

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
Susan R. Donovan, Representative District 69
June S. Speakman, Representative District 68
Absent Pamela J. Lauria, Senator District 32

The Council met in special session on Wednesday, January 10, 2024, in the Town Hall, Council Chambers, beginning at 6:00 PM, Council Chairman Calouro presiding:

1. Bristol Housing Authority (1 unexpired term set to expire January 2025)

- a. Kim Teves, 32 Brooks Farm Drive, interest/appointment
- b. Donna St. Angelo, 25 Duffield Road, interest/appointment

It is hereby noted for the record that the Council agreed, by consensus, to consider this matter for vote at the next council meeting scheduled for January 17, 2024.

The Council heard from Ms. Teves who expressed her interest in becoming a member of the Bristol Housing Authority. Discussions ensued between members of the Council and Ms. Teves pertaining to Ms. Teves's qualifications and experiences. Ms. Teves also stated why she would consider herself to be a good fit for the position.

The Council heard from Ms. St. Angello who expressed her interest in becoming a member of the Bristol Housing Authority. Discussions ensued between members of the Council and Ms. St. Angello pertaining to Ms. St. Angello's qualifications and experiences. Ms. St. Angelo also stated why she would consider herself to be a good fit for the position.

2. Zoning Board of Review (2 unexpired terms set to expire March 2025)

- a. Derek Tipton, 10 Dixon Avenue - letter of resignation
- b. Paul Blasbalg, 60 Dewolf Avenue, interest/appointment
- c. George Duarte, 7 Lafayette Drive, interest/appointment (previously interviewed)

- d. Kim Teves, 32 Brook Farm Drive, interest/appointment

It is hereby noted for the record that the Council agreed, by consensus, to consider this matter for vote at the next council meeting scheduled for January 17, 2024.

The Council heard from Mr. Blasbalg who expressed his interest in becoming a member of the Bristol Zoning Board. Discussions ensued between members of the Council and Mr. Blasbalg pertaining to Mr. Blasbalg's qualifications and experiences. Mr. Blasbalg also stated why he would consider himself to be a good fit for the position.

The Council heard from Ms. Teves who expressed her interest in becoming a member of the Bristol Zoning Board. Discussions ensued between members of the Council and Ms. Teves pertaining to Ms. Teves's qualifications and experiences. Ms. Teves also stated why she would consider herself to be a good fit for the position.

3. Harbor Commission Advisory Committee (1 vacant seat set to expire August 2026)

- a. George S. Burman, 66 Highland Road, interest/appointment

It is hereby noted for the record that the Council agreed, by consensus, to consider this matter for vote at the next council meeting scheduled for January 17, 2024.

The Council heard from Mr. Buurman who expressed his interest in becoming a member of the Harbor Commission Advisory Committee. Discussions ensued between members of the Council and Mr. Burman pertaining to Mr. Buurman's qualifications and experiences. Mr. Buurman also stated why he would consider himself to be a good fit for the position.

4. Armand Pereira for Anthony C. Almeida Post 237, 850 Hope Street re - Request for Bingo License for Thursday, January 11, 2024, Thursday, February 8, 2024, Thursday, March 14, 2024, Thursday, April 11, 2024, Thursday, May 9, 2024, and Thursday, June 13, 2024 from 5:30 PM - 9:30 PM

- a. Recommendation - Town Administrator and Fire Chief
- b. Recommendation - Town Administrator and Chief of Police

- c. Rhode Island State Police Authorization to Conduct Weekly Bingo on Thursdays

Teixeira/Sweeney- Voted unanimously to grant this license per the recommendations received and conditions, if any, as delineated, and also subject to conformance to all laws and ordinances and payment of all fees, taxes, and levies.

5. Workshop re Legislative Agenda for 2024

Council Chairman Calouro opened the discussions by thanking members of the general assembly to be part of the open discussion and dialogue of the priorities of the town for the 2024 Legislative agenda.

Members of the Council, Senators, Representatives, and Town Administrator discussed updates on the East Bay Bike Path. Concerns were raised about fishing access, solutions were proposed, and details about the bike path Bridges were provided, indicating a completion date in the summer of 2006.

The focus then shifted to the Bristol Warren Regional School Funding. The discussion revolved around changing the transportation district, potentially saving almost half a million dollars. Discussions ensued regarding a bill that was introduced to change the transportation district to Newport County, affecting students attending private schools outside of Bristol. The school committee's request for this change was highlighted, emphasizing potential cost savings. Issues related to private school transportation and the impact of proposed changes on families were debated.

Further discussions touched on the school funding formula, the hold harmless provision, and the potential decrease in funding due to declining student populations. A bill was mentioned to provide increased funding for regionalized schools. Timely concerns about the decreasing student population and potential funding adjustments in the per-pupil reimbursement system were discussed.

The conversation also included the introduction of a bill addressing high-cost special needs students. The proposal seeks

additional state funding to support these students and alleviate the financial burden on school districts.

Representatives noted the superintendent's request to initiate a bill; however, the precise language for the proposal had not yet been received. The objective is to institute a uniform statewide flat rate for Career and Technical Education (CTE) reimbursement. Currently, diverse districts impose different fees for students participating in CTE programs. The superintendent supports statewide consistency to improve stability and streamline budgeting. This implies that if a CTE student enrolls in Bristol, the sending district would consistently provide the same amount, and reciprocally.

Discussion continued to road repairs, focusing on state highways Route 114 and Route 136. It was emphasized that the towns play a crucial role in prioritizing road repairs through the TIPS program, and legislators work based on these priorities to secure funds. Mention was made of recent success with potential cost-sharing and federal funding of over a million dollars for an area around Hope Street.

The Administrator provided updates on ongoing projects, including Hope Street from Constitution to Roger Williams, which is currently in the design phase. The issue of tree removal and general maintenance, like the condition of Hope Street, was addressed.

Town Administrator noted that the town consistently engage with DOT by calling in and sending letters. However, it was important to highlight that the TIP (Transportation Improvement Program) no longer includes our formal input, a practice formerly undertaken annually by Community Development. This deviation from the usual process is attributed to the extensive workload of various ongoing projects that require significant attention. It is essential to recognize that these projects are documented in the TIP, accompanied by their respective timelines. Nevertheless, these timelines are routinely extended each year, subject to the availability of funding. As a result, the town relies on its delegation to procure funding for these projects.

Legislators discussed emergency fund repairs due to a mild winter, citing examples of projects in Warren and Bristol. The possibility of utilizing funds for further repairs this year was being considered.

Concerns were raised about the considerable impact that the ongoing situation at the Washington Bridge is having on the residents and workforce of our communities. It was noted that a letter from the delegation to the DOT was submitted seeking weekly updates.

The council and delegation members engaged in a discussion about tipping fees, local and state priorities. Notably, it was emphasized that the tipping fees are fixed until June 30th, 2025. The landfill is currently projected to remain operational until 2043. The conversation extended to statewide composting efforts and the importance of educating students and promoting composting in school districts.

During the meeting, it was noted that in 2022, at the request of the Council, a resolution regarding tax exemption for nonprofit organizations was presented. The resolution passed the Senate but faced concerns in the House, leading to its withdrawal. It was explained that Mr. Kinder has approached the state representatives, expressing interest in reintroducing the bill, specifically aiming at the Benjamin Church Senior Center. The proposed bill would grant the Council the authority to provide property tax exemptions to nonprofits without state involvement. The discussion centered on whether to reintroduce the bill, considering its potential impact on tax rolls and the need for further examination. Some members suggested a case-by-case approach, emphasizing the importance of careful consideration and transparency in decision-making. Chairman Calouro highlighted the need for a deeper analysis of implications before making any decisions.

During the meeting, there were deliberations concerning the installation of street lights along Asylum Road. It was brought to attention that the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) may lack the necessary funding to implement the streetlights. The ongoing debate revolves around determining the responsible party for installing the streetlights, whether it be the town or the state. Concerns were raised regarding the hazardous nature of the road, with a willingness expressed by the town to contribute to finding a solution. Suggestions were made regarding the potential use of solar-powered lights. There was mention of DEM's reluctance to install lights, particularly when the park is closed at night to avoid disturbing wildlife. It was proposed that the town could reconsider a previously

shelved project and potentially incorporate a scaled-back version of the project into the town's capital projects, with a request for financial assistance from the state.

Discussions were held concerning the recent modifications to zoning laws and underscored the significance of upholding effective communication. Council members conveyed sentiments of detachment during legislative deliberations and expressed a desire for greater involvement in the process, advocating for legislators to actively solicit input from the local community. It was noted that the decisions made by legislators lacked clarity at the grassroots level. Although the objective of augmenting affordable housing was acknowledged as commendable and aligned with the perspectives of local leaders.

During the meeting, there was discussion regarding the recent changes in zoning laws and the significance of maintaining effective communication. Council members expressed concerns about feeling disconnected from legislative conversations and emphasized the importance of greater involvement in the process. They suggested that legislators should have actively sought input from the local level to ensure better understanding and representation of community interests. While the goal of increasing affordable housing was recognized as commendable and supported by local leaders, it was noted that the recently passed zoning changes appeared to be overly broad. Some members suggested that zoning considerations should take into account more localized factors, acknowledging that bureaucratic processes are sometimes necessary despite their complexities.

Legislators emphasized that a significant aspect of the proposed package focuses on facilitating housing production to address Rhode Island's pressing need for more housing options. They highlighted the state's lowest rate of housing development and a substantial shortage of 50,000 housing units. While acknowledging concerns about communication gaps, legislators clarified that they heavily rely on the League of Cities and Towns to disseminate information about legislative changes. They expressed an understanding of the importance of improving communication with local leaders.

Discussions among legislators and council members centered on the necessity of gathering input from municipalities and considering the potential impacts of proposed changes. It was noted that adopting a one-size-fits-all approach for the entire state may not accurately address the diverse needs and

circumstances of different areas. For instance, it was pointed out that assumptions about exclusionary zoning may not always hold true, as factors like high water tables could affect land use.

Council members also raised concerns about the potential risks of unregulated housing production and stressed the importance of maintaining oversight. They emphasized the efforts made by towns to promote diverse development while safeguarding the environment.

Legislators asserted that the proposed bills aimed to encourage density without infringing upon the authority of towns.

Concerns were raised regarding the potential conversion of downtown storefronts into residential units and the consequential impact on the town. It was noted that the Town Solicitor's office addressed these concerns and provided the opinion that the zoning bills that were passed did not permit the conversion of mixed-use buildings, particularly those in the downtown area, thus providing protection for these structures.

Concerns were brought up regarding the development within industrial zones. Over the years, the town has received numerous complaints about residential neighborhoods being situated in industrial zones, citing issues such as noise and odors. There is a fear within the town of potentially losing the industrial development that is integral to the fabric of the community. It was emphasized that preserving this industrial component is crucial for the local economy, job opportunities, and the overall well-being of the community. It was highlighted that there should be a collective effort to be mindful of these concerns and to ensure that the balance between residential and industrial areas is maintained.

Legislators highlighted that the focus of the bills primarily centers around the repurposing of vacant buildings for housing. Examples cited included schools, vacant factories, monasteries, and churches, all of which already possess infrastructure such as electricity, plumbing, and parking facilities. Instead of encroaching on farmland and green spaces, these bills aim to streamline the process for developers to utilize existing vacant buildings through adaptive reuse. While some individuals may perceive the language of the bills as overly broad, the overarching motivation remains to facilitate the revitalization of these unused structures and address housing needs more efficiently.

Legislators highlighted that Rhode Island Housing has provided templates for municipalities, and for those interested in delving deeper, resources are available on the Rhode Island Housing website. These resources include training videos that offer comprehensive explanations of the legislative processes, accompanied by flow charts and other informative materials. While acknowledging that some of the content may be dense, it was emphasized that these resources contain detailed guidance on the implementation of legislation.

Furthermore, it was noted that Rhode Island Housing has provided guidance and financial assistance to municipalities for the implementation of these initiatives. Specifically, Bristol was confirmed to have received assistance through a municipal technical assistance grant, along with the majority of other communities in the state.

It was highlighted that Senator Felag voted against the adaptive reuse bill, whereas the other legislators approved it.

Legislators suggested that if a resolution were to be passed, they would be obligated to consider it at the very least, and likely introduce it. They expressed appreciation for the proactive approach, noting that resolutions passed by town councils have historically facilitated communication between constituents and legislators. Additionally, they highlighted that such resolutions would provide them with greater freedom to advocate for the interests of their constituents when engaging with leadership.

Discussions unfolded regarding effective means of communication and strategies for implementing corrections or amendments to recently passed zoning changes, as well as additional proposed bills brought to legislative sessions. It was suggested that a thorough examination of the legislation, pinpointing contentious language, and identifying potential issues specific to Bristol would be beneficial in crafting amendments. It was mentioned that Assistant Solicitor Teitz, who provides assistance to the planning board, had shared many concerns and implications with the board and legislators, serving as a valuable starting point for addressing these matters.

Acknowledging that these issues would not be resolved immediately, the focus was placed on providing input to legislators to initiate progress. Concerns were raised regarding

density in accessory dwelling unit building proposed changes, particularly concerning septic and water systems. Legislators clarified that while the accessory dwelling unit package did not pass legislation, it would be reintroduced in the current legislative session. Furthermore, they assured that there were no proposed changes that would interfere with sewer, septic, or water systems, as these aspects are regulated by DEM and CRMS. Local leaders were encouraged to bring attention to any language in the proposed bills that could potentially affect these systems to the legislators' attention for further consideration

Discussions continued regarding the prospect of conducting an overall housing study.

The Administrator emphasized the immediate need to preserve manufacturing zones, suggesting that this should be the primary focus of any resolution. Excluding manufacturing zones from potential impacts could significantly safeguard the future of Bristol, ensuring job retention and sustaining the community's economic vitality. He stressed the importance of maintaining a well-balanced community, not solely focused on residential development but also encompassing working waterfronts, manufacturing, commercial sectors, and recreational spaces.

Furthermore, the Administrator mentioned the potential impact of short-term rental regulations, noting that addressing this issue could alleviate some housing challenges. He pointed out that in Bristol, many homes remain underutilized due to seasonal occupancy or being converted into Airbnb rentals for higher income potential. Exploring long-term solutions to these issues was deemed essential for addressing broader housing concerns effectively.

Legislators highlighted the success of Roger Williams University and its significant impact on the town of Bristol. They underscored the importance of understanding the university's plans for expansion and housing within its campus. This understanding is crucial in addressing housing challenges within the community, as high rental prices incentivize homeowners to rent to college students rather than young families. They emphasized the necessity of engaging in discussions with Roger Williams University to ascertain their expansion plans and housing strategies. The legislators emphasized that failure to address these issues risks excluding young people from housing opportunities within the community, particularly considering the

soaring housing prices as reported in recent editions of the Bristol Phoenix.

Concerns were raised about the dilemma faced by property owners when deciding whether to rent to families or opt for short-term rentals. It was noted that some property owners may lean towards short-term rentals and college students due to concerns about potential non-payment of rent by long-term tenants, leaving them with financial burdens. It was suggested that addressing this aspect of rental management, such as mitigating the risks associated with non-payment of rent, as another important consideration in the broader discussion about housing policies and regulations.

Legislators noted that Lauren Carson from Newport chairs a commission on short-term rentals and encouraged the Council and the Administrator to send a statement to the commission regarding any concerns or preferences regarding short-term rentals in Bristol. It was mentioned that Newport faces a larger Airbnb issue and that now would be an opportune time to voice any statements to the commission.

Additionally, two significant issues regarding the accessory dwelling unit (ADU) bill were highlighted: whether ADUs should be required to be owner-occupied and if there should be a minimum-year lease. The importance of Bristol's input on these matters was emphasized and the Council and the Administrator were encouraged to convey their position on ADU policy to the commission. Considering that the speaker intends to pass the ADU bill soon, the urgency of providing feedback on these issues was stressed.

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 Teixeira, seconded by Councilman Sweeney, and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this meeting to be adjourned at 9:41 PM.

Melissa Cordeiro
Council Clerk