

Kenneth J. Hopkins
Mayor

Beth Ashman, MCP, AICP
Acting Planning Director

Steven Frias
President

Robert Coupe
Vice-President



Thomas Barbieri
David Exter
Kathleen Lanphear
Lisa Mancini
Nicole Renzulli

Frank Corrao P.E.
Acting Public Works Director

Thomas Zidelis
Finance Director

CITY PLAN COMMISSION

City Hall – 3rd Floor, Room 309
869 Park Avenue – Cranston, RI 02910

MINUTES

CITY HALL – 3rd FLOOR, COUNCIL CHAMBER 6:00PM – TUESDAY, MARCH 5, 2025

CALL TO ORDER

Commission President Frias called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. in the Council Chamber.

The following Commissioners were in attendance for the meeting: Commission President Steven Frias, Commission Vice-President Robert Coupe, Kathleen Lanphear, David Exter, Lisa Mancini, and ex-officio member Thomas Zidelis, Director of the Finance Department. Nichole Renzulli, Thomas Barbieri, and ex-officio member Frank Corrao, Acting Director of the Department of Public Works were absent.

The following members of the City Planning Department were in attendance: Beth Ashman, ACIP, Acting Planning Director; and Grace Brownell, Planner Technician.

PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION.

Upon a motion made by Commission Vice-President Coupe and seconded by Commissioner Zidelis, The City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to appoint Commissioner Barbieri to serve on the Cranston Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission.

CAPTIAL BUDGET & IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM FY26-30

Final Draft Presentation and discussion with Department heads. City Plan Commission may vote on recommendation to City Council.

Commission President Frias stated under the charter, each of the City Departments and Commissions submit requests for capital projects for the next five fiscal years. It is then the duty of the Commission to review proposed capital projects with reference to their necessity, their conformity with the Comprehensive Plan, sound principals of city planning, and the financial resources of the City.

Mr. Fris invited Commissioner Zidelis, the Director of Finance, to comment on the City's ability to financially handle these projects.

- Mr. Zidelis stated that overall, this is a very aggressive Capital Budget and Improvement Program, particularly in the Departments of the Public Works and Fire. The proposed budget accounts for worst case scenarios. The city is applying for grants, and in the event the city receives such grants, there will no longer be a need to borrow to funds to pay for these projects in the capital budget. As an example, he noted that the Fire Department has a proposed budget line for new computer equipment but also concurrently applied for a grant. In August 2026, the city will only go to the bond market if it needs funds to pay for the projects listed in the capital budget. Mr. Zidelis concluded he has no concern over the city's ability meet its financial obligations.

Commission President Frias requested clarification from Mr. Zidelis that the city has the financial resources

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for these projects, funding these projects would be consistent with prudent financial practices, and the city would not be excessively in debt.

In response, Mr. Zidelis provided positive confirmation.

Commission President Frias invited the Commission to engage in discussion:

Vice-President Coupe inquired as to whether new bonds will be authorized for the spending on the proposed capital projects. In response, Mr. Zidelis stated there may be some new bond authorizations. for infrastructure.

Commission President Frias stated he requested updates from Mr. Zidelis in regard to net debt service for retiree obligations such as the OPEB and pension in addition to sewer. Mr. Frias stated based off the provided update, this year compared to the next two years it seems very stable.

Commission President Frias invited a representative from the School Department to present the departmental budget requests. Commissioner Zidelis stated Mr. Collins has left his post with the city and he will provide an overview for the School Department in the absence of Mr. Collins. He stated what is before the Commission is the finalization of last year's Capital Improvement Program, where \$76 million were authorized for the completion of the \$130 million worth of projects authorized by the general public three years ago. The balance of the \$40 million is in the approved FY2024-2025 budget with the \$10 million AES Charter School in the FY 2025-2026 budget.

Mr. Frias requested a status on the approved funding from FY2024-2025 for the purchase and renovation of the new property for the AES Charter School and if there are any concerns for the \$10 million being requested. Mr. Frias further inquired whether the city oversees the construction of school department projects such as the AES Charter School.

Commissioner Zidelis stated the City of Cranston is now the proud owner of 4 Sharpe Drive, and renovation work will commence as early as this summer. Mr. Zidelis stated in the event the charter school goes over the prescribed budget, there will be resources within the proceeds of the \$40 million school bond.

Commission President Frias invited the Commission to engage in comment.

- Lindsay Travares, Executive Director of the Apprenticeship and Exploration School stated she is present to answer any questions and thanked the Commission for their consideration for the request.

Commission President Frias invited a representative from the Recreation Department to present their departmental budget requests. Parks and Recreation Director, Steven Piscopiello presented such requests. Mr. Piscopiello stated the emphasis for the next four years is to try to upgrade the infrastructure across city facilities. Mr. Piscopiello discussed restoring Cranston Stadium and discussed some of its historical value. He also mentioned the need for an upgraded garbage truck.

Plan Commission President Frias invited the Commission to engage in discussion:

- Commissioner Lanphear requested clarification in regard to the last time the Cranston Stadium baseball field had been rehabilitated. Ms. Lanphear further requested clarification in regard to budget request for the proposed new Cranston High School East track and field complex.

In response, Mr. Piscopiello provided clarification that it has been twenty years since the last dugout upgrades. He indicated that the field itself will be upgraded this spring. He stated Cranston High School East presently does not have a track and field complex. Cranston Stadium has been considered a potential site for a track and field facility, and alternatives are being considered.

Commission President Frias inquired whether the track and field facility would be indoor or outdoor and what league the new proposed 60/90 diamond field within Western Cranston will serve.

In response, Mr. Piscopiello stated the proposed facility will be outdoor. He stated the 60/90 diamond field is a regulation sized baseball field for the high school division, and that the John H Chaffee Athletic and Recreation Complex is a potential viable location for the 60/90 diamond field.

Mr. Frias referenced the Comprehensive Plan, page 10-9 stating that our plan looks to the National Recreation and Park Association for standards on how many big and little-league facilities there should be,

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given the population. According to such standards, Cranston is currently over what is generally recommended for little league and big-league facilities. Mr. Frias requested clarification if the issue is not the amount but the location of facilities across the city.

Mr. Piscopiello confirmed that the need is due to the shifting population to Western Cranston and the increased participation of those who play baseball. He stated all baseball diamonds within Eastern Cranston are being utilized and cannot be repurposed.

Commission Vice-President Coupe inquired how realistic is it that a viable location can be found for the 60/90 Diamond Field. Mr. Piscopiello replied it is realistic to at least take a deeper dive into the possible locations. There are wetland constraints at the Hope Highlands Middle School location.

In regard to the dog park request, Kathleen Lanphear posed the question to Mr. Frias as to whether he would support a park in which dog owners can walk their dog to exercise and socialize with the community. Plan Commission Frias stated he does not see the necessity of a dog park as the project for the reasons that have been presented.

Commission President Frias invited a representative from the Fire Department to present. As for priorities for this fiscal year, Fire Chief, Robert Ryan stated his fire engines in Western Cranston need to be replaced in addition to the Department's computer infrastructure. He further asserted some stations need repair work.

Commission President Frias inquired as to whether the headquarters would be moved or renovated at its current location. Mr. Frias further inquired as to how much it costs the Fire Department to utilize training facilities each year. Mr. Ryan stated the intention is to move the headquarters to an undetermined location.

In regard to Mr. Frias' question on the cost to utilize the training facilities, he stated he is uncertain. Mr. Ryan said the Fire Department has never had any locations in Cranston designated for live burns and general training. Mr. Ryan stated there is a potential to share a facility with the Police Department in Cranston.

Commission President Frias requested Commissioner Zidelis present on the Public Works budget requests, in the absence of Acting Director, Commissioner Frank Corrao. Mr. Frias inquired as to whether there are any current identified locations for the proposed city hall annex. Commissioner Zidelis responded that after the opening of Gladstone Elementary School, there are three potential schools that will become available. In regard to vehicle requests, Mr. Zidelis indicated the bonding will match the useful life of the equipment.

Commission President Frias requested Commissioner Zidelis present the Police Department budget requests, in the absence of a police representative. Mr. Frias requested Commissioner Zidelis provide clarification on the SWAT bearcat vehicle request. In response, Mr. Zidelis stated the SWAT Bearcat vehicle is a very robust vehicle for situations in which there is a barricaded shooter

Mr. Frias stated that he has read numerous newspaper stories on the police range. He stated it is his understanding that the noise level produced from the Cranston Police Academy outdoor shooting range is consistent with the City's noise ordinances. Mr. Zidelis concurred that this was his understanding as well. Mr. Frias requested clarification that the city is now obtaining rifle noise suppressors. Mr. Zidelis stated that this is occurring and that the intent of purchasing noise suppressors is that they are expected to reduce noise pollution. Mr. Frias stated that it is his understating that the range is being used less and less by other police departments. Mr. Zidelis confirmed that this was also his understanding based on rental revenues.

Commission President Frias requested Commissioner Zidelis present on the Information Technology departmental budget requests, in the absence of a departmental representative. Mr. Zidelis stated the servers are at the end of their useful life. Mr. Zidelis stated the IT director has sought out grants for these items. In the event the city receives the cyber security grant, such items will be removed from next year's budget.

Commission President Frias requested Commissioner Zidelis present on the library budget request, in the absence of a departmental representative. Mr. Zidelis stated the city already has the cash that will be used for the proposed Auburn Library restroom renovations.

Commission President Frias opened the floor for the Commission to vote on each Department's budget requests submitted as part of the Proposed FY2026-2030 Capital Budget and Improvement Program:

School Departmental Requests:

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Mr. Frias explained that in the prior year the AES Charter School was a controversial item. He stated that he had questioned the necessity because they had not evaluated other alternatives such as the Arlington School or the fact that the Laborers Unions had not contributed financially to the project when the district charter school in Providence was not owned by the city. He stated at this time, he recognizes the building has been purchased and needs improvements, and therefore to approve the purchase of the building without funding its improvements would not make sense to the taxpayers. Mr. Frias stated he visited the facility and recognize that it needs improvement. He also stated that the large building where the construction work is done would need to be re-created at any alternative site such as Arlington. He further observed that construction program noise might be an issue for neighbors; thus, it appears this location may be the best choice. He still questioned why the Laborers Union has not contributed to this project but indicated that it is a decision of the School Department and the Administration that they do not require the Laborers to contribute. For these reasons, he stated he will be voting in favor.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Zidelis and seconded by Commissioner Mancini, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to approve all School Departmental requests.

Public Works Departmental Requests:

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Zidelis and seconded by Commissioner Exter, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to approve all Public Works Departmental Requests.

Police Departmental Requests:

Commission President Frias stated he will be voting to make an amendment to remove the request regarding the indoor shooting range, as he does not see it as a necessity. He stated the shooting range has been present since the 1950s. When people purchase their home in proximity to this range, they purchased their home knowing they would be in close proximity to a nuisance. He also noted that based on public information, school department officials have indicated they have not received complaints from students about the noise. He also noted the city has made efforts to reduce the noise at this location by reducing the usage of the shooting range by outside police departments and by purchasing rifle noise suppressors.

Upon a motion made by Commission President Frias and seconded by Commissioner Zidelis, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to amend to remove the shooting range from the capital budget request.

Upon a motion made by Plan Commission Vice-President Coupe and seconded by Commissioner Exter, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the Police Departmental Requests, as amended.

Fire Departmental Requests:

Commission President said he would like to see in the future a cost benefit analysis in regards to having a training facility.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Zidelis and seconded by Commissioner Mancini the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the Fire Departmental Requests.

Information Technology Departmental Requests:

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Zidelis and seconded by Plan Commission Vice-President Coupe the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the Informational Technology Requests.

Parks and Recreation Departmental Requests:

Commission President Frias stated he will be voting in favor of the 60/90 Diamond Field budget request due to the need of some recreational facilities in the western side of the city. Mr. Frias stated he does not

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see the necessity of a dog park, and stated that one of the reasons given for the park is dog socialization.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Frias and seconded by Plan Commission Vice-President Coupe, the City Plan Commission voted (4-2) to amend to remove the dog park from the capital budget request. Commissioner Zidelis, nay; Commissioner Lanphear, nay.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Zidelis and seconded by Commissioner Exter, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the Parks and Recreation Requests, as amended.

Library Departmental Requests:

Upon a motion made by Plan Commission Vice-President Coupe and seconded by Commissioner Mancini, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the library departmental requests.

Proposed FY 2026-2030 Capital Budget and Improvement Program:

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Zidelis and seconded by Commission Vice-President Coupe, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the proposed 2025-2030 Capital Budget and Improvement Program, as amended.

ADJOURNMENT

The City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to adjourn at 7:26 p.m.

Next Meeting | Tuesday, April 1, 2025, 6:30 PM – **Regular Meeting**
City Hall – 3rd Floor, Council Chamber – 869 Park Avenue

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