

Hon. Kenneth J. Hopkins
Mayor

Michael E. Smith
President

Jason M. Pezzullo, MCP, MPA, AICP
City Planning Director



Robert Coupe
Vice-President

Thomas Barbieri
David Exter
Steven Frias
Kathleen Lanphear
Lisa Mancini

Justin Mateus P.E.
Public Works Director

Thomas Zidelis
Finance Director

CITY PLAN COMMISSION

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

MINUTES – SPECIAL MEETING **CITY HALL – 3rd FLOOR, COUNCIL CHAMBER** **4:00PM – THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2024**

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m. in the Council Chamber, 869 Park Avenue.

The following Commissioners were in attendance for the meeting: Chairman Michael Smith, Vice Chairman Coupe, Thomas Zidelis, David Exter, Steven Frias, Kathleen Lanphear, Justin Mateus, Thomas Barbieri, and Lisa Mancini.

The following members of the City Planning Department were in attendance: Jason M. Pezzullo, AICP, Planning Director; Kenneth R. Kirkland, AICP, Asst. Planning Director, Brianna Valcourt, Senior Planner; Jonas Bruggeman, Senior Planner

Also in attendance: Steve Marsella, Esq., Assistant City Solicitor

CAPITAL BUDGET & IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM PUBLIC HEARING (vote taken)

- Further consideration of the **FY24-29 Capital Budget and Improvement Program** requests not voted on or decided on by the City Plan Commission at their March 5th, 2024 public hearing:

- **SCHOOL DEPARTMENT REQUEST**

▪ <u>AES SCHOOL BUILDING</u> – FY 24-25	3,937,500
FY 25-26	10,000,000
Total:	<u>13,937,500</u>

Chairman Smith stated that, per the charter, the City Plan Commission is required to provide recommendations on all proposals from the departments for capital spending. The Commission did not recognize a failure to effectively vote on a specific item (as specified) following a tie vote.

Commissioner Frias stated that the City Plan Commission did not violate the charter. He said the charter does not require a specific up or down vote on every capital proposal. He called it a bogus legal interpretation and stated that this meeting is unjustified. He also stated this is essentially a motion for reconsideration. Under basic parliamentary procedure, a motion of reconsideration needs to be made at the meeting where the original vote occurred.

Commissioner Lanphear agreed with respect to the requirements and obligations of the Commission by the charter, relative to the capital budget. In reference to the city charter, Ms. Lanphear stated that there is no specificity on how to approve or not approve a particular item. Ms. Lanphear inquired about the basis of the decision to reconsider the vote.

Asst. City Solicitor Steve Marsella stated that based upon the unique circumstance and vagueness of the charter, there was not a specific negative or positive vote on the specified item. Mr. Marsella shared that it was the city solicitor's opinion that the meeting should be held, and the item to be voted on. Mr. Marsella further clarified that due to the uniqueness of the motion to approve everything *but* a single line item, the matter was left open to be voted on.

Chairman Smith invited members of the public to speak on the matter.

- Lindsey Tevares, Principal and Executive Director of the Apprenticeship Exploration School (AES) provided specific information about the AES, a CPS district charter school established through a partnership with the Laborers International Union of North America and Cranston Public Schools. Ms. Tevares stated that AES' policies, curriculum, graduation requirements, and a majority of the student population are from the City of Cranston. Ms. Tevares clarified previous statements made regarding enrollment, stating that the school hosts 180 students, or capacity. Ms. Tevares stated that the program allows less than sixty (60) students to enroll through a lottery system for the following year. Ms. Tevares stated that AES has received 236 applications for 9th grade and 118 applications for grades 10-12. Ms. Tevares stated that AES programs are recognized by RIDE and expanded on the programs provided by AES. In regard to the suggestion about utilizing vacant school buildings for programming, Ms. Tevares stated that Arlington Elementary School is not suitable for the programs offered at AES, because it will require renovating the interior, building a construction lab, which could cost over \$1 million, and generate noise that could affect nearby residences. In regard to previous comments made regarding attendance, Ms. Tevares stated that school outcomes and attendance has improved over the last three years over the course of enrollment.
- Zachary Farrell, Executive Director of Secondary Programs for Cranston Public Schools shared support on behalf of the school department for the acquisition and renovation of AES through the issuance of the proposed bond and capital budget. Mr. Farrell stated that there is a programmatic demand of CTE opportunities sorely needed in the city.
- Steve Stycos, 37 Ferncrest Avenue – Mr. Stycos stated that his previous comments regarding enrollment at AES were based on electronic documents published by RIDE. He stated the issue before the Commission is whether \$14 million should be spent to build a school at a factory. Mr. Stycos stated that this meeting is sleazy and this meeting is being held because some people did not like the decision made at the last meeting. He stated calling this meeting undermines the public faith in institutions and is a maneuver to redo a vote of a meeting that was previously held. Mr. Stycos also stated that Commissioner Barbieri should not be voting on school-related matters due to a perceived conflict of interest. Mr. Stycos asked that the Commission uphold the previous vote.
- Domenic Fusco, Vice Chair of the Cranston School Committee – Mr. Fusco asked that the Commission vote in favor of this request. Mr. Fusco reaffirmed that Arlington Elementary School is not conducive to AES programming. Mr. Fusco clarified that, per the Rhode Island Department of Education, this proposal would be included in the reimbursement program previously discussed.

Seeing no further public comment in-person nor online, Chairman Smith entertained a motion to close public comment.

Upon motion made by Ms. Mancini, and seconded by Mr. Zidelis, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (9-0) to close public comment.

Commissioner Lanphear inquired about school enrollment. Mr. Farrell stated that district-wide enrollment between both high schools is approximately 1,300, of which approximately 60% of CHSW students are enrolled in CTE, and approximately 25% of CHSE students are enrolled in CTE. Mr. Farrell clarified that upward of 90% of students enrolled in CTE programs are students from Cranston. Ms. Tevares stated

that approximately 98% of AES students are enrolled in CTE coursework, of which above 50% of students are Cranston residents.

Commissioner Lanphear inquired about the reimbursement allocation for the budget request relative to AES, if the School Committee has established certainty of the reimbursement. Ms. Lanphear suggested that the School Department may adjust the budget request to reflect the amount of taxpayer burden with the reimbursement reflected.

Commissioner Frias inquired about noise generation from CTE construction programs. Mr. Farrell stated that projects are mainly completed off-site, not typically completed on-site.

Commissioner Zidelis responded to the question previously posed regarding reimbursement. Mr. Zidelis clarified that the city must authorize and borrow \$13M for design and construction, to which the city then refers to RIDE to reimburse the grant over time to coincide with debt service. To advance the school, the city must authorize the initial \$13M.

Commissioner Frias stated that it has not been shown why it is necessary for the taxpayers to spend \$14 million plus interest to purchase a factory building and convert it to school. He stated it would cost less to convert the Arlington Elementary School, which is already owned by the city, to be a vocational school. Regarding the concern about noise generated by a vocational school at Arlington, he noted that the facility could be sound proofed and some projects could be done offsite just like Cranston West does. He also stated that no explanation has been given as to why the Laborers Union is not contributing to the purchase and modifications of the charter school when in Providence the district charter school is owned by the charter school, not the city. If the Laborers Union do not contribute, taxpayers, at the state and local level, end up paying 100 percent of the cost.

Commissioner Coupe offered comments, stating that he had previously viewed the capital budget hearings and reviewed the letters submitted to the Cranston Herald prior to this meeting. Vice Chair Coupe stated the expertise and support of the School Department and Committee should not be disputed. It is not the purview of the City Plan Commission to deny a capital improvement request because the Commission does not understand or approve of the mission of the program. Mr. Coupe argued that, upon denial, state taxpayer funds will be used for a different cause, potentially without reimbursement. Mr. Coupe stated that it is appropriate to listen to the experts within the field regarding this specific request.

Seeing no further discussion, Chairman Smith accepted a motion.

Upon motion made by Vice Chair Coupe, and seconded by Mr. Mateus, the City Plan Commission voted (5-4) to accept and approve this item in the capital budget. Mr. Frias, Mr. Exter, Ms. Mancini, and Ms. Lanphear voted nay.

ADJOURNMENT

(vote taken)

Next Meeting - Tuesday, April 3, 2024, 6:30PM – **Regular Meeting**
City Hall – 3rd Floor, Council Chamber – 869 Park Avenue

Upon motion made by Vice Chairman Coupe, and seconded by Mr. Mateus, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (8-0) to adjourn the meeting at 4:52 p.m.