things, which was never presented at a meeting. Both proposals are very different and they are missing very clear items, which is site construction. We have no

idea what the site construction is. She does not want to accuse anyone, but if anyone has taken the time to look at each of these proposals and determine what is appropriate for Edgewood Highlands. She just feels very uncomfortable like even supporting a Resolution that distributes something equally when there is not necessarily a need in each Ward. She is happy to look at the other Wards, but they are here tonight with their need for their School and it is their parents and their kids that are suffering. The need is in Ward 1 so they are asking the Committee to fully fund what is appropriately needed, not the cheapest cost for Ward 1 just because for whatever reason we want to be cheap about it. They want to be taken seriously. They have the costs and if the Finance Committee would like her to present them this evening, she is happy to do that.

**Amy Sloan**, 11 Haddon Hill, appeared to speak regarding the playground issue at Edgewood Highlands. She stated that she agrees that the solution is not just to take a chunk of money and divvy it out equally when the need is not necessarily equal. As far as she knows, their playground is the only playground that is currently closed so it definitely needs repair. If there is money left over, then spread it out as needed to the other Wards. She asked that this playground be fixed as soon as possible and not as cheap as possible for the long-term.

**Katelyn Kelly**, 1122 Narragansett Blvd., appeared to speak regarding the playground issue at Edgewood Highlands and stated that she is not really happy about the proposed plan. Dividing up the money evenly to each Ward seems fair at first glance, but if every playground in each Ward needs that much work then obviously we have bigger issues than just fixing the playgrounds. The Edgewood Highlands playground has been neglected for years and for that reason, needs a complete overhaul. We need to divvy up this money in a way that makes sense for each Ward's real needs versus doing what is fair. If other playgrounds need funding, they should be inspected and real Budget should be proposed, but we should not be waiting for that to happen just to get the Edgewood Highlands playground back open. This is something that should be looked at and put into planning budgets. The Edgewood Highlands playground should be the top priority and the distribution of these funds should be reflected in that.

**Megan Cressy Johnson**, 145 Villa Ave., appeared to speak in support of the Edgewood playground. She stated that this playground should be top priority before distributing the funds evenly between Wards because she believes this is the only playground in the City that is closed. There needs to be a comprehensive look at all the playgrounds and what needs to be fixed before just evenly distributing the money.

**Susan Blake**, 173 Grand Ave., appeared to speak regarding the Budlong Pool and stated that contrary to evaluations presented by the Federal Hill Group in 2022 and by Weston and Sampson in 2023, actual water usage data gathered by Karen Rosenberg clearly debunks any claims regarding leaks at the Budlong Pool. There was no evidence of consistent increased water usage prior to the installation of the new liner in 2018. These facts are based on data that was independently sought from the City. She also stated that they have presented multiple reports of similar public information that brings truth to the forefront of this discussion. These facts clearly cast out on the validity and the integrity of both of the reports. It is time to have a disinterested company, a company just stating the facts about what the true status of the pool is today, then, you can make your informed decisions. There are 2,000 signatures of people who want the pool repaired and open as it was and those 2,000 signatures represent 20,000 residents who feel this way. That is about 27% of the eligible voters in the City who are angry and who will remember

this and who has lied to them as well as who here has perpetrated those lies in spite of the truths coming when next November comes around. The City Council has the power to hire a company to give a truthful fact-based evaluation and assessment. The residents need the Council to do more now because time is running out.

**Sarah Cody**, 311 Doric Ave., Director of One Cranston Health Equity Zone and CCAP, appeared to speak and stated that their goal within Cranston is to support and equip community members to collaborate and create projects, places and programming where residents can healthily live, learn, work and play in Cranston. She appeared to speak regarding the “Resolution proposing Recognition of the Community Builders Grant Program Funded by the OneCranston Health Equity Zone of Comprehensive Community Action, Inc. (CCAP) within each City Ward”. This program has funded a variety of efforts ranging from planting trees at a baseball field to funding signage on self-esteem for school bathrooms and purchasing books for a reading week as well as a bench and signage for two local community gardens. She asked that this Resolution be passed.

**Ellen Basso**, 71 Dale Hill Dr., East Greenwich, Rhodes Elementary School Librarian and Student Council Mentor, appeared to speak regarding “Resolution proposing Recognition of the Community Builders Grant Program Funded by the OneCranston Health Equity Zone of Comprehensive Community Action, Inc. (CCAP) within each City Ward”, She stated that she applied for the Grant on behalf of the Student Council on behalf of the students. They applied for the Grant to purchase motivational posters to hang in the School bathrooms. The students were very proud in being awarded the Grant. This was a very small project that had a big impact on the School. Overall, this small Grant was very helpful to all members of the Rhodes Elementary School community.

**Elena Rios**, 52 Valley St., Providence, Youth Services Librarian at the Central Library, appeared to speak and stated that she is one of the recipients of this year’s Community Builders Grant. She spoke in support of “Resolution proposing Recognition of the Community Builders Grant Program Funded by the OneCranston Health Equity Zone of Comprehensive Community Action, Inc. (CCAP) within each City Ward”.

**Keith Catone**, 61 Windsor Rd., Ward 1 School Committee Member, appeared to speak regarding the playground issue at Edgewood Highlands and stated that there needs to be a priority list of the playgrounds that need repairing. Edgewood Highlands being closed should be a priority. Part of the problem is lack of information. He knows the City is in the process of doing a comprehensive assessment and hopes that that assessment can be shared.

**Domenic Fusco**, 167 Fiat Ave., Ward 3 School Committee Member, appeared to speak and stated that children are the most important resource. We need to fix our schools. Garden City School just re-opened and Eden Park and Gladstone need to be finished. There are other schools that are in dire need of some work. He asked that the Council listen to what the Representative from RIDE has to offer with an open mind and seriously consider suggestions that he has to offer. We have to look at the long-term and not the short-term.

## **VII. NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE**

### A. Ordinances

**9-23-04**      ***Ordinance allocating \$600,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act Funds for the purpose of Upgrading City of Cranston Playgrounds in All Six Wards. Sponsored by Mayor Kenneth J. Hopkins.***

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

#### Under Discussion:

**Director Moretti** stated that within the last month, Council Vice-President Vargas has met with the Mayor and the Administration calling the attention concerning the Edgewood Highlands playground, which there is no excuse for that not being opened the day that School opened. Once the Mayor heard about it, he went there and the Mayor wanting to fund repair of that facility to get it opened as soon as possible and Council Vice-President Vargas's Resolution calls for that. Coincidentally, the Mayor also extended the offer to have Council Vice-President Vargas co-sponsor his Ordinance, but she mentioned that she had her own Resolution which is fine, but he thinks everyone is together on this. The Mayor also felt that the \$100,000 would get the Edgewood Highlands playground open and in good shape and there is also needs throughout the City for playgrounds so he thought an equitable thing to do was let each Council person recommend use of those funds. If the Council feels that that is inappropriate, the Mayor will pull his Ordinance, but he thought this was the most expeditious way of funding, particularly Edgewood.

**Council Vice-President Vargas** stated that she submitted her Resolution on a Monday and the Administration submitted their own on a Wednesday, so her Resolution was submitted without knowing that the Administration was going to be submitting one. She has a few concerns about this. A lot are about what was echoed this evening. Her concerns are pretty much in equities that are taking place if we were to provide \$100,000 to each Ward. The timing of it as well as the assessment we do not know what the cost is while we are prioritizing playgrounds that are located at school grounds. There is no comprehensive way, there is no best practices, there is not an actual protocol right now of initial steps that we would be actually following to determine how that \$100,000 is going to get spent and prioritize if there are school playgrounds within the schools. In the Mayor's Ordinance, it states that the funds remaining that are unused will be re-allocated proportionally to the other Wards. She questioned how that is going to happen and who is going to be making those decisions. Is it the City Council, is it the Administration? Every penny that gets spent of ARPA funds have to come before the City Council. She understands the component of this, but once that \$100,000 is granted to be used, that is it. That is going to create a hot mess. There is no order right now. There is no way to prioritize other than the fact that we have right now one playground in a school facility outside of school playground area that is currently closed. That is her concern with this Ordinance. The other problem she has with this Ordinance is we do not have an assessment of all the other playgrounds of what it is going to cost. Until we have an actual assessment, which should be at the very start, and what the Administration should be doing is possibility utilizing ARPA funds to assess our playgrounds and get actual specific information as to what we need before we start spending money. On this specific Ordinance, she has a slide that she never received from the

Administration. She was given a slide by someone else. She has been asking and talking about playgrounds since October of 2021 and as a result, she believes that this comprehensive report on the Edgewood playground was done in May of 2022. She discussed the slide presentation.

**Councilman Paplauskas** stated that he fully supports Council Vice-President Vargas's request to get this playground fixed as quickly as possible. He asked if there is a final number on the cost.

**Council President Marino** stated that she is eagerly and anxiously looking to fix the playgrounds that need the fixing and prioritizing the ones that need it most. When Council Vice-President Vargas had the meeting with the Administration along with School Committee Member Catone, she participated in that meeting and asked if we are all in agreement. Is Edgewood Highlands the priority, is this the worst playground? She could not even get an immediate answer on that. She wants everyone present to understand that despite having a meeting on this issue, they still, at that time, did not have a clear answer that Edgewood Highlands playground was in fact the worst one. There was some back and forth and then there was some assurance given that it was the worst one because it was closed. What that tells her is that we need an assessment. It does not have to be a professional. We have a Parks and Recreation Department. This is not a novel concept. This is the way we should be handling the appropriations of this money. The playgrounds that are most in need, those are the ones that should be getting the bulk of the funds. She understands and appreciates the notion that we want to be fair and disperse it evenly, but what is fair is fixing what we need to fix with the funds that we have. If she votes in opposition to this Ordinance this evening, it is because she feels we need an assessment and then look at the cost and then come to the Council to appropriate ARPA funds from there.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked if we would have to go out to bid for this or if there are already people on a list to be selected from. Director Zidelis stated that barring there being a master purchase agreement at a State level, he would say that this must be bid or try to get a bid exemption from BOCAP, but he is pretty confident that these projects would have to be bid.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked Council Vice-President Vargas where the study she has came from. Council Vice-President Vargas stated that she obtained it at the request of someone else. Councilwoman Renzulli asked Council Vice-President Vargas if she knows who requested that and if it went to Parks and Recreation. Council Vice-President Vargas stated that it went to the City.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked Administration why the Council has not seen this. Director Moretti stated that this evening is the first he has seen that and has no idea what report that is. He does not know the source of it, who paid for it or who requested it and what use it is for. It would be very informative to everyone to find that out.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** stated that even though she does not have a vote this evening, it is concerning to her that we do not know about this, the Administration is saying that they do not know about this, the fact this had to be paid for, it would have had to come out of a budget line somewhere and who requested it. She would like that report.

**Chair** asked Director Moretti if the Council can be provided with that report before the next Finance meeting. Director Moretti stated that he does not know what that is so he can't provide it because he does not have it and never heard of it, never seen it. If the Councilwoman can tell who the sources are, perhaps that could help him find that information and will be happy to provide it. Chair stated that he does not want to speak for the Council Vice-President and she can correct him if he is wrong, but he believes she said someone from the public was able to obtain that and he does not think it would be proper or comfortable for her sharing that. Director Moretti stated that he can't provide the report, then, sorry.

**Chair** asked Director Zidelis if by the next Finance meeting, he can find out how much that report cost, what line item it came out of and he would like a copy of the report for the entire Finance Committee and entire City Council. Director Zidelis stated that as Director Moretti has stated, if someone could tell him the source of the report, he can track down if we did pay for it, where it came from, but we have to ascertain the source of the report. Chair stated that that is what he is asking the Finance Department to do. He asked that the Director find out where that came from, how it was paid for and to get the Council a copy of it. If it was paid for by the City, the City Council would like a copy of it.

**Council President Marino** stated that she received an email from Council Vice-President Vargas this evening with the report and she presented it via slide. She will, as we speak, email that to Director Zidelis, Director Tessaglia and Director Moretti and then the City can sleuth out the information requested this evening.

**Councilwoman Germain** stated that the issue of playgrounds has been a discussion for a long time. She questioned who is responsible in the City to inspect the playgrounds before school starts. People have told her it is the School, it is the School Committee responsibility. She would like to hear from the Administration of who is responsible for that and who is accountable because what is happening with this playground should not be happening. We are three weeks into the School year, so if there is a preparation before School starts for those playgrounds, who is the person? She feels like we are seeing a pattern, whether there is concealed information, whether it is not taking our demands seriously, there is a pattern and she is really tired of it. She agrees that we should not be at this stage to prioritize. She is for equality, but at this moment we cannot talk of equality, we have to talk about equity if there is an imbalance. If this playground has to be closed, this is a result of the imbalance, of the neglect and we have to take the approach of equity. This is where she stands.

Motion and second to recommend approval of this Ordinance were withdrawn.

On motion by Council President Marino, seconded by Councilman Paplauskas, it was voted to table this Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

**Chair** asked Solicitor if it is correct that motion to table would require a two-third majority to bring back onto the docket. Solicitor stated that that is correct. Attorney Angell stated that that is correct. His recommendation would be to continue this for the information requested.

Motion and second to table were withdrawn.

On motion by Council President Marino, seconded by Councilwoman Germain, it was voted to continue this Ordinance. Motion passed unanimously.

## B. Resolutions

***Resolution proposing Recognition of the Community Builders Grant Program Funded by the OneCranston Health Equity Zone of Comprehensive Community Action, Inc. (CCAP) within each City Ward.*** Sponsored by Councilman Ferri and Council President Marino; co-sponsored by Councilman Donegan, Councilwoman Renzulli, and Councilwoman Germain.

On motion by Councilwoman Germain, seconded by Council Vice-President Vargas, it was voted to recommend approval of this Resolution.

### Under Discussion:

**Councilman Ferri** thanked everyone that has testified this evening regarding this Resolution. He read a statement from Annette Bourne, who states that she is willing to lend her voice and support of this Resolution. Councilman Ferri stated that this Grants, although small, obviously can have a great impact. He is hoping that the Council is in favor of this program that maybe in the future, we can match this funding of \$300 per Ward and maybe even look further into it. He hopes everyone supports this Resolution.

**Chair** stated that we are fortunate to have such a tremendous and committed staff working in addition to really a beautiful array of community partners who make up the organization and this is one of the best parts of it and seeing the community come together to build something and we should approve this.

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

***Resolution relative to Playgrounds Upgrade & Maintenance.*** Sponsored by Council Vice-President Vargas.

**Council Vice-President Vargas** stated that the Resolution she put forward this evening needs a dollar amount, so she would like to see the dollar amount in the Resolution as to what the actual cost is going to be to remove the rubber known as PIP, install the new rubber and in addition to that, provide a full assessment as to what the playground actually needs. She would like to have a full assessment of that park before that is done so that we can actually tie her Resolution with an actual dollar amount and then bring it before the full Committee and vote on it. She wants this playground open and also wants to make sure that we are moving along and making sure that this playground is open and the kids have a facility, a playground that has all new items there and if not new, at least what needs to be replaced. She is calling on the Administration to do a full assessment evaluation of Edgewood playground, come up with a total dollar amount and include that in this Resolution, bring it before the Finance Committee again so it could be passed. She would like to have this Resolution continued until next month or as soon as possible and hoping the Chair can work on scheduling a special meeting sooner depending on when that evaluation could be done so we do not have to wait until December.



**Chair** stated that if the assessment is received prior to the October Council meeting, we can refer this to the City Council for that evening for passage later that evening. Similarly, if we get it before any of the other Committee meetings, he would be happy to try and piggyback on that night or if we have to schedule a special night, he would be happy to do that also.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** stated that she would like to be clear on how this can be done fastest and can the Finance Director tell the City Council what that route is so we can ask for it because she believes we all have the same goal, but she is afraid of it not actually working out that way. Director Zidelis stated that the first step is going to be identifying someone, as he heard earlier, getting a professional outside assessment. This will be the first step to ascertain who is going to do this work. The next step would be finding out what the cost of an assessment would be in identifying a funding source. Councilwoman Renzulli stated that her fear is it is not going to happen as quickly as we want this to be done because if we do not have a list to draw from, then we are going to have to go out to bid for the person who is going to do the assessment or do we have that on a list?

**Council Vice-President Vargas** stated that, if hypothetically, the PTA was to say that they wanted to provide that assessment or an outside person wanted to donate their services, she asked if that is something that is allowed. Solicitor stated that from a legal perspective, he emphasized that once again, we are beginning to blur the lines between what is properly an Executive function or an Administrative function versus a Legislative function. The Charter is very clear that the Legislative Body cannot interfere or direct or order the Executive Branch to do anything. As he stated many times before, the Legislative Branch appropriates. Once an appropriation is made, whether it is ARPA funds or it is amount for a department, those are Administrative decisions on how to proceed with, that money is strictly an Administrative Executive function. It seems to him that the Council or the Committee is essentially trying to control, sort of speak, of the process and he cautioned that you can certainly in your discretion decide whether or not you want to appropriate a certain amount of funds from ARPA for this playground project, but he just re-emphasized that your decision is whether or not to appropriate this amount of money that is being requested. Once you make that decision, the rest is up to the Administration. He has been hearing about how out of the six Wards there are certain playgrounds that require perhaps more work or improvements than others, in his opinion, he does not believe that you can essentially bootstrap the Administration and say you have to spend \$50,000 here, you have to spend \$150,000 there and \$125,000 there. You can certainly ask the Administration how it intends to do that, but you can't place conditions on the Administration as to how they are going to ultimately expend these funds. Attorney Angell stated that he, in general, agrees with Solicitor Verdecchia. This Council through the appropriation process can set certain earmarks or benchmarks to be met. Once the appropriation is made, it is up to the Executive to decide how best to use those funds and how to manage the project. There is an apparatus in place in the City with respect to vendor selection that would necessarily have to be observed. There was a question of whether or not you could accept donated services. He supposes the City could solicit services to be donated provided of course that they meet the specifications of whatever the bid may be. That is an Executive function to determine the suitability of the services to be consumed whether paid for or free, but in general, he agrees with Solicitor Verdecchia's interpretation of the Charter.

**Council President Marino** stated that the Council has the ability and responsibility to appropriate funds, but it can do so with contingencies. What she means by that is, the Council is

not restricted in having to give carte blanche \$600,000 and just do these repairs. The Council has the right to ask the Administration to do an assessment so that it then will have the confidence and the information that they need to make an educational decision with respect to the City's money and allocate it appropriately. That is not something new and they have every right and every responsibility as a body in which to do it. It is completely reasonable and it is the Administration's job to do the assessment for safety. The Council is not asking for something that is extraordinary. They are asking for relevant pertinent information so that every dollar that this City spends is spent wisely and the Council has made it clear that they can do this expeditiously. Where there is a will there is a way. The Council has already spoken that they will do everything that it possibly can to expedite this to get this done and make it happen.

Motion and second to continue this Ordinance to the next Finance meeting passed unanimously.

Councilman Paplauskas left the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

### ***C. Real Estate Tax Abatements***

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

### ***D. Tangible Tax Abatements***

On motion by Council President Marino, seconded by Council Vice-President Vargas, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Abatements as recommended by the City Assessor. Motion passed unanimously.

### ***E. Tax Interest Waiver Approvals***

On motion by Council President Marino, seconded by Council Vice-President Vargas, it was voted to recommend approval of this list of Tax Interest Waiver Approvals. Motion passed unanimously.

### **Councilman Donegan:**

- ***Remaining ARPA Funds***

**Chair** asked how much is left unencumbered. Director Zidelis stated that prior to the obligation of \$600,000 for the ARPA, it is \$5.9 million. He erroneously misstated the \$4.1 million and the cause of that was a mathematical error.

- ***Update from Mark Mariano of Weston & Sampson on plans for Budlong Pool.***

**Chair** stated that the reason for this update is to get more understanding on the financing of what exactly we can get for the \$4.75 million available. We were forwarded an email last Monday with some information and received another email today with a cost breakdown of that and that is what we are present this evening to discuss. We are here to discuss the finance of the pool and that is it.

**Mark Mariano** appeared to speak and stated that the analysis they did when this was discussed last month, the 7,000 sq. ft. pool is \$3 to \$3.5 that did not include all the contingencies of the building, so we were just shy at approximately \$4.2. Once you have all the contingencies when you are at this level of a project, you need to carry a certain amount of contingency because you do not know the unexpected that you are going to find if you go through the conditions, so there is approximately \$400,000 that is carried in that Budget for contingency. Obviously, you do not want to go into a project without contingency. When doing that math, they came out that 8,000 is the maximum amount you can get for the \$4.5. That 8,000 is considering taking that same shape pool that was shown. So, going back to what was heard in public commentary, more center of the pool growing for teen activities, that is where we would grow square footage in those two areas.

**Chair** asked, if we were to just have a rectangular pool in the shape that it is now, with the size reduced, would there be opportunity within the \$4.7 to then have a larger square footage and without those islands? Mr. Mariano stated that if you take that rectangle, it is a tradeoff so now you are going to have more water volume that you have to filter in a larger filtration system. You are still going to have the same amount of concrete on the floor, you are still going to have the same amount close to the same amount of perimeter, you probably have about 100-150 foot less perimeter depending on how they shape the pool so the difference in the cost is approximately \$50,000.

**Chair** stated that if the City wanted to explore bringing the square footage up to 10, 11, 12,000, he asked if there is a rough estimate of how much that would cost. Mr. Mariano stated that they did the evaluation for 11,000 and they came in at \$6.5. Chair asked if that includes the pool house. Mark Saccoccio of Saccoccio Associates Architects, appeared to speak and stated, yes. Chair asked if the City would be eligible for any sort of variances for work in the pool house due to the historic nature. Mr. Saccoccio stated, no, the building has been vacated. They have already met with the Building Inspector and are doing minimal amount of work in the building. They are trying not to spend any more money than they have to in the building and invest as much money in the pool as they can. There is no ADA accessibility in the building now. Everything they are doing now is directly related to the function of the pool. There are no additional bells and whistles.

Councilwoman Germain left the meeting at 9:40 p.m.

**Council President Marino** clarified that this Council has already appropriated the funds, we have already held meetings, approved Resolution as a Council in terms of what we would like to see with respect to the pool. It is out of the hands of the Council in terms of initiating shovels in the ground and procuring Mr. Saccoccio's services. That is not up to the Council nor is it up to the Council for a meeting. If that was conveyed to Mr. Saccoccio, that was inaccurate, it is solely between him and the Administration. Mr. Saccoccio stated that he spoke to the Administration today and he thinks that they wanted to get through this last hurdle and then release him to proceed. He does not want to speak for the Administration, but that is what he believes. They are ready to start and it will be a beautiful pool.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** stated that she just wants to be clear that it is now in the hands of the Mayor if he wants to build a pool like it has been the whole time. She asked if that is correct. Director Zidelis stated that the Mayor has an appropriation to build a pool.

- *Presentation from RIDE on school construction” to the docket*

**Mario Carano**, Chief Operations Officer for the RI Department of Education, appeared to speak and presented a handout. He stated that the main reason he is before the Committee is because over the last four or five years, the Department of Education has shifted to being a supportive group where they are proactive in pointing out certain incentives or benefits that may be available to communities who otherwise might miss out on if they do not act on time. One that he is present to discuss this evening are the temporary incentives for School construction, which the State will reimburse School construction projects. This is an opportunity that is available to Cranston. The City has two existing Bonds set to expire totaling \$36 million that receive only 48% reimbursement. If a similar amount of debt were issued now for projects that begin by end of Fiscal Year, you could get potentially 74% reimbursement. He gave an overview of the handout he presented. He stated that what the District has been doing with Eden Park, Gladstone Street School and Garden City, they are confident that this would be put to really good use. As to the timeline, there is a really really narrow window of opportunity. The General Assembly just extended the bonuses this past July 1<sup>st</sup>. The bonuses now begin to expire at the end of the Fiscal Year, so the District has already sent in a State 1 application, which has been approved by RIDE. That merely allows this conversation to occur. It does not commit you to do anything. The action item would be that in the next few months, if you were going to consider something, you would pick a number, pass a Resolution and send it to the General Assembly. The District would work on submitting projects for the State 2 at some point in the Spring. Whether you are or not allowed to piggyback on the Presidential Primary or pick a different day, but you would target a Spring Election, which is what other communities are doing in Rhode Island with the idea of getting these under contract.

On motion by Council President Marino, seconded by Councilwoman Germain, it was voted to accept the document presented by Mr. Carano into the record. Motion passed unanimously.

**Councilwoman Germain** asked, if we want to move forward on this, the Administration must agree to move forward with this to take the opportunity with this 74% reimbursement. Director Zidelis stated that he can state with no uncertain terms that the debt service requirements are currently being reviewed. He believes that there have been discussions with the City Administration and the Schools about what potential projects may be advanced and the timeline to put forth a Referendum to the voters. So, that work is already being done.

**Chair** stated that at the last School Buildings Committee meeting, they did discuss getting a breakdown increment by increment of what a \$20 million Bond would look like in debt service or what a \$25 million, \$30 million and so on, so that way this body can make a decision on what is palatable for both balancing what is responsible and also addressing what the need is in the City. Director Zidelis stated that that same approach is being taken with a slight derivation. The approach is Phase 1 Schools have been put forward. That is our first approach in terms of the projects to be advanced with the estimates as of the current date and then anything above that will be layered in incrementally, such as Counselor requested.

**Council President Marino** stated that as to the timeline of things, she understands that the Council would have to, if they were inclined to do this, would pass a Resolution by the beginning of the year so we can present it to the General Assembly in order to meet the Election deadline, but practically speaking she is sure it is pressing or would be pressing on the public's mind, the actual timeline is when the construction would need to be completed by, when the submission would need to be in to the State in order for us to take advantage of the 74% reimbursement rate with this extension.

**Council President Marino** addressed Superintendent Nota-Masse and questioned that with this Stage 1, we are looking at a potential for \$40 million bringing us to the Bond Referendum? Superintendent Jeanine Nota-Masse appeared to speak and stated that it is a minimum, we need to have Gladstone and Eden Park completed. The monies they need to be allocated to finish those two projects, \$40 million would cover additional repairs and renovations. Another pressing matter that she is growing very nervous about is the parking lot at Cranston High School West, which is in tough shape. Those are projects that cost millions to do. Park View was never finished in this round because of their increased costs. She understands that \$200 million is a staggering number and she realizes that adding \$200 million, which that number is actually \$130 million, but \$200 million with 74% reimbursement off is a discussion. \$40 million at a minimum would enable them to finish their current projects. The bigger number would then inspire more discussions about bigger projects for the next five years.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked if the Administration could provide the council with some numbers because people will be asking the Council about their tax increases because that is what people do. She would like to make sure that the Council has some kind of an idea before they say yes to something and then have to backpedal during the budget season. Director Zidelis stated that anticipating that that is one of the facets of the approach they are taking and what they are doing is taking median residential property in the City and the median business property in the City with the current year's tax rates as they include the debt service for year to year. Councilwoman Renzulli's suggestion is already factored into their analysis. Councilwoman Renzulli asked Director Zidelis when he anticipates having that information. Director Zidelis stated additional decrements were added last week so they are running those numbers. He would say three to four weeks would be reasonable.

**Chair** stated that we do not have a month due to the timeline. If we get those numbers in the beginning of November and something goes before the City Council at the end of November, and is introduced and goes through the process in December, we need it quicker than a month. He knows Director Zidelis is very thorough and is always incredibly responsive to him. He is not saying that in any way as a slight towards him or his department, but the Council needs it quicker. Director Zidelis stated that he will discuss this with the Administration in the morning and make sure that they walk through with the format and get it back to the Council as fast as humanly possible and if it can be delivered to the Council before its next regular scheduled meeting, it will be.

**Chair** asked that this item be kept on the Finance agenda and also placed on the City Council docket for the end of this month.

**Superintendent Nota-Masse** stated that this is time sensitive so if it is a no go, then that is fine. They need to know either way. The plans that need to be developed and sent to the Department of Education for approval need to be done well, they need to be done thorough, they need to be done professionally. They have built all the things that they have built over the past five years. They do things thoroughly and they do them well. she is not about to start doing things on the fly because we are trying to get it into a deadline. The fact that the Legislature has enabled these reimbursements to be extended a year and she was told ‘no appetite for this to be extended’, we have to assume June 30, 2024 of the 74% off sale goes away and we are back down to 54%. She understands there is a tax impact, she lives in Cranston and sees what it is and knows the difficulties of the budget. We have been discussing this at the Building Committee for months so this is not a surprise.

**Attorney Angell** pointed out to the Council that there are really two tracks to be considered. The RIDE process travels in a certain lane with respect to their phases. Each phase requires a degree of specificity that the Superintendent is far more versed in speaking about than he is as well as Mr. Carana. That process drives a particular number that is your Bond number. That Bond number needs to be written into a Bond Act, proposed in the General Assembly and passed in the General Assembly before it can get on any ballot. When you think of the timing and what we have available to us next year, the Fall is too late for a variety of reasons. You need to get that Bond Act to the General Assembly so that they can take it up. If it is introduced and pre-filed in time for January, most likely they will be in position to take it up in late January and perhaps very early February. The City’s Board of Elections would then have to put together a ballot. In order to do that, they need to get through a process and permissions with the State Board of Elections. He disagrees with Mr. Carano that the Director of Elections would disagree that he does not believe that this can be put on a Presidential Primary Election. He believes Federal Law prohibits that. Your timeframe to get this before the voters looks like May and June and he did hear that and that is correct. This is why other communities are doing it that way so you do not have a lot of time. This Council does not have a lot of time to give its approval to a number based upon a project and then get that to the General Assembly in a Bond Act to seek permission to put it on the ballot. He suggested that the council act on this and get a written Bond Act document to Legislative Counsel at the State House last week of December or first week of January at the latest.

**Chair** stated that the need for repairing, rebuilding and rehabilitating the Schools and the School grounds is not going to go away and we all know that. The 74% reimbursement is. He thinks it makes more sense for the long-term financial stability of the City to take on those projects now because the need is not going to go away, but that money is so we would be paying more both due to inflation and lack of reimbursement to not do this now then it would be to continue to make bold investments in our Schools in the present. This is something he thinks we should do and do now. He has already had conversations with the Superintendent about getting the Bond drafted and he knows that their Bond Counsel is looking into it, but this is something that we need to move expeditiously on to make sure we can get this on the ballot next year.

**Council President Marino** stated that she is hopeful and appreciates Director Zidelis's saying that he is going to expedite this and get the information to the Council as soon as possible. She likes the idea that there is going to be 74%, so it is \$10 million in essence with respect to the \$40 million, she understands that it is only a limited image, but the \$36 million is coming off on the books. She asked Director Zidelis if he agrees. Director Zidelis stated that there are two tranches of Bonds coming off the books in the next four years so that he agrees with. Council President Marino stated that she would rather err on the side of caution and move this forward to expedite it even though ultimately it will be up to the voters, but to tie our hands and give up this opportunity, to her, this does not make sense.

**Council President Marino:**

- *The current remaining funds available on grants received by the City versus the total amount of grant funds awarded/received by the City.*

**Council President Marino** stated that she spoke to Director Zidelis this morning and he needed additional time to get this information. She asked that this item be continued to next month's meeting

***City Council Grant Writer's Report***

**Linda Teal** appeared to speak on behalf of Lisa Andoscia, Council Grant Writer and operator of Rosewood Consulting. She stated that so far this year, Rosewood Consulting has secured \$300,000 in funds for the Itri Park that will pay for ADA ramp access and some signage, \$344,000 that has been secured for the Police Department for vehicles for K-9 Unit and \$1.9 million has been secured or is in the process of being secured for Phase 2 of Knightsville, the Police Department and the Knightsville funds re through Congressional directive spending and they will be part of the Federal Budget that will be passed this Fall.

**VII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 9:50p.m.

Rosalba Zanni  
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees