

## **PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE**

Regular meeting of the Public Works Committee was held on Thursday, August 12, 2010 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 P.M.

Present: Councilman Mario Aceto, Chair  
Councilman Anthony J. Lupino, Vice-Chair  
Councilman Robert J. Pelletier  
Councilman Richard D. Santamaria, Jr.  
Councilwoman Michelle Bergin-Andrews (appeared at 6:35 P.M.)  
Council President John E. Lanni, Jr.

Also Present: Councilman Emilio L. Navarro  
Councilman Paul H. Archetto  
Robin Muksian-Schutt, Director of Administration  
Gerald Cordy, Deputy Director of Administration  
Evan Kirshenbaum, Assistant City Solicitor  
Robert Strom, Director of Finance  
Steve Woerner, City Council Internal Auditor  
Maria Medeiros Wall, City Clerk  
Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees  
Heather Finger, Stenographer

### **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:**

On motion by Council President Lanni, seconded by Councilman Santamaria, it was voted to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting and they stand approved as recorded. Motion passed unanimously.

### **CORRESPONDENCE:**

### **OLD BUSINESS:**

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

- **Street Lighting Policy: Report from Administration**

**Resident of 44 Howard St.**, appeared to speak regarding the street lights shut off program. She asked what other solutions the City has come up with and how much the City has saved in turning off street lights and how much in the hole the City is in.

**Manny Miguel**, 123 Harper Ave., appeared to speak and asked that the bickering stop and a solution be found with a compromise.

**Ms. Schutt** stated that on March 9, 2009, the Mayor proposed level-funding for the street lighting. On May 6, 2009, the Budget was amended to \$916,000 and actuals came in at \$1.3 million. Mr. Cordy met with National Grid to see what we could do to eliminate the costs. Mr. Cordy conducted a nine month study and worked with the Police Department, Traffic Safety and National Grid to come up with a plan on turning street lights off and make it safe and the most equitable way was to turn off every third light. The actual savings would be \$864,000. The Council supported the Mayor's proposal to shut off every third light and in July, 2010, the City started shutting off the lights. We got about one-third of the way through the program and started receiving phone calls from residents who were upset about this. People with traffic safety concerns were being addressed by Mr. Cordy and were told it would be looked at. Another issue that came up was the safety issues of various areas that the Police Department noticed as concerns. A lot of fear among the elderly and safety concerns on Phenix and Council Rock Road. At that point, the Mayor determined that out of safety, the lights would be turned back on. Funding for that would have to come from layoffs or any employees who retire, positions would remain vacant.

**Councilman Aceto** stated that no one on the Council was consulted or made a partner in the decision to implement. Discussed turning off lights on State roads, we're shutting off every 3<sup>rd</sup> light on State Roads. **Ms Schutt** stated that the Council was informed at the June 24<sup>th</sup> Council meeting that the program was being implemented.

**Council President** stated that the Council was never given a copy of any police study. Administration blaming the Council for turning off the lights is a false statement. The Council is willing to work with the Administration, but they are not. Money is an issue in this City and that needs to be corrected.

**Chair** stated that the Council was never made part of this decision. He understands that this needed to be done, but the Council should have been made part of the process. At the June 24, 2010 Council meeting, the Council was formally notified of this plan, and during the Budget process and Committee meetings, the Council was made aware that this was going to be done. Why were there additional cuts in 2011 budget? **Ms. Schutt** stated that more lights needed to be shut off because of rate hikes.

**Council President Lanni** stated that this Council was never given a copy of any study done. To blame the Council for the Mayor's plan to shut street lights off is inaccurate and it is false and he hopes the public realizes this. Pointing the finger is not going to solve the problem. We need to work together to try to correct this problem.

**Councilman Santamaria** asked what the percentage is that goes to light State roads. Ms. Schutt stated that there are approximately 3,000 lights on State roads and 10,000 in total. Councilman Santamaria suggested to Administration to leave lights off on State roads and put that money to light City roads. Ms. Schutt stated that whether we like it or not, we have an obligation to look at public safety. Those State roads do go through our City. This Administration is and has worked with this Council and any comments contrary to that is unfounded.

**Councilman Navarro** asked how many lights have been shut off as off today. Ms. Schutt stated that between State and City, approximately 1,000. Councilman Navarro asked what the cost is so far to turn the lights off. Ms. Schutt stated \$25 per light. There will be a cost, per light, to turn the lights back on.

**Councilwoman Bergin-Andrews** stated that the Council had no input on how the City went about this.

**Councilman Archetto** stated that during the process, high crime and low crime areas and elderly population was not take into account. A much more effective study should have been done. Mr. Cordy stated that in regards to public safety, we spent a long time on looking at the impact. The Administration worked with the Police Department to identify most potential high crime areas and those lights were left on and also areas of traffic safety. In regards to crime, he spent numerous hours looking at this. He also indicated that the way the Administration based the shut offs was done by a printout received from National Grid of street name and pole number.

**Chair** asked who owns the poles. Ms. Schutt stated, National Grid. Councilman Aceto stated that those poles are on City roads and we should look at whether they can be taxed. **Ms. Schutt** stated that this would have to be looked into, but she is not sure the PUC would allow the City to charge them.

**Councilman Lupino** asked what the next step is going to be taken and how will they be communicated to the Council members and the taxpayers. Chair stated that it is his intention to hold another meeting or workshop jointly on procedures for turning the street lights back on.

**Councilman Navarro** stated that the studies for this program took nine months and the program was not even in effect for two weeks and it was a failure. He asked how the Administration will make up for a third of the money needed. Ms. Schutt stated that there are two positions that were layed off two months ago. She will have those figures available for the next Council meeting. She noted that no transfers can happen until the fourth quarter.

**Chair** asked that for the next Council meeting, the Administration provide a report on how decisions were made to have the street lights turned off.

**Councilman Santamaria** asked Mr. Woerner how other Cities and Towns are handling street lights on State roads. Mr. Woerner stated that Cumberland and Johnston are telling National Grid that they have inappropriately billed the municipalities.

**Councilman Navarro** asked what the plan is and how long the process will take. Mr. Cordy stated that National Grid was notified this morning to turn all the lights that were turned off, back on. They will come up with a plan and he will be notified, but it will take some time. Councilman Navarro asked how long. Mr. Cordy stated that all he can do is stay after National Grid. We are at their mercy. Because turning the lights back on will mean revenue for them, they will probably be turned on pretty quick. Councilman Navarro asked that an update be given at the next Council meeting on when the lights will be turned back on.

**Councilwoman Bergin-Andrews** asked what the cost would be to have the lights turned back on. Ms. Schutt stated that we will be asking for some type of waiver for the charge, since it is a revenue for National Grid.

**Council President Lanni** stated that he is willing to sit down in a public workshop with the Administration to see if we can come up with actual savings, if the Administration is willing to work with the Council.

**Ms. Schutt** asked if the Council is willing to have the program reversed. Chair stated, yes. The street lights need to be turned back on.

**Council President Lanni** stated that if a workshop meeting is held, we could look at various areas in the City that maybe lights could be turned off without affecting safety or come up with other solutions so save money.

Public Speakers:

**Resident of 44 Howard St.**, appeared to speak and stated that the residents are suffering. She stated that if the Administration and Council cannot work together, get a neutral party to help resolve this issue. As a taxpayer, she wants her lights back on. She does not want to wait a month. The idea of turning lights off was not a bad idea, but it was not analyzed fully. Her concern is so much money has been spent on this and she questioned how much will be spent to have them turned back on. The taxpayers cannot afford this.

**Diana Gordon**, 363 Pontiac Ave., head of Central Crime Watch, appeared to speak and stated that there is a lot of crime in the Pontiac Ave. neighborhood and if lights are shut off on this road, since it is a State road, the situation will get worse.

**Richard Tomlins**, 400 Farmington Ave., appeared to speak and stated that the Administration worked on this plan for nine months, it should have been brought to the Council's attention. This is a serious issue.

**Manny Miguel**, 123 Harper Ave., appeared to speak and asked for cooperation. If this issue was a safety issue, why was this not made public earlier by the Council.

**Mike Farina** appeared to speak and stated that it took nine months to come up with this plan and two weeks to see it did not work. This does not make sense.

- **Natick Ave. Bridge**

**Councilman Pelletier** reported that he has been monitoring this project and the improvements are going very well. The landscape work and finishing touches are now being done on Natick Ave.

**Councilman Lupino** suggested that speed checks be placed until the bridge is opened. He stated that the third or fourth pole on Natick Ave. is still in the roadway. Ms. Schutt stated that National Grid is indicating that the pole is not their responsibility because the City paved more of the shoulder. Chair suggested that a meeting be held with National Grid and the Traffic Engineer regarding this issue.

**Ms. Schutt** stated that, as to the bridge, design is schedule to be finished by the fall and submitted to DEM and construction should start in the spring. Chair stated that this is the second time this bridge is being repaired. He questioned if there is a short-term solution so the bridge could be opened up just to car traffic so it would not be an inconvenience to the neighborhood. Ms. Schutt stated that for a short-term solution, would be quite costly and at this point, we are well underway to being done.

**Council President Lanni** stated that speeding is an issue on Natick Avenue. **Councilman Pelletier** stated that this bridge is part of an evacuation route.

**Chair** asked that for the next Council meeting, the Administration provide an update on the bridge and how much the costs are for the repairs.

- **1590 Plainfield Circle (Referred from City Council 7/26/2010 – Councilman Santamaria)**

**Councilman Santamaria** stated that he has received a detailed e-mail from Veolia indicating that they will proceed with all the problems.

**Solicitor** stated that he has also received the e-mail and was told that everything is being handled by the Superintendent at the Plant.

On motion by Councilman Santamaria, seconded by Councilman Pelletier, it was voted to remove this item from the agenda since this is being handled and if Veolia doesn't, this will be brought back before the Committee. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni  
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees