

SPECIAL MEETING – CITY COUNCIL

-APRIL 3, 2003-

A Special meeting of the Cranston City Council was held on THURSDAY, April 3, 2003 at the Park View Middle School, Park Ave., Cranston, Rhode Island.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 P.M. by the Council President.

Roll Call showed the following members present: Councilmen Fung, Jackvony, Council Member Fogarty, Councilwoman McFarland, Councilmen Ferolito, Lanni, McDonough and Council President Pastore –8.

Absent: Councilwoman O’Hara –1.

Also Present: Paul Grimes, Director of Administration; Robin Muksian-Schutt, Deputy Director of Administration; Jametta Alston, City Solicitor; Jerome Baron, Director of Finance; Mike Igoe, City Controller; Patrick Quinlan, City Council Legal Counsel.

Council President stated that Councilwoman O’Hara is out of State and will not be able to attend this meeting.

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The City Clerk read the following:

CITY OF CRANSTON
RHODE ISLAND

CALL OF SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL

In accordance with the Home Rule Charter and Section 6.08, I hereby call a special meeting of the City Council to be held on Thursday, April 3, 2003 at 7:00 P.M. at the Park View Middle School, Park Ave., Cranston, RI at which meeting the following items of business shall be transacted:

Public Hearing relative to the Operating and Capital Budget for the City of Cranston for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2003 – June 30, 2004 in accordance with Section 6.08 of the Cranston Home Rule Charter.

And I hereby request the City Clerk to notify all Council members of the Call of the special meeting.

Executed at Cranston, Rhode Island, this 31st day of March, 2003.

/s/ Peter T. Pastore, Jr.
Council President

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CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that a true copy of the attached Call of a special meeting of the City Council to be held on Thursday, April 3, 2003 at 7:00 P.M. at the Park View Middle School, Park Ave., Cranston, Rhode Island was delivered via electronic mail on the 1st day of April, 2003 and regular mail, postage prepaid to the addresses listed below.

Council President Peter T. Pastore, Jr.
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Councilman Marc D. Ferolito
2 Amy Dr.
Cranston, RI 02921
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Council Member Cynthia M. Fogarty
60 Ausdale Rd.
Cranston, RI 02910
Fogarty1@msn.com

Councilman Allan W. Fung
252F Mayfield Ave.
Cranston, RI 02920
alfung@cox.net

Councilwoman Ellen O'Hara
79 Massasoit Ave.
Cranston, RI 02905
ellencohara@cox.net

Councilman Kirk McDonough
67 Dellwood Rd.
Cranston, RI 02920
kirkmcdonough@cox.net

Councilwoman Paula McFarland
100 Pomham St.
Cranston, RI 02910
pmcfarland@prodigy.net

Councilman Randall A. Jackvony
198 Burdick Dr.
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rjackvony@cox.net

Councilman John E. Lanni, Jr.
111 Woodview Dr.
Cranston, RI 02920
John.lanni@coachusa.com

/s/ Maria Medeiros Wall
City Clerk

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RFP for Internal and External Audit provided to Jerome Baron so could proceed. President asked if there were any objections? There were none.

Councilwoman McFarland read memo from Mr. Grimes dated April 3, 2003.

Council President Pastore also request work papers for budget this evening. He stated that anyone in the audience could pose questions to the Administration on proposed budget.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS:

Thomas Ricci spoke regarding the Fire Department . He noted that there are now seven deputy chiefs and two others, for a total of nine and questioned when did this occur. Chief Warren stated that this was previous to last contract. Mr. Ricci stated that 9 deputies, 15 captains, 47 lieutenants and rescue lieutenants and 129 firefighters, seems have gotten carried away. Police Department doesn't come close.

Jeffrey Kelly questioned whether the format is different. Departments have previously done presentations. Council President Pastore stated that this is not a department hearing. The Finance Committee will hold department hearings starting on April 10, 2003 and each department head will be asked questions. Council will ask questions first then public will have opportunity to ask questions.

Jim Davies, 19 Quail Ridge Rd., appeared to speak and thanked Mayor Laffey, because this is the first time he has heard public official explain where our dollars are going. He stated that he had questioned Police and Fire in previous budgets, but never got direct answers. He hopes Mayor Laffey is around when contracts are to be re-negotiated. He stated that he understands that Police and Fire have not agreed to make any concessions for the City. He hopes the Council and the Mayor will return to reasonableness with each other.

Sharon Ventura, 50 Castleton Dr., appeared to speak and stated that she sent a letter to Mayor Laffey and Council President Pastore and Council members regarding powers to investigate what happened after initial determination by Auditor General, Ernest Almonte, and subsequent meeting with Dr. Carl. Council President Pastore stated that the Performance Audit Committee will be meeting on Monday to go over the RFP and any other items referred to in Ms. Ventura's letter. Ms. Ventura stated that she didn't add up \$11 million in cuts. Senior Services and Library cuts should be restored. Trash needs to be restored. She stated that there need to be cut, such as Administrative salaries. Mayor said if Unions won't save pension, they will. Ms. Ventura applauded Councilwoman McFarland for what was asked for, but still need to ask School Department to submit list of school breakdown.

Councilman McDonough stated that he did ask for breakdown for each school and their personnel and was denied the information. Ms. Ventura suggested School Department be taken to Court. Council should be entitled to information. Taxpayers don't want to pay anymore and don't want to borrow any more money.

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Mario Casinelli appeared to speak regarding the Senior Services budget. The Center is a star for the City. Senior Services brings in a lot of dollars, approximately \$3 million. Council President Pastore asked if he was speaking about reimbursements? Mr. Casinelli stated the facility runs at zero cost, with 80% volunteers and part-time help. Want to eliminate part-timers.

Kristen Eric appeared to speak. She is an independent licensed social worker. And is speaking on behalf of the elderly being hurt by cuts in programs and is also appearing to speak on behalf of the Crossing Guards – health benefits may be too costly, but no reason to eliminate them.

Albert Benetti, 24 Concord Ave., appeared to speak. He stated that he has been attending Council meetings since he got caught up in the banking crisis. This is the first time he saw a budget presented by a Mayor that was clear and concise. Everyone is going to have to swallow a bitter pill. Need to re-negotiate co-pay for everybody and same health care plan. Feels Libraries should not be cut, they have already given enough. He has three children in the schools and his wife was a teacher's aide last year. School cuts might eliminate her job, but that's a pain he'll will have to bear.

Jeffrey Kelly appeared to speak regarding pension ordinances, concerned with legal fees in challenging it if passed. Council President Pastore stated that legal counsel have been asked to appear before the Ordinance Committee to present their opinions. Mr. Kelly stated that Mayor wants to cut Seniors and field fertilization. He asked if it is prudent to let fields that cost thousands of dollars in bond money deteriorate. Stated that ninety percent of the budget is contractual. Mayor has asked for some perks for his own Administration and we are looking to cutting these. He stated he was concerned with further cuts in the Homestead Exemption before the before State Law is enacted.

Denise Maisinko, 9 Ivy Ave., appeared to speak on the crossing guards. She has one child that walks to Park View and crosses one of the City's most dangerous intersections. Please help Crossing Guards.

Richard Demmler appeared to speak and stated that he has appeared at all Council budget hearings. He did not vote for Mayor Laffey. Got tired of his statements of being a financial expert, without having a plan. The Mayor has now come up with a plan and the Council needs to make some hard decisions. Recently discovered that retirement health care were getting 100% until age 65. Buyback; severance package; Requested a list of retiree benefits for public. Asked how the Council could approve new contracts when City's financial situation uncertain.

Jane Hamilton, Welfare Ave., appeared to speak. She stated that she loved Cranston.

Unidentified man appeared to speak.

Carol Russell appeared to speak and stated she works for the School Department, lives in Cranston and is getting hit double.

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Jim McElroy appeared to speak and stated he hopes the action on the pension ordinance is legal. Suggests future hires be City residents. He asked Council President Pastore why he voted for pension ordinances in 1996. Asked if he was bamboozled? Council President Pastore responded that the City was dealing with two crisis's at the time. The Sewer Treatment Plan and Environmental Protection Agency issues, there were growing deficits and the un-funded pension liability. A number of people were moved to the to the State Retirement this step capped liability. Provided parity with annuity benefits for those who voluntarily transferred to the State plan. Would rather have legal counsel go over these matters at Ordinance Committee meeting because there would be more questions. Key at time was to cap unfounded liability portion. Sewer Treatment Plan re-capitalized the City, moved new hires into State system thereby giving future Council more time.

Unidentified speaker appeared and asked if Fire and Police still continue to receive 3% annuity. Mr. Baron stated that Fire receives 3%, Police do not, they are being phased out. Speaker asked if hires between 1990-1995 opted to volunteer to go into State Pension Fund? He thanked Mayor Laffey for wherewithal.

Aram Garabedian appeared to speak Referred to Proposed budget. Pg. 14 – one problem, 2003 doesn't show actuals. Questions \$260,000 for outside labor relations. Pg. 17 these appear to be excessive healthcare costs for a department with only two employees. Pg. 20 - Rental of hydrants increase of over \$100,000. Regarding the libraries, how can we not spend \$35,000 to close for six Sundays. Our libraries are one of the best resources we have in the City. Library should not be cut. Crossing Guards – RI Law requires that we ensure the safety of our school children 1) provide bussing or 2) make sure can access school buildings safety. Reasonable to say should not pay healthcare but not reasonable to say eliminate. Pg. 31 – Municipal Debt – lists required reserve of \$1 million - why is it required, does not appear in previous budgets. He was in City Hall and there was an elderly woman whom he helped. She told him she did not have money to pay taxes and had come to City Hall to make arrangements to pay the bill. He asked Council to balance affordability of this budget with doing the right thing. RI Supreme Court on contracts has said can't go back in time and erase a contract. Believes excess benefits in Police and Fire but need to follow procedure and law. What need to do now is meet with Police and Fire. Suggested not to go away thinking can remove anything from contracts by repeal of an Ordinance and spend a lot of money on what has already been established by law.

Scott Matarese, 192 Sweetbriar Dr., appeared to speak. He stated that he is attending this meeting as a young taxpayer and a concerned citizen. He spoke regarding the following: 1) more equity with Police and Fire, more compatibility with private sector. He does not want to pay for excess benefits. He worked in the financial world for 10 years. He hopes the Council does everything in its power to come to an agreement with Police and Fire; 2 He is outraged at cost of Crossing Guard. He was a Crossing Guard when he was a student and got paid nothing. \$87 an hour is outrageous. He suggested having a teacher run the program. He stated that he speaks for many young taxpayers in the City of Cranston. The Ordinance in 1996 should never have happened. Crossing Guards should be eliminated or kept at a more reasonable cost to the City.

Paul Gibbs, 97 Orchard St., appeared to speak against library cuts and the Crossing Guards.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 P.M.

Maria Medeiros Wall
City Clerk

(See Stenographic notes of Ron Ronzio, Stenographer).