

(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).

SPECIAL FINANCE COMMITTEE – APRIL 18, 2019
(BUDGET HEARINGS)

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Thursday, April 18, 2019, in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 P.M. by the Chair.

Present Councilmember Paul J. McAuley
 Councilmember John P. Donegan
 Councilmember Edward J. Brady
 Councilmember Christopher G. Paplauskas
 Councilmember Kenneth J. Hopkins
 Council Vice-President Michael W. Favicchio, Chair
 Council President Michael J Farina

Also Present: Councilmember Steven A. Stycos
 Daniel Parrillo, Director of Administration
 Robert Strom, Finance Director
 David Dimaio, City Council Auditor/Budget Analyst
 Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committee

Council President Farina stated that if there are no objections, he would like the Capital Budget moved first on the agenda since there are members of the public who would like to speak regarding that. No one objected.

On motion by Councilmember Hopkins, seconded by Councilmember McAuley, it was voted to move the Capital Budget first on the agenda. Motion passed unanimously.

CAPITAL BUDGET

Chair asked Parks and Recreation Director Liberatore to address the Committee since there have been concerns from the public regarding the proposed turf field at Cranston High School West and asked that Director Liberatore address some of those concerns.

Director Liberatore stated that the cause of these concerns and confusion was due to a letter or email from an Assistant Soccer Coach's wife stating that the soccer field was not going to be addressed in this project. This is not true. We would not be spending money if we were not addressing all the children of Cranston. He indicated that the field will be 60 yards wide and 120 yards long; the boys lacrosse field will be 60/110 and the girls lacrosse field will be 60/115.

Chair stated that Mr. DiMaio will not be taking part in any discussion regarding this matter.

Director Liberatore stated that the demand is high for these types of fields. In 2000, the City went out to bond for \$2,400,000. The Cranston Stadium turf was installed in 2007 for \$840,000 Fiscal Year 2007-2008 and halfway through Fiscal Year 2009, enough Revenue came in to pay for that turf field. In 2017, a new turf was installed at a cost of \$950,000 and to date, this department has brought in a net of \$2,152,000 into the General Fund. They are averaging \$310,000 in Revenue on the Stadium turf.

Councilmember Hopkins asked if there are any plans to install protected netting behind the goals of the lacrosse field. Director Liberatore stated that this is in his plan. He has also submitted some prices and has spoken to the School Athletic Director to see if he can help him. The plan is for the Metropolitan Ave. field and the other at the Ed Lemoie.

Council President Farina questioned if the Revenues at Cranston High School West will be a little lower than Cranston High School East. Director Liberatore stated that he would say it would be approximately three quarters of what the Stadium brings in. By doing these fields, it would save the City approximately \$80,000 per year in irrigation costs and lawn cutting.

Councilmember Stycos asked how this project will impact the track. Director Liberatore stated that the track will still be there, it will not be impacted.

Director Strom stated that a Purchase Order was just approved for this project for approximately \$900,000. They intend to go to BOCAP again to bring it up to the approximately \$1.2 million.

Councilmember Hopkins asked Director Liberatore to consider, in his future plans, for a possible track for the Eastern side of the City for Cranston High School East.

Councilmember Stycos questioned the Hamilton Building Relocation. Kenneth Mason, Director of Public Works, stated that approximately nine years ago, the City sold the building to CCAP and they gave the City a lease for a portion of the building for -\$0- per year for the Inspections Department, Engineering Department and CDBG. That lease expires September, 2020 and we need to vacate that building. The City needs to determine where those City departments are going to go. Councilmember Stycos asked if that lease can be renewed. Director Mason stated, no, they opted not to. They want the building for themselves.

Councilmember Brady questioned why the significant increase in Traffic Improvements. Director Mason stated that the City is going to study several intersections in the Western part of the City and going to retain an engineering firm and, hopefully, come up with a project for those.

Councilmember Paplauskas questioned System Wide Drainage Rehab. Director Mason stated that DEM requires Cities and Towns to come up with a concise plan on how they are to maintain and mapping of all drainage system.

Council President Farina questioned what the \$500,000 for Open Space is for. Jason Pezzullo, City Planner, stated that we do not have a Land Trust. He funds this just in case we do get a Land Trust, then the funds are there. Council President Farina asked why we can't just build a Land Trust. Director Pezzullo stated that the Charter needs to be amended to build a Land Trust. He is not stating that we need a Land Trust for Open Space project. That money is used for buyouts of flooded homes. Councilmember Stycos stated that we do not need a Municipal Land Trust to acquire land. He indicated that during former Mayor Laffey's Administration, the City purchased the Knight Farm land. Director Pezzullo stated that we do not need to have a Land Trust, but a glaring weakness in the City is the lack of one.

Councilmember Stycos questioned the funding for additional vehicles. Director Mason stated that the \$555,000 is for three additional six-wheel dump trucks. He stated that two of the three we are replacing are seventeen years old. He also stated that the proposal is to purchase two Foremen pickup trucks.

Councilmember Stycos presented a handout of proposed Capital Budget funding for the last ten years and stated that most of those funds are for Public Works. Director Strom stated that of the \$20 million, \$10.5 million is for over two year period. Director Strom stated that \$9 million is for Schools. Chair stated that it is the Schools that are driving this up. Director Strom indicated that we do not bond for what is in the Capital Budget. He also stated that he is not concerned about what we have already bonded for. What he is concerned about is the \$133 million bonding that is going to go before us for the Schools.

Council President Farina clarified that for the next Fiscal Year, it is \$20.8 million, there are some compliance items in the Public Works Department that we have to do, there is a ladder truck in the Fire Department and for the Schools, it is \$9 million, but next year, it is \$-0- for the schools.

Public Speakers:

Adam Lupino, 62 Highland St., member of Board of Directors of Cranston High School West Alumni Association, appeared to speak on behalf of the Association in favor of the Cranston High School West turf field project. He stated that the Association is committed to this project and in trying everything they can to raise funds at no increase to the taxpayer. The Association is also looking at ways to improve snack bar and press box and add new seating. This is a wise investment for the City.

Robert Murray, Esq., appeared to speak in favor of the Cranston High School West turf field project and stated that the communities that invest in infrastructures for the children, those are the communities that stand out.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

Director Strom appeared to speak and presented Revenue and Expenditure reports for this department and stated that this budget is pretty much the same as last year's except for contractual obligations. He highlighted the following line items:

- Lighting of streets is a little higher than last year.
- Sidewalk Program has been increased because there is more interest in this program.
- Snow Removal is level funded. Snow Removal is only over by \$39,000 for the year.
- Care of Trees was increased.

Councilmember Donegan addressed line item #54002 Rodent Control Program and stated that while he was campaigning, he heard from a lot of his constituents of problems with rodents. He questioned why funding for this line item has gone down by more than half since 2014. Director Mason stated that that line item is for bait and material only. He also stated that there is one full-time Rodent Control Officer and two part-timers and they only bait residential properties. This was reduced because we are not expending the \$15,000.

Councilmember McAuley stated that Rolfe Square needs to be re-energized. He questioned what can be done about this. Director Mason stated that we can take a look at that as a Capital project in the near future. One issue is the bricks that were installed years ago should be looked at in the near future. Those bricks are uplifting. Councilmember Hopkins stated that some of the roots from the trees planted on the sidewalk are lifting the bricks. He stated that as a future Capital project, old antique lighting along Rolfe Square should be looked at. This would revitalize that area.

Councilmembers Hopkins, McAuley, Paplauskas and Council President Farina commended the Public Works Department for the work they do year round.

Councilmember Stycos asked what the statistics are of percentage of recycling. Director Mason stated that before we instituted the trash carts, we were at 19-20%. Right now, we are at 28%, which is better, but still not what it should be. He also stated that we have been receiving 1% of the tipping.

Councilmember Stycos asked for explanation of the three sewer projects in the Capital Budget. Director Mason stated that they need attention because they are starting to fail. Those projects are:

- Wellington Ave. transmission main.
- Route 95 Sewer main.
- Burnham pump station bypass.

He stated that even though these are listed as Capital Budget projects, they are paid out of the Sewer Enterprise Operating Budget.

No one appeared speak from the public.

SEWER ENTERPRISE FUND

Director Strom appeared to speak and presented Revenue and Expenditure reports for this department.

Director Mason stated that this will be the third year in a row we will not be asking for any rate increase for the Sewer Enterprise Fund.

Director Strom stated that Revenues are progressing very well and we should be over budget. Expenditures are under budget. Overall, the Enterprise Fund is doing extremely well. Currently, we have \$14 million in reserve for projects.

Councilmember Stycos asked if we will receive any Revenues for the Pastore Center. Director Strom stated that bills go out in July. We receive the money from the State six to nine months later. A receivable is set up and this is why it is not showing in the budget at this time.

No one appeared speak from the public.

PLANNING

Director Strom appeared to speak and presented Revenue and Expenditure reports for this department.

Jason Pezzullo, City Planner, appeared to speak.

Director Strom stated that there are two part-time employees, who are former employees of this department and have retired and are working under the 75 day rule, who are helping with projects. In the proposed budget, there is one additional person who will also be working with doing some work in the Inspections Department. That is a shared person between the two departments. This position will be entry level Planner/Code Compliance Officer. This Planner position has not been funded since 2011.

Councilmember Donegan asked Director Pezzullo's opinion of filming the Planning Commission meetings. Director Pezzullo stated that he does not have an opinion regarding this. If funding is allocated, he would not have any objections.

Councilmember Stycos asked Director Pezzullo if he could explain what the Planning Department should look like as far as staffing and what the City would gain in having the department staffed that way. Director Pezzullo stated that the department should have five to six full-time Planners, they currently have three. He also stated that right now the staff is handling day to day issues. They do not have the staff to address items for long-range planning, such as Hazard Mitigation Plan, Zoning Code and Comprehensive Plan. They also want to address the Land Trust. They do not have the time and staff to address all those.

No one appeared speak from the public.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees