

**AGENDA**

**SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2008**

**6:30 P.M.**

**LONGFELLOW SCHOOL – 139 OCEAN TERRACE  
BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT**

Prayer

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

Public Hearing concerning the closing of the Ocean Terrace Fire House at 245 Ocean Terrace.

**BRIDGEPORT CITY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING – PUBLIC HEARING  
FEBRUARY 21<sup>ST</sup>, 2008**

**Longfellow School, 139 Ocean Terrace**

- ATTENDANCE:** Mayor Bill Finch, Council Members: Brannelly, Crowe, McCarthy, Bonney, Silva, Colón, Walsh, Martinez, Lyons, Austin, Santiago (6:50), Curwen (7:00), dePara (7:00)
- STAFF:** Ann Murray, Assistant City Clerk, Kaitlin Lesnick, Press Secretary; Andrew Nunn, CAO; Mark Anastasi, City Attorney; Bob Kennedy, Acting Public Facilities Director; David Cody, Head of Construction Management; Brian Rooney, Chief of Bridgeport Fire Department
- OTHERS:** Robert Russo; Tom Mulligan; State Rep. Bob Keeley; Robert Whitbread, President of Bridgeport Fire Fighters Association Local 834; Ron Morales, President of Bridgeport Hispanic Firefighters Association; Ron Mackey, President of Firebirds Society of Bridgeport; Timothy Landock, Bridgeport Fire Department and Blackrock Resident; David Dobbs, Blackrock Resident; David Dobbs, Bridgeport Fire Department; Kyle Gardner, Captain at Ocean Terrace Fire Station; Judge Carmen Lopez; Janette Watson, former Blackrock Resident; Felicia Upchurch, Blackrock Resident; Donna Fuel, Blackrock Resident; Patty Scott, Blackrock Resident

**CALL TO ORDER**

City Clerk Note: In the interest of public convenience, Mayor called the hearing to order in the absence of a quorum of the City Council, and the Assistant Clerk did not call the roll. It should be noted that a quorum of the body was present shortly following the call to order.

The meeting was called to order at 6:45 p.m. by Mayor Finch.

Mayor Finch announced that he did not believe that the temporary closing of the Ocean Terrace Firehouse was covered under City Ordinance Title 8.33.010 requiring notification of the closing of public emergency facilities. He said that despite that the Council had decided to hold a public hearing on the matter in the spirit of open government. He told the public that their comments, concerns and questions would be made part of ongoing deliberation. He went on to say that work was ongoing at the site and temporary arrangements had been made there for continued service. He then pointed

out several people involved in the process to the public including Acting Public Facilities Director, Bob Kennedy; Head of Construction, David Cody and Fire Chief Brian Rooney. He informed the public that they would not be speaking during the hearing but would be available afterwards for questions. Mayor Finch thanked Council Members Crowe and Brannelly for keeping him and the Council well informed on this matter. He then went on to ask that speakers try to limit themselves to five minutes adding that discretion would be shown for those speakers who went over that allotted time.

**Public Hearing concerning the closing of the Ocean Terrace Fire House at 245 Ocean Terrace.**

Mayor Finch opened the public hearing and called upon Mr. Robert Whitbread to speak.

Mr. Whitbread introduced himself and announced that he was present to speak about Engine 7 and Ladder 11. He explained that the company was removed because the conditions at the firehouse were uninhabitable. He noted that the roof was leaking and water was all over the place and raw sewage was backing up onto the floors and in the locker rooms. He said that he'd followed the financial issues and the repair issues and from what he'd seen there was enough money at least being requested to solve this issue. He suggested that the City consider building a new firehouse to replace the almost 40-year-old house which was on sinking land. He said that it was a great idea to go green and this would be a great opportunity to put up a brand-new building that would serve the community for decades to come in a much more efficient and cleaner manner. He conceded that he didn't know all the facts about the building or about the expenses but he was sure that a new firehouse was the way to go for the City and its citizens. He offered to meet with whoever ultimately made that decision to discuss the idea further and said that he was willing to help get additional funding for it if necessary. Mr. Whitbread said that in the mean time the building would need thorough cleaning just to make it habitable for dogs again because unaffected areas didn't appear to have been closed off during construction and soot had gotten all over the firehouse. He noted that the lease on the trailer that the Ocean Terrace Fire Company was living in was coming up and recommended that if the City elected to build a new Firehouse that they consider replacing the present living quarters with a newer, cleaner, more habitable place to stay. He said that he'd given members of the administration the name of a local company who was more than willing to work with the City at a lower price than what was currently being spent. He hoped the City would consider not spending funds on the repair of the firehouse because it would only need repairs again in 10 years. He closed, saying that the City had to get a better maintenance program for public buildings as requests for repairs on the firehouse had been submitted for the past 3 years for the same issues.

Mayor Finch thanked Mr. Whitbread and called the next speaker, Mr. Ron Morales.

Ron Morales said he believed the focus of this meeting was that there were three tragic deaths on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007 and the purpose of City Ordinance Title 8.33.010 was to avoid such a tragedy. He said that there was supposed to be a discussion prior to the

removal, the relocating or the closing of Engine 7 and Truck 11 and that did not occur. He asked why that discussion had not been held and said that either the Mayor or the Fire Chief should have to answer for that through a report that should have been submitted prior to this meeting taking place. He said that such a report would inform those concerned of any related financial issues, the type of damage, how long the firehouse would be closed, the impact of the closing and what would be done to provide safety to the neighborhood in the absence of a fully functional firehouse. He said that no such report had been submitted and no discussion held until this meeting. He added that this meeting was very nice but the fact of the matter was that three people had passed away. He stated that he'd brought the Monsignor here with him to this meeting and that the Monsignor and his parishioners had not been made aware that this meeting was taking place despite the deceased being members of his parish. Mr. Morales said it was his belief that the leadership of the Fire Department should have been sitting with the Council and taking the heat for not providing what was supposed to be provided by ordinance. He continued, saying that for the leader of the Department to think that a fire company could come from Wood Avenue and go all the way to Sailors Lane in the right amount of time to protect anything was foolish and that the City should question that information. He stated that according to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), a fire grows 100% every 30 to 60 seconds. He said that given this information it was foolish to say that the deceased wouldn't have had a fighting chance if Engine 7 was available. Mr. Morales said that he'd been in the fire prevention business 21 years, was a fire prevention expert across the country and had secured almost \$1.5 million from FEMA and the US Administration for fire prevention grants so he knew what he was talking about. He said that the public needed to have a report regarding the decision process for the closing of the firehouse. He asked why at a minimum the City's Public Safety and Transportation Committee wasn't notified of the closing. He said that he understood that the firehouse was not currently closed and that the limitations of service were only temporary, but the ordinance did not specify that it applied to permanent closings only. He said that the deaths of these three people should have never happened and their deaths could have been prevented with the proper discussion and information. He told the Council that they should know what would happen if the viaduct was closed due to flooding and what would happen if Engine 7 was called to another district to help. He said that the Fire Chief had a salary of over 6 figures so he could certainly provide reports with this information. He asked the Council and the Mayor not to protect Chief Rooney's bad decisions because his bad decision cost three people their lives and two boys had lost their parents forever. He said that there was still nothing being done about this other than trying to fix a house that would fall apart. He urged the City not to put good money into a bad project.

Atty. Anastasi said that while Mr. Morales is clearly entitled to his opinion, the City Attorney's Office provided legal advice to the Council, not Mr. Morales. He said that while it was a tragedy whenever there was a loss of life and certainly everyone shared that sorrow and sympathy, this meeting was hardly the place to be discussing it in fairness to the survivors. Atty. Anastasi stated that this was absolutely not a situation where any objective observer would agree that the ordinance applied as this was a

temporary emergency repair operation. He said that the ordinance by its plain language addressed situations where for operational or financial reasons the City elected to close a firehouse and under those circumstances it was certainly appropriate to have 45 day advanced notice, public hearings, and to submit the fiscal reasons for the closure. He stated that that was not the case in this instance and since this was an emergency situation that rendered the house uninhabitable the Chief exercised his discretion as he was entitled to do. Atty. Anastasi advised the Council that was nice, helpful and appropriate to hear from the public on this matter but the hearing was not being conducted in accordance with any ordinance mandate.

Mr. Morales said it didn't take long for the City Attorney to spin what he'd said because that was his job but the fact remained that Chief Rooney was the Deputy Chief of Operations for eight years and facilities fell under his domain. He said that the repairs to the firehouse should have been made under his leadership as the Deputy Chief of Operations and instead the house had gotten so dilapidated that it had to be closed. He said that whether the City Attorney wanted to defend him or not was his prerogative but he wouldn't be able to spin this any other way. He said that a mother, a father and a baby were now deceased and two boys were left without parents. He told Atty. Anastasi that he could smirk all he wanted because his family was safe.

Atty. Anastasi said he found it offensive that Mr. Morales would use people's tragic deaths for his union purposes.

Mayor Finch called the next speaker, Ron Mackey and asked that all speakers try to remain constructive, non-personal and non-accusatory. He said that the City had made every effort to keep fire prevention services here available and he didn't believe that anyone had tried to work around any ordinance. He said that it was the plain reading of the ordinance that this hearing was not technically required and it was the City's intention to hold this hearing in the spirit of open government. He added that the City did not need an ordinance to tell them to have a hearing on something this important. Mayor Finch explained for public information purposed that the ordinance that was being referred to mandated that a public hearing be held if a firehouse or other such public facility was going to be closed permanently and that was not the case in this instance. Mayor Finch then held up a smoke detector and announced that any Bridgeport resident could have a free smoke detector by calling 335-8835. He urged the public to tell their friends and neighbors to call that number for their own free smoke detectors.

Mr. Mackey asked what the rules of this meeting were and if speakers would be interrupted any time they said something contrary to what the City Attorney thought.

Atty. Anastasi said that it was his job to give the City Council legal advice and if someone was attempting to mislead them he would correct them when they'd finished speaking.

Mayor Finch said that when there was a question that hinged on some form of law, the City Attorney could advise them. He said that the City had a free and open tradition of allowing the City Attorney's advice and sometimes it was taken and sometimes it wasn't.

Mr. Mackey said that Mr. Morales had spoken about three people dying and it was important to understand why the firehouse closed a week before they died.

Mayor Finch said that was why the hearing was held and that everyone was equally moved by their passing. He said that he'd been at the site of that fire and certainly Mr. Mackey knew how difficult that was as he'd been at those sites before. He said that everyone had to keep our heads about them and remain calm so that this could be prevented going forward.

Mr. Mackey stated that he'd been president of the Firebird Society for the past nine years and that he was a retired lieutenant with the Bridgeport Fire Department. He distributed two packets of documents to the Council and said that on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007, he'd written a letter to the Mayor to which he'd yet to receive a reply. He said that in this letter he'd asked what the Fire Chief's backup plan was for the closing of the firehouse. He'd also asked if Mayor Finch and the Council Members in the district had been aware of a backup plan. He said that public officials needed to know about something as drastic as closing a fire company. Mr. Mackey asked everyone present to drive from the firehouse across the street to Wood Avenue at 25 mph (the speed limit that Chief Rooney had set for vehicles responding to emergencies) and see for themselves how long the drive would take. He said that if there was a fire as he spoke at Congressman Shays' house, Engine 7 would respond by itself. He said that while the house was being engulfed in flames, four people would respond with one person at the fire hydrant, one at the truck's panel and none of them able to enter the building without waiting seven more minutes for backup to arrive. He told the Council that included in the packets he'd distributed were articles regarding alternative firehouses. He reviewed an article by Aaron Leo of the Connecticut Post in which Mr. Mackey was quoted in mid-December as saying "Some on-site alternative facilities should have been set up temporarily near the Ocean Terrace station to house the firefighters". He continued reviewing that article, noting that the Chief had said that alternative housing was not feasible and the Department was doing the best they could with available resources. He noted that Chief Rooney in that article had asked why he hadn't offered alternative housing solutions in his letter to Mayor Finch and was quotes as saying, "Erecting a temporary setup for firefighters would have been challenging, involving separate men's and women's quarters, keeping firefighters warm and providing adequate bathroom and shower facilities". Mr. Mackey went on to ask if Chief Rooney had done a time study to let the Council know how long it would take for the Department to respond during the maintenance. He suspected that no such time study was provided and revisited the article in which Chief Rooney had said that he'd had a stack of papers on the repairs to the firehouse for problems such as clogged toilets and drains and various leaks. He said that this was because the Chief had known about these problems for years. Mr. Mackey asked when the Chief planned on presenting these issued to the Mayor. He asked if the Chief had

spoken to Scott Appleby, Bridgeport's FEMA liaison regarding whether or not FEMA could provide trailers to house the Ocean Terrace Fire Company. Mr. Mackey then asked why the City was paying \$69 a month for a trailer. He questioned the leadership of someone who would make a decision to close a firehouse resulting in the deaths of three people. He continued, saying that he was glad that the Fire Department and the City was now giving out smoke detectors, adding that the Firebirds Society had been doing that for 23 years and that they also provided free carbon monoxide detectors. He asked the Council to read the articles he'd submitted about smoke detectors at their leisure, explaining that the United States Fire Administration recommended not only installing the type of smoke detector that Mayor Finch had shown, but also a photoelectric dual alarm smoke detector which was more effective for detecting smoldering fires such as a cigarette burning in a couch while standard detectors were more effective in the detection of faster fires such as those caused by cooking. Mr. Mackey said that the large immigrant population of Bridgeport would be hesitant to give their names and addresses to City official for fear of arrest since New Haven's Mayor had issued photo IDs to immigrants resulting in an arrest the very next day. He then went on to refer to another article he'd submitted regarding the Department of Homeland Security training the New York City Fire Department to assist in gathering intelligence information during routine inspections and emergencies. He asked the Mayor if he thought that citizens would give their names and addresses to get smoke detector from the Fire Department if they had reason to believe that they were working as spies for the Federal Government. He said that the Firebirds Society had existed since 1983 and Chief Rooney had never once reached out to them.

Mayor Finch said that he understood this was an emotional topic but asked that comments be focused on the Ocean Terrace Firehouse. He then introduced Mr. Timothy Landock.

Mr. Landock said that he'd been a resident of Blackrock for 16 years and he'd seen regular notifications in the newspaper of things such as bulk garbage pickup, street parking restrictions for street cleaning, etc. but hadn't seen any notification about the firehouse closing. He said that he'd been a Bridgeport Firefighter for 18 years and after the firehouse closed, he'd gone house to house in his neighborhood and to businesses on Fairfield Avenue and none of his neighbors were aware of the closing. He said that he was embarrassed to live in Blackrock right now because nobody really cared that this firehouse was closed. He said that perhaps if such a tragic fire had occurred on Sailors Lane or somewhere by St. Mary's people might have been more upset. Mr. Landock noted that it had been almost 4 months since the firehouse closed, and this was the first time there'd been a public hearing to discuss it. He recalled that on the night before the firehouse closed, he'd called the Mayor's office not as a firefighter but as a citizen because the Mayor had invited any citizen with complaints or concerns to call his office. He said that he kept getting turned away and his questions as to whether or not the Mayor was aware of the closing and how long the firehouse would be closed was left unanswered. He said that he finally identified himself as a firefighter and the response from the Mayor's office after a five-minute delay was that he was overstepping his

bounds as a city employee. Mr. Landock said that as a firefighter, he swore to protect the lives and property of the city of Bridgeport, and to be told that he was overstepping my bounds was unbelievable. He said that the Ocean Terrace Firehouse had been in poor condition since he'd joined the Department 18 years ago. He said that the firehouse was visibly sloped and he'd been told by a 30 year veteran of the Department that it used to be level. He said that putting more money into the firehouse was useless and as owners of houses knew, putting a band-aid on such a badly damaged property would only require paying four times as much in the future for additional repairs compared to repairing it fully from the start. Mr. Landock asked that if the City could inform residents when they wouldn't be allowed to park on the street or when bulk trash would be picked up, that they also inform residents when the firehouse was going to be closed. He said that he had three children and a wife and he was worried about them. He told the Council and the Mayor smoke detectors were great and everyone should have them but smoke detectors didn't put out fires; firefighters put out fires. He went on to say that right after the firehouse was closed, he'd purchased emergency escape ladders for his two-story house and had his eight-year-old son practice using the ladder by himself in case of emergency response delays. He said that Engine 7 was currently at the firehouse but at any given time they could be someplace else. He reminded the Council and the Mayor that the Fire Department responded to more than just fires, and also responded to car accidents and medical emergencies. He said that people needed to know if those services would have to be provided from the Wood Avenue firehouse, not only because of the taxes paid by residents but for life safety. He said that if a petition could be put in the paper because Harborview Market wouldn't be serving coffee, certainly there could be information in the paper about the firehouse.

Mayor Finch said he spoke on behalf of everyone present when he thanked Mr. Landock for his service. He said that he made his children very proud tonight by speaking the way he did. He then called the next speaker, Mr. David Panzone.

Mr. Panzone said that he was concerned not only for this firehouse, but for this community and this area of Bridgeport. He said that it was a shame to have a firehouse closed down and that people in Blackrock rested assured that if anything should happen to their house it would be well protected because there was a firehouse so close by. He noted that the next nearest firehouse was a considerable distance away and it was unsettling to know residents' lives and families and the safety of the neighborhood was in the hands of a firehouse so far was when there was one so nearby that should be doing the job. Mr. Panzone said he knew this all came down to a matter of funding and he wasn't aware of the related numbers, statistics, etc. as they pertained to the firehouse. He said that in fact, he really didn't know much about the firehouse closing at all, because residents weren't really well informed on that matter. He stated that he was shocked to see the flyer he'd received in the mail that week about this meeting and he'd hoped that this meeting would be more of a fact-finding mission than just a public hearing. He said that it would've been nice to have a question and answer format so that the community could really know what was at stake and what it would take to keep up the firehouse or rebuild another one.

Mayor Finch said that public officials would remain after the meeting to answer his questions and that his questions would be entered as into public record. The Mayor thanked Mr. Panzone and called the next speaker, Mr. David Dobbs.

Mr. Dobbs stated that people should be spending less time pointing fingers and playing the blame game and more time looking for solutions. He said that the fire on Fairfield Ave was tragic and it couldn't happen ever again and no one was to say for sure if things would have been different if the firehouse were open. He urged everyone to leave politics out this process and instead make it a matter of good government. He said that there were other firehouses in the City with similar issues and this could be prevented from happening again with good planning and good government.

Mayor Finch thanked Mr. Dobbs and called the next speaker, Mr. Kyle Gardner.

Mr. Gardner introduced himself as the newly appointed captain at the Ocean Terrace Firehouse, adding that he'd served the previous 9 years as a lieutenant at the Beechmont Firehouse and that he did not respond to the fire on Fairfield Ave. where three lives were lost. He went on to describe the apparatus floor at the Ocean Terrace Firehouse as roughly the size of Longfellow School's cafeteria where this meeting was held. He said that the entire floor had been torn up and it looked like a minefield because the pipes that ran underneath it had been destroyed. He said that this was not a case of minor repairs that had been put off causing the Department to displace fire companies, but a major undertaking that nobody immediately understood the scope of. He explained that the fatalities occurred during the beginning of the demolition and though he didn't respond to that fire, he did know that smoke detectors could have saved those lives. He said that if the fire company was right around the corner, they would still be deceased because they didn't have smoke detectors. He said that it was very easy to get smoke detectors from the Department and all that was required was that residents give their name, phone number and address. He went on to say that his aunt had recently passed away, leaving her three-family house in his and his wife's care. He'd finally thought to check the batteries in the house's smoke detectors when he'd discovered that there was only one smoke detector in the house. He said that as a captain with the Fire Department who responded to daily emergencies and made sure that people had working smoke detectors in their homes, if it'd taken him so long to make sure that his aunt's three family house didn't have smoke detectors, then he didn't know how harshly the Chief or the City's Administration could really be blamed for everyone in town not taking advantage of the free smoke detectors given out. He went on to say that at his previous fire company there were plenty of times when he was out on a call and other emergencies required response at the same time, and people in that area were just as uncovered by his absence as the people in Blackrock were during the fire on Fairfield Avenue. He said that a fire truck was not always at the station when they were needed.

Mayor Finch thanked Mr. Gardner and called the next speaker, Councilman Bob Walsh.

Councilman Walsh stood and shook the hand of Mr. Landock's young son who was also in attendance, saying that his own father was also a firefighter with the Bridgeport Fire Department for 20 years and he knew what it was like at times to feel the fear of what happens when a family member was dispatched to a fire. Councilman Walsh remembered that as a child he could distinguish the difference between the sounds of fire truck, ambulance, and police sirens immediately and he immediately felt his heart pump when he knew it was a fire truck and he always said a little prayer, because that's what kids of firefighters did. He said that that was why this matter was so important. He said that he first wanted to set the record straight with regard to City Ordinance Title 8.33.010, which he had proudly authored. He read Item A. of the ordinance aloud which said "Prior to the City closing any police precinct headquarters or firehouses or closing any fire companies, ladder companies or truck companies or relocating any police precinct headquarters or firehouses or fire companies, ladder companies or truck companies, the Mayor shall give public notice of such action..." Councilman Walsh stated that nowhere in this language was the word "permanent" used so it was not true that the ordinance applied only to permanent closing. He said that he'd intentionally worded the ordinance in this manner because every time such a facility was closed, it was always temporary. Councilman Walsh then read Item C. of the ordinance where it said, "the Mayor or his designee shall submit written testimony outlining the economic reasons for such actions, the negative impact such action may have on sections of the City relative to response times, coverage areas and the City as a whole, alternative solutions sought prior to the proposed actions and any additional pertinent information." He said that this was not done in this case. He then went on to read the Bridgeport Fire Department's Mission Statement which said, "Our goal is to provide 24 hour emergency service for the protection of life and property within a four minute response time frame" and the end of a directive from Chief Rooney dated June 22, 2007, which said, "All companies responding to an alarm, except on I-95 and Rt. 25 are to keep the speed limit to 25 mph. No exceptions. Officers are to strictly enforce this rule". He said that he mentioned these documents to illustrate that he'd done the math for this situation. He explained that a four minute response time at 25 mph would come out to 0.416 miles per minute and the maximum distance at that rate in four minutes would be 1.7 miles. He then went on to illustrate how that would affect some Blackrock residents. He stated that according to MapQuest, it would take 10 minutes to get to former City Council Representative Tom Mulligan's house from the Wood Avenue Firehouse and according to his calculations, factoring only the strict speed limit and distance; it would take the fire company 7 minutes to reach his house from Wood Avenue. He told City Council Representative Susan Brannelly that MapQuest said that the drive to her house would take nine minutes and his calculations said that fire response would take 6 minutes under optimum circumstances according to his calculations. He told Councilman Brian Crowe that a trip to his house would take 7 minutes according to MapQuest and 4.6 minutes according to his calculations. He then reported that a drive to Blackrock Yacht Club would take 10 minutes according to MapQuest and 6.6 minutes according to his calculations, again assuming optimum conditions with no accounting for stops. He finished the list with the house of Judge of Probate, Paul Ganim to which MapQuest reported the drive from Wood Avenue would take 9 minutes and his calculation determined would take 6

minutes. He submitted these findings to public record, saying that there was no way the Fire Department could have responded within 4 minutes to any of those places with the Ocean Terrace Firehouse closed, temporarily or not. He said that when the firehouse was closed, the City was aware that there was no way they could operate within that stated goal and no notice was given of this and that was outrageous. Councilman Walsh said that as the author of the ordinance, he invited the opportunity to work with anyone they thought it needed fine tuning but there was an obvious problem with how it would be enforced going forward. He said that the language was fairly clear but he'd been told that the first emergency purchase order for work at this firehouse was cut November 1, 2007; over a month prior to its closing. He requested a written opinion from the City Attorney's Office with regard to how this would be enforced and who would ultimately held responsible and whether it would mean fining whoever was responsible for not abiding by this ordinance. He said that at a minimum, if some type of exception had to be made for emergencies and 45 day notice cannot be given, then there should be hand delivered notice given instead to every City Council Member. Councilman Walsh reported that he'd visited the firehouse with Rep. Keeley after hearing some stories about the building and surrounding land. He stated that one could see alongside the foundation of that firehouse where the earth was pulled away. He said that if one were to look down the street from the back parking area, one could clearly observe a dip of unimaginable proportions. Councilman Walsh then noted that walking alongside that firehouse one could see where concrete had cracked from the settling around the building. He said he didn't really believe that the temporary repairs that were currently being made were going to have any lasting effect. He said that he wanted a full analysis of the property submitted to Council because fixing a firehouse and not having any road to drive out onto when a call came in wasn't of much value either. He recommended that the Council and the Mayor look at the road between the firehouse and Goodwill where they could see a steep decline as the road approached the firehouse. He said that there were serious problems there and he didn't know if the City is looking into them or putting them off but the Council should be aware of them and decide if they would have to deal with them.

Mayor Finch thanked Councilman Walsh and introduced the next speaker, Judge Carmen Lopez.

Judge Lopez thanked State Representative Bob Keeley for the card he'd sent out that week, informing residents that this hearing would be held. She said that she'd been very concerned about this matter since hearing about the fire on Fairfield Ave. and participating with the Monsignor and the church in that very tragic event. She said that she was moved to speak earlier because it appeared as though the Mayor was calling Mr. Morales' attention or reprimanding him while the City Attorney was allowed to stand and speak, accusing Mr. Morales of using the tragic deaths of three people to further union purposes with no reprimand. She wondered how anyone could make such a statement at a meeting held for the public to be heard and said that it didn't appear fair that there was no equal reprimand for Atty. Anastasi, despite his being a city employee. She said that it was inappropriate of the City Attorney to speak to a citizen of the city of Bridgeport in that manner because it was their taxes that paid him. She went on to ask if there was

some way for the public to find out how this building got in such a state of disrepair without anyone ever doing anything about it. She then noted that Mayor Finch had said that public officials would be available to answer questions after the meeting and said she considered it unfair that those officials would not be speaking and answering questions on the record like the rest of the attendees.

Mayor Finch thanked Judge Lopez and called Ms. Janette Watson to speak.

Ms. Watson introduced herself, saying that she was a pastor and a long time community activist and that her family had lived in the PT Barnum Apartments from the time that she was born. She said that she now lived on Arctic Street but was very concerned because she had a five-month-old granddaughter living in the PT Barnum Apartments. She said that the focus of this discussion was not smoke detectors but the firehouse. She explained that as a secretary she was required to submit documentation to her employer on anything that would concern her and wondered what happened to the documentation to inform people of the deterioration of the firehouse that had been happening over many years. She asked what would happen in the absence of the Ocean Terrace fire company if the Wood Avenue company was out on a call and there was an emergency and if there were additional trucks available to respond. She said that smoke detector batteries could be checked daily and still run out overnight and while landlords knew that they were supposed to have smoke detectors, there was a large non-English speaking population in Bridgeport who didn't know where or how to get them. Ms. Watson said that she was employed at Longfellow School and none of the parents of students that she'd spoken to knew about this meeting.

Mayor Finch thanked Ms. Watson and introduced Ms. Felicia Upchurch.

Ms. Upchurch said that she lived in the PT Barnum Apartments and didn't know that the firehouse was closed until she'd gotten the card from Rep. Keeley in the mail that very day.

Mayor Finch assured her that the firehouse was now open.

Ms. Upchurch stated that if there was no emergency response service at the Ocean Terrace firehouse she would have to take her four children out of Longfellow school. She explained that two of her children were asthmatic and that the Fire Department responded more quickly and efficiently than the ambulance company. She said that it was a shame that she never knew about this closing.

Mr. Finch once again assured her that the firehouse was now open and told her to inform her neighbors of this. He then called upon Ms. Donna Fuel to speak.

Ms. Fuel said that she was also a resident in the PT Barnum Apartments and an advocate for the residents of the Bridgeport Housing Authority. She said that Bridgeport Housing Authority residents were never informed of the firehouse's closing and only found out

after the fire on Fairfield Avenue. She said that she'd spoken to many residents and a prevailing concern was that the Fire Department was the first to respond to any emergency, not limited to fires. She said that she also had a grandchild who was one year old and had sleep apnea so she often had to call 911 and the Fire Department was always the first to respond and her grandchild was alive because of that response. She said that she'd seen the ambulance company get lost in the Twin Towers Apartments while trying to respond to an emergency at the PT Barnum Apartments and get lost in the PT Barnum Apartments while trying to respond to an emergency in the Twin Tower Apartments. She said that this was not a problem with the Fire Department as they knew the area well. She said that the Fire Department treated residents with respect and that firefighters would open hydrants for children in the summer time so they were not only there to protect people but also to provide the security of knowing that someone would be there if needed.

Mayor Finch thanked Ms. Fuel and introduced the final speaker of the night, Ms. Patty Scott.

Ms. Scott said that she'd just received notification of this meeting that night. She said that she did not envy the decision of having to keep this firehouse open or closed, but I did know that there were several factors affecting the viability of the neighborhood as it was currently finally getting rebuilt and growing and the firehouse was a true need. She said that she didn't full understand what happened or why the firehouse's foundation was failing but she'd invested a lot of time and a lot of money into this community and her home to try to make Blackrock a great place to live and a place that people would want to come to live, work, play and be entertained. She said that the closing of the firehouse would undermine all of the efforts of all the people in this room and in Blackrock who were trying to keep this neighborhood a viable asset to the City of Bridgeport.

Mayor Finch closed the public hearing, saying that he'd learned a lot as he believed everyone had particularly how much Bridgeport appreciates its Fire Department, the great service they provide and how difficult it was to provide a public service in a City like Bridgeport. He said that there was a problem with the City's buildings and that there were hundreds of buildings in Bridgeport that the Public was responsible for and it was very difficult for all of them to be maintained optimally. He said that this was something that his administration and the Council would be working on. He thanked everyone for attending and encouraged the public to speak with City staff and Council further if they wished.

### ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm by Mayor Finch.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Schroder  
Telesco Secretarial Services

Bridgeport City Council  
Special Meeting – Public Hearing  
February 21, 2008  
Page 12