

*(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, September 9, 2024 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

### **I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 P.M. by the Chair.

### **II. ROLL CALL:**

Present: Councilman Robert J. Ferri  
Councilwoman Kristen E. Haroian  
Councilman Richard D. Campopiano  
Councilman Daniel Wall  
Councilman Christopher G. Paplauskas  
Councilman John P. Donegan, Chair  
Council President Jessica M. Marino

Absent: Council Vice-President Lammis J. Vargas

Also Present: Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli  
John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor  
Thomas Zidelis, Director of Finance  
David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst  
Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees  
Heather Finger, Stenographer

### **III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

#### ***A. Minutes of the August 15, 2024 regular meeting***

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the August 15, 2024 meeting and they stand approved as recorded. Motion passed unanimously.

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

#### ***A. Approval of the sealed minutes of the July 1, 2024 Executive Session***

Council President Marino prepared the minutes and delivered them in sealed envelopes to the Council members present in the executive session. **(Cont. from 8/15/2024).**

No action taken.

**12-23-01** *ORDINANCE In Amendment of Title 3 of the Code of the City of Cranston, 2005, entitled “Revenue and Finance”, Chapter 3.110 – Ten (10) Year Tax Stabilization for Property Located at Oaklawn Avenue (Plat 17-3, Lot 670) (Oaklawn Avenue Tax Stabilization). Sponsored by Council President Marino. (Cont. from 1/8/2024, 2/5/2024, 3/4/2024, 4/1/2024, 5/6/2024 & 7/1/2024).*

**Chair** indicated that it has come to his attention that this Ordinance and the next Ordinance seeks to be continued for one month.

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

**12-23-02** *ORDINANCE In Amendment of Title 3 of the Code of the City of Cranston, 2005, entitled “Revenue and Finance”, Chapter 3.111 – Ten (10) Year Tax Stabilization for Property Located at 320 Scituate Avenue (Scituate Avenue Tax Stabilization). Sponsored by Council President Marino. (Cont. from 1/8/2024, 2/5/2024, 3/4/2024, 5/6/2024 & 7/1/2024)*

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

**6-24-01** *ORDINANCE Allocating \$2,500,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act Funds for the Purpose of Supporting School Projects, Upgrading City of Cranston and CLCF Properties and Providing Finance Assistance to Small Businesses. Sponsored by Mayor Kenneth J. Hopkins. (Cont. from 7/1/2024)*

**Chair** stated that litigation is still pending and encouraged a motion to continue.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to continue this Ordinance.

Under Discussion:

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked if anyone has any idea of when we are going to hear anything about this litigation. August 30<sup>th</sup> was mentioned in the past, but she has not heard anything from our Attorney.

**Chair** stated that he does not have a definitive answer on the date, but he does know that there were subsequent meetings that were held and that date has now been continued.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked that whoever knows, let the Council know because obviously, there have been meeting going on back and forth since August 30<sup>th</sup> so she is a little perturbed that we have no further information since then.

Roll call was taken on motion to continue this Ordinance to next month’s meeting and motion passed unanimously.

## **V. CORRESPONDENCE/COMMUNICATIONS**

*None.*

## **VI. PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Domenic Fusco**, 167 Fiat Ave., Vice-Chair of School Committee, appeared to speak regarding the two contracts on the agenda and stated that they are fair contracts and asked for approval.

**Steven Morocco**, 2 Bel Isle Way, appeared to speak via Zoom and stated that he does not understand why Ordinance 6-24-01 was not voted on this evening. This is kicking the can down the road again. You should be voting on this this evening. CLCF has raised over \$1.3 million for a new addition. They could use that \$50,000 to finish the project they started and the Council kicking this can down the road does no good to anybody. Besides that, there is money for Schools in there, money for Brayton Ave. You are spending \$4.4 million or whatever it is, on a pool that is going to be used six or seven weeks a year. There is a facility that is used basically year round not only for CLCF, not only for the high schools, but there is a walking track around it, there are picnic benches. The most important thing is your attorney should be here saying why this is being kicked down the road. He is very disappointed in everyone. This should have been voted on last month or should be voted on tonight.

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

### A. Ordinances

**08-24-04**      **ORDINANCE** Ratifying School Committee's Collective Bargaining Agreement with the National Association of Government Employees, Local RI-153, Custodial Unit; Pursuant to Charter Sec. 11.02.1.

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

#### Under Discussion:

**Chair** asked Director Zidelis if he had anything to share with the Committee about the fiscal impact.

**Director Zidelis** stated that he has not had the opportunity to speak with Director Balducci so he will refrain from commenting until he does.

**Michael Crudale**, School Chief Human Resource Officer, appeared to speak and stated that Mr. Balducci could not attend in person this evening, but is present on Zoom.

**Chair** asked if there is a fiscal note attached to this. Director Zidelis stated that he has the contract, but has not seen the fiscal note. Chair indicated that the Council does need to know what the fiscal impact is.

**Mr. Crudale** stated that the fiscal impact was sent to the Clerk with the CBA.

**Clerk** indicated that the fiscal note was received, but there was a problem with the link.

**Chair** stated that the confusion is that the fiscal note is not linked on the docket. He asked if Mr. Balducci would like to add anything to this. Chair also asked Solicitor if this can be referred out of Committee to the full Council with a recommendation to approve pending the receipt of a fiscal note.

Solicitor stated that his understanding of the way the Charter and the Ordinance reads, the language he believes is, it states “it shall not be considered”. The question is what is meant by the term “considered”. Does it mean vote, does it mean discussion? He is confused and asked if a fiscal note has been prepared and is this just a scrivener’s error just of the attachment. Mr. Crudale stated that a fiscal note was provided to the Clerk. Solicitor stated that his interpretation and his opinion, the term “considered” suggests to him is that no action should be taken.

**Chair** asked for a two-minute recess.

**Solicitor** stated that after reviewing the Charter and Ordinance provisions, language states “prior to consideration of the Council”. It does not seem like it would apply at the Committee level, however, it is not going to be able to be legally voted on or possibly discussed without the fiscal note being attached prior to the Council meeting.

**Chair** stated that there is a fiscal note and the Committee members were able to review it during this meeting. Based on the Solicitor’s comment, he is comfortable with this coming out of Committee. These are workers who have sacrificed on behalf of the City to help the City and he thinks this is a fair contract based on the fiscal impact that we have this evening.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** stated that she thinks the custodians work the hardest and get the least as far as compensation goes. Her question is not directed at that. This \$1 million, is this something that is going to have to come directly from the City or is there some plan within the School Department to cover some of this? Mr. Crudale stated that for year one, it is budgeted and then as long as the Schools are appropriately funded for year two and three, it is within the budget for those years.

**Joseph Balducci**, School Chief Financial Officer, appeared to speak via Zoom and stated that the first year of the contract, 24-25 has been built into their budget and can be supported. As a District, they will always look internally to take care of their contractual obligations with minimal impact to the City, but he can’t guarantee this evening, that may not happen. Their two biggest revenue sources are both the City of Cranston and the State of Rhode Island. With continued appropriate funding, the answer is, yes, these contracts can be afforded. This particular bargaining unit, when we were struggling several years ago, between salary, concessions and reduced benefits, they were impacted negatively approximately 30%. Over the last few contract cycles, they have been trying to get them on a better footing and he believes this contract does that. These people are not your typical custodians. They go above and beyond.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** stated that she agrees that the custodians are some of the hardest workers in the City of Cranston School Department, but she just wants to put it out there for everyone else that this \$1 million is going to have to come from somewhere through 2027. She noted that if this is approved, cuts may have to be made if the extra money is not coming into the City or taxes would have to be raised. We have to think about that now and start planning for it now on both the City and School Department side.

**Councilman Wall** concurred that this bargaining unit, over the years, gave money up for the benefit of the City and the benefit of the School Department and they had not gotten anything in return for over a decade. They do work hard and go above and beyond and it is time we have to take care of them. He will definitely be in favor of this.

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

**08-24-05 ORDINANCE** Ratifying School Committee's Collective Bargaining Agreement with Rhode Island Laborers District Council 1322, Tradespeople/Mechanic Unit; Pursuant to Charter Sec. 11.02.1.

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

Under Discussion:

**Chair** indicated that the fiscal note is attached to this Ordinance.

**Mr. Crudale** stated that this is a total of eleven members. There are eight tradespeople that consist of two Electricians, two HVAC people, two Plumbers and two Carpenters. There are also three Mechanics that handle their very large fleet of large and small buses.

**Mr. Balducci** stated that the \$2 is an approximate 5% increase and the second year, the \$1.25 is an approximate 3.2% increase in percentage.

**Mr. Crudale** noted that this is a two year contract as opposed to three year and that was at the Union's request.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked if this is already budgeted for. Mr. Crudale stated that year one is budgeted. Year two is similar to Mr. Balducci's comments on the last CBA. They try to budget internally first and then they look to the appropriations from both the City and the State.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** stated that her comments remain the same that as we go forward to the next year, we need to remember now that we are approving this and that the School Department does not know if they can cover it on their own and the City may have to come up with the money, so every time we approve something, we need to think forward on how we are going to pay for it because while the people deserve the money in both of these contracts, we are not planning a stream of income to cover it, then every year when we do the budget, it is going to be the same conversation of why we do not have the money for this so if we do not have extra money coming in then things are going to have to get cut somewhere. These employees are more than deserving of their raises, but we have to think about that.

**Councilman Ferri** stated that he would be in favor of approving this this evening and if you have good employees, you have to pay them a fair wage.

**Council President Marino** stated that she appreciates the hard work that the School Department did in negotiating this contract and the preceding contract that was discussed. It is nice to give them the compensation that they deserve given the sacrifices that they made. It is not lost on anyone in this room or prior Councils the need to have a balanced budget, the need to afford the increases that we are going to be paying our employees throughout the City and the School Department has had a good track record of recent years. She trusts Mr. Balducci and his years of experience with balancing the School Department's budget and everyone within the School Administration and will be in favor of this this evening.

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

B. Resolutions

*None.*

C. *Real Estate Tax Abatements*

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

D. *Motor Vehicle Tax Abatements*

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

E. *Tangible Tax Abatements*

*None.*

F. *Tax Assessment Board of Review assessed December 31, 2022.*  
*(Informational Only – No Vote will be taken)*

*None.*

G. *Tax Interest Waiver Approvals*

*None.*

H. *Tax Interest Waiver Denials*

*None.*

**VIII. COUNCIL MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS**

**Councilman Donegan:**

- *Grants for Lead Law Enforcement*

**Peter Asen**, RI Field Office Director of US Department of Housing and Urban Development, appeared to speak and presented a packet of a slide presentation. He stated that in terms of lead enforcement, he did reach out to Chairman Donegan on his recent Resolution just to let him know that across the Country have paired kind of the stick enforcement with the carrot of using federal funding to help remediate lead hazards in their communities and he wanted share some opportunities available and his Office Field Policy and Management is front door of HUD in the State of Rhode Island. Their office in downtown Providence is open to the public and they are also reachable by phone and e-mail. He explained each slide of his presentation.

**Chair** stated that in terms of the older adult home modification program, it is one of the ones that has not opened up yet this year. He asked if there is any insight of when that might happen. Mr. Asen stated that he does not have direct exact knowledge of the timing of that. He thinks it could be soon. In speaking to the Office, in terms of some of these other Grants that they seek to really get them out earlier in the calendar year. This year there was some staffing issues and other challenges, but there is certainly potential that in 2025, some of those Grants that he just pointed out that closed recently, could actually open up sooner so preparing to pursue any of those would be appropriate at this point. Chair asked how much communication goes on between the Office and the League of Cities and Towns about these opportunities or with the Infrastructure Bank or local entities to encourage applications. Mr. Asen stated that the National Office really does not do that, but his local Office, that is a big part of what they want to do. With these recent Grants that did come out, he sent an e-mail to several of the larger Cities that he knows in the future he would like to do more with. He recently did a presentation to the League of Cities and Towns about all the things HUD is doing in the State as a whole, but he is certainly open to any suggestions that anyone has around other ways we can do outreach around some of this.

**Chair** stated that each year he brings up the issue of lead poison and each year we are going to continue, hopefully someone else continues to bring up the issue of lead poisoning because it is still an issue and it is going to still continue to be an issue until we do something to eradicate it and the funding is there, we just need to have the will to get it. He hopes someone will continue with that.

**Councilwoman Renzulli** asked if there is a way to tell us exactly how we can subscribe to get the updates on the various Grants. Mr. Asen stated that these are Federal Grants, but certainly you can go to grants.gov and if you want to be notified about certain departments and certain things. HUD.gov/lead brings you to the page for the Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes and they have their own specific kind of e-mail newsletter.

#### **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Rosalba Zanni  
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees