

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

PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

Regular meeting of the Public Works Committee was held on Thursday, April 11, 2024 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 P.M. by the Vice-Chair.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli
Councilman Robert J. Ferri
Councilman John P. Donegan
Councilman Richard G. Campopiano
Councilman Daniel R. Wall
Councilwoman Aniece Germain, Vice-Chair
Council Vice-President Lammis J. Vargas, Chair (appeared at 6:15 p.m.)
Council President Jessica M. Marino

Also Present: Councilman Christopher G. Paplauskas
Justin Mateus, Acting Public Works Director
John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor
Stephen Angell, City Council Legal Counsel
Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees
Heather Finger, Stenographer

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- **Approval of minutes of the March 14, 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 March 14, 2024 meeting and they stand approved as recorded. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER

Council President Marino: (Cont. from 3/14/2024)

- ***Update from Administration regarding the status of the City's participation in the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank's Community Septic System Loan Program***

Acting Director Mateus stated that as of Today, the Governor's Office, RI Infrastructure Bank and RI Housing Authority will be open for application starting on Monday.

Council President Marino asked if that means that we will have it on our City website ready for residents to apply for on Monday. Acting Director Mateus stated that that is correct.

Council President Marino asked that this item can be removed from the agenda.

- *Flooding events from September to current throughout the City; status of FEMA, State and other assistance; remediation and mitigation efforts*

Acting Director Mateus stated that he has nothing to add to this topic.

Council President Marino stated that this has been discussed before, the intent of keeping it on the agenda is because this is a continuing type of event that is reoccurring so we are giving the public an opportunity to be heard on this ongoing issue and because we are also concerned about what we are going to do as a City to remediate these problems knowing that a lot of solutions are long-term and some of the solutions or contributing factors are short-term. In terms of the short-term factors, it has come up quite a bit multiple times. Some residents saying whether it is a riverbank, a culvert or it is underneath a bridge, there is debris that needs removal to help mitigate the flooding problem and she knows the City has gone out to remove some of the debris, but some of them have been multiple calls for the same exact issue. She does not know whether in fact it is being communication from Constituent Affairs to Public Works. The follow-up, reach out from constituents on these are not later, not days later, sometimes it is a week later. What is it that is going on with respect to that type of issue of removal? Acting Director Mateus stated that the debris-born objects of waterways are unique situations. They are not something that we have specialized equipment to handle, so often, it requires creative approaches to get these things out of the waterway. That takes time to coordinate to get the equipment on site and to give it a couple of goes because with these creative solutions, they are not perfect, so you have to put a little bit of manpower in there.

Council President Marino stated that she would like to think that the Public Works Department has a schedule of cleaning the culverts and in prone areas being caught up with debris and flooding and look at whether the schedule needs to be changed to be done more frequently. Acting Director Mateus stated that before the rain events happen, they do proactively go out and look at our low lying areas and the Highway Department will look to make sure structures are cleared, including culverts and catch basins. Once the storm is over, they go out to those low lying areas, but they rely heavily on residents calling in and letting us know if there is an issue there and then we often expeditiously go out there and take care of those issues. Council President Marino asked if the City has actual equipment, machines or trucks that go out and clean the actual drains. Acting Director Mateus stated that the City does not. We have a clamshell truck, but that is not the truck that is used for that operation. We have a contract with a contractor that goes out and cleans the catch basins proactively.

Council President Marino stated that there is one component that she is not hearing enough of and that is what, we as a City, are we going to do about the ongoing issue of disturbance next to wetlands, the capacity in which wetlands can handle the increased flow due to development and just the nature of the storms themselves and how we are seeing flooding in areas that never flooded before. The Municipal Resiliency Program is great to facilitate us to have that long-term plan and she wants to know that we are committed to doing that. Also, she wants to make sure that, we as a City, are having the discussions that we need with our neighboring Cities because you cannot fix the problem long-term or short-term if we are isolated in fixing it in one location. She, herself, has had some discussions with some neighboring Cities and Towns and she is hopeful that we can partner to it a minimum as one thing because there are many tools that we can have in our toolbox to do an updated study of the Pawtuxet River. There is funding available for it. There will be more to come on that issue. She has taken some

steps along those lines and with some potential funding opportunity that potentially may not cost us a dime if certain funding becomes available to us with the D.O.T. itself has funding available for those types of studies. She can share some of the information she has obtained about the Pawtuxet Rivert, which has a big impact on the City overall. She asked that some photos of past floods be shared on the screen for everyone to see.

Councilman Campopiano echoed Council President Marino's concerns. He stated that being in Western Cranston, we know to start with the water table, which is extremely high and as we build more and more, the more undesirable properties is now being built on and affecting that. Pippin Orchard Rd. is starting to flood now. He is really concerned with the building that is going on in that area and he wants to make sure it is addressed, the water table, the way the culverts are built, the way the water is being directed because he does not want to be looking down one hundred years from now and find out the government has to buy out all these houses because they are flooded out. He asked if the City is being reactionary with cleaning out of these areas or is it on a schedule. Acting Director Mateus stated that before any rain event, the Highway Department goes out and clear any of our low lying flood prone areas of the City. Once the storm is over and the drainage has happened, that is when we rely on residents to call us with any problems. Councilman Campopiano stated that maybe in the near future, we should look at purchasing equipment needed so we can be more on spot in clearing these areas out. Acting Director Mateus stated that the equipment is a Vactor truck. We used to have one and he believes it broke down and no longer have it. The equipment is one piece of the puzzle. There is also personnel that has to have special training to do this type of work. It is more than buying the truck that would go into that type of effort. Those trucks are approximately \$250,000 each.

Council President Marino asked if there is anyone on staff that has licensing training. Acting Director Mateus stated no.

Councilwoman Renzulli asked if it is possible to have a cost analysis of how much we are spending on vendors versus how much a machine costs and the costs to certify someone for this. She also would like to know if there is a list that could be provided to the Council of the areas that the City specifically goes out to proactively do the cleanup in advance. Acting Director Mateus stated that if Councilwoman Renzulli is referring to the low lying areas, those are documented in a word doc and can be shared.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Drake Patten, 684 Natick Ave., appeared to speak and presented a handout of an email she sent to Acting Director Mateus on January 2, 2024 and received no response. She addressed the flooding issues on her property and surrounding neighbors' properties. She asked that pictures of her property be shown on the screen for everyone to see and stated that there has been huge amounts of damage from the floods.

On motion by Councilman Ferri, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to accept this document into the record. Motion passed unanimously.

Gavel was passed to Chairwoman Vargas.

VI. NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

PETITION of Narragansett Electric and Verizon New England Inc. to install new pole, P3-1, on Summit Dr.

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

Council President Marino:

- ***Discussion regarding the Status of the citywide bridge and culvert inspections performed by Pare Corporation, including the report, its findings and plans***

Acting Director Mateus stated that investigations are complete as of last week. Report is expected in approximately a month from now.

Council President Marino asked that this be placed on the May agenda for update.

Council President Marino asked if there were any other components to their inspection as part of the inspection. Acting Director Mateus stated that the whole outcome of this project is for the City to come up with a five-year maintenance program for all of our bridges and culverts. That is what we are getting in the report, schedules and approximate costs of construction. Council President Marino asked Acting Director Mateus if he provided them with a list of all the bridges and culverts for them to go out and inspect. Acting Director Mateus stated that they did, yes. Council President Marino asked that the Council be provided with this list because that will facilitate the Council when communicating with the residents when they are asking questions.

Council Vice-President Vargas:

- ***Playground Update:***
 - ***Status on Edgewood Playground and Smith Street Playground's Can we expect the Commercial Playground in the Capital Project Plan***

Acting Director Mateus stated that what he is hearing for the first time is as to Edgewood Highlands, the matting and the equipment was removed by Public Works and Parks and Recreation is hiring someone to finish that demo next week while the students are on break and the installation of the new playground equipment will follow that and should be completed within a month.

Council Vice-President Vargas stated that she is really trying to get a timeline in terms of Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3 and if we are going to have a playground open before start of the new School year in September. She stated that the Administration knew these questions were on the agenda this evening and, no disrespect to Acting Director Mateus, but she feels there should have been more detailed information because it is no use if we are adding this to the agenda and we are getting absolutely no response.

Acting Director Mateus stated that as to the Smith St. playground, the new equipment will be installed over the weekend and is scheduled for completion by end of April.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked what the status is of all the other playgrounds that we allocated funds for. Acting Director Mateus stated that he just referenced the ones that were specifically listed on the agenda. Council Vice-President Vargas asked that an email be sent to the entire Council of where we are on all the playgrounds that the Council allocated those funds for. On the Edgewood playground and Smith St. playground, she would like to know who the contractor was that it was awarded to and possibly a timeline in terms of the phases of the breakdown of our playgrounds. She would like this information for all the playgrounds.

Councilman Ferri asked if it is the Public Works Department or Parks and Recreation Department that is responsible for the playgrounds. Acting Director Mateus stated that it is Parks and Recreation. Councilman Ferri asked why someone from Parks and Recreation is not responding to the Council Vice-President's requests repeatedly to answer these questions. Council Vice-President Vargas stated that she has sent an email, which she received no response from.

- **Itri Park:**
 - *How much has the City spent to date (including the cost/amount paid to Al Engineering, Tower Construction, any overtime in DPW or city departments if any on this project)*
 - *What is the total cost of the project?*
 - *The total amount of money received from the federal and state?*

Acting Director Mateus addressed Phase I and gave following breakdown of the what the City has spent to date, including construction and design, with no Overtime for City Departments: Out of City expenses - \$921,520.78 of Capital Bond Funds and \$841,000 in Federal and State funds has been utilized for a total of \$1,762,520.78. He gave following breakdown of the \$841,000: \$291,000 in Federal Grants, \$400,000 from D.E.M. and \$150,000 from RI Commerce.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked what is included in Phase I. Acting Director Mateus stated design and construction of the park.

Council Vice-President Vargas addressed Phase II and asked what the cost is and what was included. Acting Director Mateus stated that, although not on the agenda this evening, it is the streetscape portion of Knightsville. That is roads, sidewalks, street trees and lumineers, everything that you would see in the public right of way, such as benches, trash bins, flag pole, trees and lighting. The cost for Phase II is approximately \$3.285 million.

Solicitor stated that he does not see any Phase number or streetscape listed on the agenda and cautioned continued discussion on this.

Council Vice-President Vargas stated that it is her mistake, she should have not stated "Itri Park Project" on the agenda. It should have stated "Knightsville Project". This is where she is trying to get the costs, dollar amounts, total of what has been spent. If this cannot be discussed this evening, she is fine with that, it can be continued.

Solicitor stated that the way it is worded on the agenda is limited to Itri Park. Going beyond that, would be an Open Meetings issue.

Attorney Angell stated that he knows what Council Vice-President Vargas is driving at is a broader topic. He stated to Council Vice-President Vargas that she would want to make sure that her agenda topic matches the name of the project itself that way it draws in everything she wants it to.

Council Vice-President Vargas stated that with the Finance Chair's permission, she would like this added to the next Finance Committee agenda and she will work on the language with Legal Counsel. Councilman Donegan stated that that is fine with him.

- *What was the date of the change in the outdoor dining plan?*

No discussion was held.

- ***Street Sweeping:***
 - *When will it start this year*

Acting Director Mateus stated that they have started, first pass is on the main roads and then will go West to East this year and then do the main roads again.

Councilman Donegan asked if Acting Director Mateus can follow up with a general idea of when each Ward will be swept so the Council can relay that information to the residents when inquiries come in. acting Director Mateus stated that he will try to get as much as an accurate schedule as he can, although it is subject to change.

- ***US Dept. of Transportation Grant Opportunity for: Delineators on Narragansett Blvd. Walking/bike path***

Council Vice-President Vargas asked if there is any appetite on the City side. She stated that she reached out to the Council Grant Writer and she is certainly more than willing to help, but it takes partnership where we would need collaboration from the City's end to assist in any potential Grants so that she is also able to execute her job and being able to provide us with any type of funding and assistance. She asked if there is any opportunity here. Acting Director Mateus stated that if the Grant Writer would like to send him the RFP for the USDOT Grant, he will take a look at it and see what is applicable. Council Vice-President Vargas reminded Acting Director Mateus that it was sent to him on April 3rd in the afternoon. Acting Director Mateus stated that he will check his emails and look at the RFP and check out the applicability of it.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees