

(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, May 16, 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 Chair.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Councilman Robert J. Ferri
Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli
Councilman John P. Donegan
Councilman Richard D. Campopiano
Councilman Daniel Wall
Councilwoman Kristen E. Haroian, Vice-Chair
Council Vice-President Lammis J. Vargas, Chair
Council President Jessie M. Marino, Ex-Officio

Also Present: Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff (arrived at 6:10 p.m.)
John Verdecchia, Assistant City Solicitor
Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees
Meredith Potter, Stenographer

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- **Approval of minutes of the April 11, 2024 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 April 11, 2024 meeting and they stand approved as recorded. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER

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*

Council President Marino stated that she does not see anyone from the Administration present and asked the Chair if anyone has reached out to her indicating that no one would be present this evening. Chair stated that no one has reached out to her and she asked if Solicitor has any information. Solicitor stated that he believes Director Moretti will be attending.

Chair asked for a motion to take the agenda out of order and take Public Comment until Director Moretti arrives.

On motion by Council President Marino, seconded by Councilman Wall, it was voted to take agenda out of order. Motion passed on a vote of 7-1. The following being recorded a voting “aye”: Councilwoman Renzulli, Councilmen Donegan, Campopiano, Wall, Councilwoman Haroian, Council Vice-President Vargas and Council President Marino -7. The following being recorded as voting “nay”: Councilman Ferri -1.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Susan Blake, 173 Grand Ave., appeared to speak regarding the Budlong Pool and stale bids. She stated that the bids were open in early March for the Budlong Pool Project. The lowest bid was approximately \$400,000 over what we have to spend on the pool. That was the lowest bid and we are beyond the 60 days point on the opening of the bid so she suggested, if someone was present from the Administration, fresh bids, since prices change. Any revision to the design specs on the open bid to lower the cost constitutes changes in the actual bid and should be rebid in the vein of being transparent. If you change the bid specs to make it affordable, you have changed the bid and everyone should have the opportunity to quote on the new specs. She questioned how it is that a request on March 21, 2024 from the RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission specifically requesting a cost breakdown from the City on two critical matters and are still unanswered. The first one was they wanted a cost breakdown on the Federal Hill Group’s proposed cost to update and fix the pool for \$2.5 - \$2.8 million, that was in February of 2022. The other thing they wanted was a cost breakdown from Weston and Samson on the proposed cost to replace the pool for \$9 million. Nineteen months later, those breakdowns have not been provided nor made available to the public even under a specific public records request for them. How is it that on May 8th, a letter from the RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission says that they still have not received the supporting documentation from the City, but that the City claims that to fix the pool would not be “economically feasible or prudent” is believable? They accept unsubstantiated claims as fact, why is that? The same letter also notes that Weston and Samson report on the pool from August 2023 did not include water pressure testing on the pool or its filtration system. It also states that the same report was based on a visual inspection. That same report states that there were no depth markers when in fact there were two sets clearly visible right through the fence, that is a red flag. In her opinion, that report is not worth the paper that is written on. It is substantially based on hearsay from the Federal Hill Group study. Mark Saccoccio, the Architect whom the City awarded a \$350,000 design job on this tiny pool, had the audacity to stand before this Committee last Fall proclaiming that the new tiny pool would be the envy of every City. We can all see that the pool holds precipitation year after year without any problem, but we are supposed to believe that it only leaks chlorinated water. That is ridiculous. She asked that the council ask the difficult questions with your Committee Members and always question authority because if you just let it go, then you are complicit. Quoting long-term City Solicitor, Evan Kirshenbaum from last August Council meeting, he stated, “People elect you not to sit here and listen, they elect you to sit here and do”.

IV. COMMITTEE BUSINESS MATTERS CARRIED OVER (Cont.)

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*

Director Moretti stated that the Pare Group, that was contracted to do all the bridge and culverts inspections, have completed their field work. They will be preparing a report that summarizes the priorities, the work they recommend being completed along with the priorities and estimated costs. That will take time, probably into early July timeframe and expect to see that report. There was a culvert at Hillside Farms that required immediate attention that could have posed a danger. Structural deficiencies have received temporary repairs to last two to three years. The preview of the report that the contractor has discussed with Public Works indicated no other substantial danger or concerns that need immediate attention. The Mayor is charging them to develop a plan that will be financially affordable to the City to address matters over time versus having surprises.

Council President Marino stated to Director Moretti that last time when this issue came up, he indicated that he thought the report would be done by May. She asked if there is a particular reason why that has changed. Director Moretti stated that nothing has changed. We are not even guaranteeing early July. It could be June or a matter of three to four weeks from now, but we do not have a guarantee or a contract with a specific deadline so no need for alarm.

Council President Marino stated that as to the expense of the report and she asked if that put out to bid or was this a specific request to them? Director Moretti stated that he does not have the answer to that question. His speculation is that they were a pre-approved engineering firm, but he does not recall it coming up to a bidding process. Council President Marino asked that she be notified if it actually went out to bid or if this was just a selection and how it was that it came to be that it was selected. She stated that with respect to the report, she asked what the expectations to the components to that report were? Director Moretti stated that he believes he did mention that developing the cost and the priorities so we could work it into a long-germ financial plan. He would be happy to forward to all nine Council Members a copy of the contract. Council President Marino asked if they are going to be conducting any work that is necessary relative to these repairs or will those specifics itemized areas of repair be put out to bid so that competing firms can compete for that work and we can get the lowest price for the City? Director Moretti stated that he does not know if they are a contracting firm or an engineering design firm. He thinks it is the latter, so he can't answer that question, but if they are a qualified company and it happens to be that they can do the work and they comply with that process, they should be considered and not precluded. Council President Marino stated that in terms of any work that has been done for repairs, she asked who has performed that work, was it Pare or was it done in-house or did we put it out to bid. Director Moretti stated that it was done in-house. The Highway Department performed the repairs and did an admirable job and probably saved the City a lot of money.

Council President Marino indicated to the actual list of bridges and culverts that were inspected and stated that since they have completed the work, she knows as a Council, they are still in the dark as to specifically which bridges and culverts were inspected. She asked Director Moretti if he has an actual list of those bridges and culverts that was asked of the company to inspect. Director Moretti stated that he knows that DPW has it and he believes it was shared. He can certainly share that list.

Council President Marino stated that while there has not been any formal report that has been compiled by Pare, she asked if they have provided to the City any other previous written report or assessment relative to the needed repairs based on their field inspections. Director Moretti stated that he is not aware of any. Council President Marino asked Director Moretti who would be aware of any if those were provided. Would they be sent to him or would they be sent to someone else within the City? Director Moretti stated that it would be DPW. Council President Marino asked Director Moretti when the City reached out to them to commence this and when did they begin? Director Moretti stated that this is not on the agenda and he is not prepared to answer the question. He can't expand on something that was not requested with not having the opportunity to prepare. Council President Marino stated that just for clarity, the agenda item states "Discussion regarding the status of the City-wide bridge and culvert inspections performed by Pare including the report, its findings and plans". Director Moretti stated to Council President Marino that she is getting into procurement. It's beyond findings and plans. Council President Marino asked Director Moretti if he knows when they started their field inspections. Director Moretti stated, no, he does not recall, possibly March, but he is not sure.

Councilman Ferri asked if our Hazard Mitigation Plan is updated to a current status. Director Moretti stated that this is not on the docket and he does not have that answer.

Chair asked that Director Moretti provide this information to the Clerk via e-mail for the City Council.

Chair asked that this item be continued to next month's meeting.

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

Director Moretti stated that the City is not responsible nor coordinates the responsibilities of the various State and Federal agencies, however, the Mayor sponsored a public forum where various public agencies came forward that could offer assistance to the flooding victims of the February timeframe. Since then there is approximately 400 residents who have taken advantage of aid or assistance through FEMA or SBA and to the upwards of claims of \$1.6 million and the SBA and FEMA applications from the flooding events will close May 20th.

Council President Marino stated that in terms of the remediation and mitigation efforts and State and other assistance, she asked where we are along the lines of the Municipal Resiliency Program and making any efforts along those lines for mitigation and remediation going forward. Director Moretti stated that through the Budget process, there are some Capital projects that we are planning. These flooding issues have been pervasive for decades and as everyone would agree, the weather has changed lately and the flooding events are frequent. There is some long-term planning that is happening. Some of the planning is addressing the watershed issues, applying for Grants along with what we have in Capital. Director Mateus enumerated last time that we are in contact with the Federal Government and they are doing the work, but we are advising in their efforts to take residences along the Pocasset River and they should be up and running with that program as they stated approximately a year ago and that was about nine months ago that was not the case. They are still seeking final approvals for those efforts and we are told this time that those efforts have begun to afford people the opportunity that their properties could be taken. The Mayor is seeking some emergency funding. In the Pocasset River there is some blockages. We have witnessed three areas of the Pocasset near Fletcher Ave. where there are trees down that could be blocking the flow of water and we are asking for emergency funds to at least take out those blockage points.

Council President Marino asked if we have a pending Grant through the Municipal Resiliency Program relative to the flooding for remediation mitigation efforts. Director Moretti stated that there is a Grant application for the Garden St. area where there is a watershed that is affected beginning at City Hall down. Council President Marino stated that she wants to be certain that we are making every effort to take up these opportunities for funding relative to the well-needed remediation and mitigation efforts long-term with respect to flooding because as everyone knows and will agree, these are not one-time rare occurrences any longer and these efforts are needed and the funding is available out there. The Council Grant Writer is well-suited and well-equipped and eager to assist in that capacity. She hopes that those resources, administratively, are being applied to make sure that we accomplish those goals for the City. Director Moretti stated that the Council Grant Writer does not compile the information. He does not want the Council to be under the impression that the Grant Writer is here actually sitting in the building working with us. The work falls upon the Administration and often times the Department of Public Works.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Taken earlier in the meeting.

VI. NEW MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

Councilman Ferri:

- **Budlong Pool Bids**
 - *Update on the status of the bids on the Budlong Pool.*
 - *Seeing all bids were over the allotted funds, what is the plan? How far along is the plan?*
- **Budlong Pool HUD Grant**
 - *Based on the requirements of the Grant, what steps are being taken to sustain the grant and what is the timetable?*

Director Moretti stated that currently funds available are \$750,000 for the Congressional Grant, \$4 million have to do with the use of ARPA funds for total of \$4.75 million has been allocated. On March 5th, BOCAP opened bids and there were five bids and lowest bid was for basic construction excluding engineering which would probably be approximately \$350,000 and that construction bid was \$4.76 million, next highest bid was \$4.94 million. The Engineering Department is looking at ways of coming up with what they call or refer to as deduct or eliminations referring to items that can possibly be done inhouse rather than go out to bid. The target is sometime in early June to develop the list of deducts to be able to have more of an affordable plan. As to how far along this is, we are in the process of executing an MOU with the RI Historical Preservation Commission and that was proceeding well in finding ways to memorialize the pool house. We were well on its way and the group, Cranston Forward, asserted what they refer as consulting party status. With that, basically us adding another step in the involvement in the process to bring that group up to speed where we were with it. It did delay approximately two months to satisfy the concerns of that group to participate in the process and last week a letter was received from the Historical Preservation Commission for us to move forward. So, that participation has taken place and to get the MOU in place will take a little bit of time. At the same time, we are working in finishing up the deducts. He does not anticipate in seeing a pool this year given that extended timeframe. He hopes to move along in the next few months having an MOU in place and coming up with enough value engineering to be able to award the bid.

Councilman Ferri asked why we weren't looking at deduct from the beginning. If this is something that we are capable of doing, why wouldn't it be something we would do anyway and save the \$400,000 from the beginning instead of working backwards? Director Moretti stated that the intention was to move forward and have a pool built sometime this season. Now that given this involvement, it is not going to happen so we are afforded not going to have a pool. If we have a pool ready in December or March of next year, it is not really going to matter. That is an example of where the City can be doing some work ourselves where before we were moving forward to try to have a pool ready for this Summer. Councilman Ferri asked if we are considering putting it out to bid again to see if there is someone that could build it for \$4 million? Director Moretti stated that we owe it to the bidder. We could go out to bid, but likely would be higher and not lower. Probably in the best interest of the City to stay with the bid we have. We have a thorough bidding process. Now that everyone knows what the bids are, he is not sure how much lower people are going to be bidding at. He thinks the City runs an equal risk if not a greater risk of paying more money and not being able to get the project done.

Council Vice-President Vargas:

- *Overnight Parking of Trailers on Broad Street; "No Overnight Parking" signage*

Chair stated that she has sent the Administration e-mails regarding this and has not heard back in terms of the overnight trailers that are parked in front of the Cemetery outside the charging station across from the Dollar General. There are trailers parked overnight all weekend and there are trailers that are not moving before the overnight parking Ordinance and are there from Friday all the way until Monday morning because she has purposely driven by there at all times to get a sense of whether these trailers have moved. Residents are reaching out to her about this. There is an Ordinance in place already for no overnight parking and does not believe there is any signage there. Councilman Ferri stated that the signs are supposed to state 'no commercial parking'. That Ordinance was passed approximately two months ago. Chair stated that the trailers are from out of State and are starting to pile up all the way down Broad St. at certain times of the month. She asked if the Administration can start by reaching out to Dollar General because one of them is theirs and then if not, can we go out to see if the plates can be run and send notice to the owners? Maybe signage is a start before tagging them and see what happens. Director Moretti stated that as to the signs, apparently because there is a lot of space between the recent Ordinances, they are on order and we are expecting delivery soon. He can check to see if we can accelerate something. He can also see if we can stop by the businesses to see if these trailers belong to them.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees