

TOWN COUNCIL-SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES- WEDNESDAY, Feb. 1, 2023

PRESENT: Calouro, Parella, Teixeira, Sweeney, and Ley

ALSO PRESENT: Steven Contente, Town Administrator
Walter S. Felag, Jr., Senator District 10
Linda L. Ujifusa, Senator District 11
Pamela J. Lauria, Senator District 32
Susan R. Donovan, Representative District 69
Absent: June S. Speakman, Representative District 68
*(it is hereby noted for the record that Rep.
Speakman was unable to attend due to sickness)*

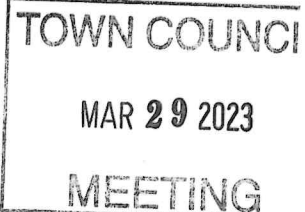
The Council met in special session on Wednesday, February 1, 2023, in the Town Hall, Council Chambers, beginning at 7:00 PM, Council Chairman Calouro presiding:

1. Workshop re Legislative Agenda for 2023

It is hereby noted for the record that no action was taken on this agenda item.

Council Chairman Calouro opened the meeting by thanking members of the general assembly to be part of the open discussion and dialogue of the priorities of the town for the 2023 Legislative agenda.

Members of the Council, Senators, Representatives, and Town Administrator discussed the school funding formula and Regional School Bonus funding. Senator Felag gave a brief overview of the State's school funding formula and how it tries to distribute funds fairly throughout the state. Noting that inner-city schools get more funding as they are considered higher need. It was explained that the formula was complex, and it was challenging to receive more funding for wealthier communities. It was added that a major category in the distribution of aid was highly concentrated on free and reduced lunches and that it was essential to have an accurate count to be part of the successful formula for getting aid. Concerns were expressed about the school aid formula and how it did not work in favor of regional schools. It was stated that categorical aid for regional schools has been introduced for legislative consideration year after year. However, it has not been successful. It was further noted that a study on school funding formulas and recommendations can be found on the State's website.



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Discussion ensued relating to low-income student applications. It was noted that the Governor was considering utilizing snap as a metric for capturing a more accurate number of low-income households.

Discussions ensued regarding a bill that was recently introduced for changes in the region for transportation funds. It would include moving Bristol back into district 5. It was not clear if the bill will pass due to opposition from lobby groups, particularly private schools. The bill would have an overall cost savings of approximately \$1 million. It was suggested grandfathering in current students and offsetting costs with any regional bonuses. The discussion also touches on the 50% reimbursement for transportation as a regional school district.

It was strongly reminded that the school budget is roughly 50% of the town's budget.

A discussion ensued regarding a potential mandate of a period review of the Bristol- Warren School District enabling legislation. It was mentioned that the school committee has expressed the desire to review the legislation every few years, but it is unclear whether this would require legislative changes or simply a procedural review. The group discusses the need to update the legislation to include funding for advertising, legal fees, and other expenses. They suggest adding a mandate to review the legislation every five years to avoid making hasty decisions based on emotions. They also mention the importance of involving the public in any changes made to the legislation. Overall, they would like to work towards finding a more efficient and effective way to update and review the enabling legislation.

Discussions ensued regarding any new bonds available to fix local schools and bring new life into the buildings. It was mentioned that there is a process to go through. The school committee has a deadline for submitting stage one for the high school to get potential bonuses or funding. It was suggested to ask the school committee specific questions in future meetings. Representative Donovan noted that she attended a webinar hosted by Senator Whitehouse and she would forward the link and slides of a comprehensive list of infrastructure funds available, specifically for Rhode Island. It was requested that if any of

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the members of the general assembly came across a grant opportunity for Bristol, they would have the courtesy to inform the town officials.

Councilman Ley discusses his role as liaison for seniors who are interested in Municipal Resiliency project grants for disaster preparedness. There is concern about the impact of climate change on seniors and how to ensure they are prepared for any disasters. Senator Lauria mentions that he has submitted legislation that requires the Economic Development Council to include CRMC and DEM on their planning council and to consider environmental impacts and climate actions in their planning and budgeting for economic development, which she hopes will bring climate resilience to the forefront of economic planning rather than just being addressed after the fact.

Chairman Calouro asks about the lights on Asylum Road for Quinta Gaelin Community Center. Representative Donovan notes that she will continue to follow up with DEM.

Chairman Calouro ask for either another workshop or informal follow discussions.

Chairman Calouro notes that a resolution was sent to the general assembly for consideration of an additional auxiliary member to the Bristol Historical District Committee to assist with quorums. Member of the General Assembly noted that the resolution has been submitted to both the house and senate for consideration.

Discussions ensued regarding composting funding. Senator Ujifusa noted that she had been informed that Recourse Recovery provides project-based grants that are accepted twice per fiscal year and training grant applications are accepted on a rolling base. The town can contact RIRRC for more details.

Chairman Calouro asks for information on the State Opioid Settlement. Senator Felag notes that the settlement may be somewhere around \$145 Million and distributed over the next 12-18-year period and the different disbursement structures for the state and local municipalities. Town Administrator noted that the town has been working with the school district to provide a curriculum program to the schools.

Senator Felag provides an explanation of the RIDOT sidewalk completions on Metacom Ave., and Hope Street. He noted that the project was to be started in 2025. Town Administrator Contente notes the progress and recent conversations with DOT; noting that the town applied for a grant opportunity for a \$1 million

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direct expenditure from Senator Reed's office. Discussions ensued about the condition of the town sidewalks, funding, and improvement project in the south end of town that has been delayed several times. The discussion continues to discuss a comprehensive website that allows users to view community projects and their timelines. It was noted that the Department of Transportation is said to be committed to moving the project forward, and the conversation discusses the need for funding to support the project. The conversation also touches on the importance of community involvement in ensuring that the Department of Transportation prioritizes necessary projects.

During the meeting, there was a discussion about the completion timing of the bike path bridges in East Bay. It was noted that the Project Management Office informed the general assembly that the permits from CRMC, DEM, and Army Corps of Engineers are necessary before they can determine the demo start date. The permitting process is underway, but it is a lengthy process. It was mentioned that the completion date is October 2025 and that a contract has been awarded. Senator Ujifusa was informed that they will be updated as progress is made, and demolition scheduling information becomes available.

Town Administrator Contente discussed a request to exclude municipalities from being assessed 10% of the cost of state building fees for public improvement projects where the State Building Commission has jurisdiction. The example was given of a marina expansion project in Bristol that fell under the State Building Commission, resulting in a fee of \$43,496. It was the consensus of the council that this fee is an unreasonable tax on the local taxpayers, as they did not budget for the fee and did not feel the need for state inspection services. The town will request a resolution and fight the fee as much as possible, noting that other communities managing state properties may also be impacted.

Councilman Teixeira raised a concern about landscapers blowing debris onto the road, which can be hazardous for drivers and harm the environment. He suggested using leaf bags to collect the debris and not blowing it onto the roads. It was also mentioned that homeowners also contribute to the problem. It was proposed to consider passing a local ordinance to prohibit sweeping debris onto the street. Legislation has been seen statewide regarding the environmental impact of leaf blowers, but not for leaves.

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Vice Chairwoman Parella brought up an issue related to transportation. She noted she had previously raised this issue with a transportation advisory committee and at Roger Williams, but it may not be a good time now to address it due to current difficulties with bus drivers. The issue related to cross-town transportation on RIPTA Busses, and the challenge of getting to places beyond the routes. Noting that some community members already have buses up and down their streets due to colleges and universities, but there are liability issues with contracting with them to take people. She suggested exploring the possibility of contracting with colleges and universities to transport adult students, which they believe would be a more creative solution than adding new bus routes.

Councilman Ley expressed his interest in learning more about the availability of grant money and public financing for indoor recreational facilities. He mentioned that he knows Massachusetts has been successful with indoor recreational facilities and wondered what it would take for the state of RI to make more money available for indoor recreational facilities. He expressed his desire to continue the conversation at a later time.

Councilman Sweeney asked if any legislation had been introduced regarding electric bikes on the bike path and he expressed his concerns about high speeds. Senator Lauria noted that she was not aware of any legislation consideration and noted that she has heard equal parts both for and against electronic bikes.

Town Administrator Contente commended the general assembly for their initiatives in implementing several laws and regulations aimed at reducing the use of Styrofoam and plastic. Noting that their initiatives will have a significant impact on the environment.

Councilman Teixeira asked that the members of the general assembly provide the council the courtesy of informing them of any bills that may be introduced or that they may be supporting that may impact Bristol.

Council Chairman Calouro expressed his concerns about a recent bill that was passed regarding Accessible Dwelling units (ADUs), stating that it had a lot of problems and is vague on specific details; and that the law needs to be cleaned up. He gave a couple of examples of issues that needed to be addressed such as the bill did not specify that an R 20 zone should not be assumed as a 20,000-square-foot lot, which could cause confusion.

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Additionally, the bill used vague terms like "reasonable" and "excessive" which could create problems when it came to zoning laws that were based on specific setbacks and space requirements. Noting that local laws and ordinances were in place to protect communities from their neighbors and vice versa. Chairman Calouro agreed that the goal of the new law was to increase housing stock and availability, but it needed to be cleaned up to avoid creating havoc. He suggested that the law needed to give communities time to review the changes and revise their local ordinances to deal with it effectively, prior to passage.

Chairman Calouro further expressed his concerns with a new affordable housing law that was to be introduced by the Speaker. He suggested that the State needed to sit down with local communities to discuss what they were trying to accomplish with the law in greater detail. Noting that zoning was a local issue and that the State could not write a law with a broad brush. Town Administrator Contente noted that the League of Cities and Town has drafted a resolution regarding the housing development and land use bill and he will be introducing it to the council at the next meeting for consideration.

It was suggested that legislative workshops such as these should be addressed earlier in the year to be able to introduce priorities at the beginning of the legislative sessions.

Council Chairman Calouro noted that he would work with the Clerk to set up a follow-up meeting to discuss progress on the workshop. It was suggested that any follow-up meeting should be held on a Monday evening, if possible, due to the legislative calendar. It was also suggested that the meeting take place in late April to mid-May to ensure sufficient time to address and concerns prior to the close of the legislative session.

The council thanked the members of the general assembly for their time and consideration in attending the workshop.

There being no further business, upon a motion by Councilman Sweeney, seconded by Councilman Teixeira, and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this meeting to be adjourned at 8:32 PM.

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Melissa Cordeiro

Council Clerk

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