

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS COMMITTEE
EMERGENCY MEETING
MARCH 21, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia, Co-Chair; Denese Taylor-Moye; Anthony Paoletto; Milta Feliciano; Jack Banta; John Olson; Nessah Smith

STAFF: Mark Anastasi, Associate City Attorney; Angel dePara, Chief Administrative Office; Daniel Roach, Mayor's Office

CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 8:00 PM. A quorum was present.

The Chair stated that this meeting is put into effect two members of the public who have applied to the Tax Assessment Board. She stated that this needs to be done tonight, as the Board begins tomorrow. She stated that they have both the background checks and ethics checks regarding Mr. Coviello and Mr. Benson. The Chair passed the information out to the committee members, and instructed them to return the documents once they finished reading them.

NEW APPOINTMENTS

Atty. Anastasi stated, as this is an emergency meeting without the standard 24 hour notice of the meeting, the nature of the emergency must be clarified. In support of that, he submitted a memo from Ken Flatto, Director of Finance. The Chair read the document into the record as follows:

From: Ken Flatto

Sent: Monday, March 21, 2016 12:34 PM

To: Anastasi, Mark T; DePara, Angel

Cc: Roach, Daniel; Meyer, RChristopher; Gomes, John

Subject: RE: Appointments to Board of Assessment Appeals

Attachments: public notice boaa.pdf

Attached is the public notice and advertisement issued by the Assessor's office evidencing the fact that reassessment meetings and hearings commence March 22nd and run through April. Our hope is to conduct training for new members within the next week or as soon as possible.

The actual Assessment Appeal hearings are slated to commence on Monday, March 28th.

The Board truly requires enough members to serve now due to the volume of hearings during a reassessment year such as this one!

Feel free to pass this email along to the Council members if necessary. The Tax Collector is in the process of providing requested information today regarding nominees to the Board.

Thank you so much for assistance on this matter. IF you need any other information please let me know.

Ken

The Chair stated if the committee had any other questions, Mr. Roach and Mr. DePara were present to answer them, and if necessary they could call Mr. Flatto. She stated that a personal history is attached in the distributed documents, and that both candidates were interviewed by the committee and are current on their taxes.

To that point, the Chair read the following communication from Levonbria Johnson into the record:

From: Johnson, Levonbria
Sent: Monday, March 21, 2016 1:38 PM
To: Flatto, Kenneth; DePara, Angel; Anastasi, Mark T
Subject: CURRENT TAXES

Good Afternoon,

Charles J. Coviello and Oyiboka Benson are current on their taxes.

Best,
Levonbria Johnson

Council Member Taylor-Moye asked if this is the first time the committee has seen these documents, and the Chair answered in the affirmative, stating that they had just received the documents tonight.

Oyiboka Benson (285 Laurel Avenue, Bridgeport, CT) to Board of Assessment Appeals

Council Member Martinez stated that she had concerns regarding Mr. Benson. She asked how the candidates are picked. Mr. Roach stated that names are recommended through the Mayor's office, and are then sent to the Commission.

Council Member Martinez asked how long Mr. Benson has been a resident of the City, as it appears he registered in 2013. She additionally asked the scope of the background check, and whether it is local or state-wide. Atty. Anastasi stated that there is correspondence provided by the CAO, and the background check is bifurcated into two parts. The local portion is done immediately by the Bridgeport Police Department. The State conducts the federal background check, which takes a month to process. Should anything be disclosed that indicates an issue with the applicant, that would be grounds for immediate removal. Atty. Anastasi stated that at the State level, the background check is substantial and time consuming. He further stated that there is no requirement that they do it, but Bridgeport requires it, and that they have the applicants disclose certain elements of their history prior to the check.

Council Member Martinez noted that Mr. Benson is unemployed and asked what type of background the City generally prefers regarding the Assessment Appeals Board. Atty. Anastasi stated that there is no set criteria, but that they generally look for a background with substantial financial experience. He further stated that Mr. Benson was an accountant at the Bridgeport Housing Authority for a substantial period of time, and anticipates being employed by them again in short order. Council Member Martinez asked if there was verification from the Housing Authority about this, and Atty. Anastasi stated that the legal side of the Housing Authority confirmed this to him by word of mouth. Atty. Anastasi further stated that Mr. Benson has a doctorate.

Council Member Olson stated that this discussion should have happened in the committee, rather than tonight, as it is exceedingly rushed. He stated that he has reservations regarding Mr. Benson, as compared to Mr. Coviello's years of experience, his qualifications look a bit light. Council Member Olson asked why they feel Mr. Benson would be competent and appropriate. Mr. Roach stated that he has nothing to add regarding the background Mr. Anastasi already offered. Mr. Roach stated that Mr. Benson is obviously intelligent, has an accounting background, and pointed out that of a real estate background does not preclude him from serving on the board.

Council Member Brantley asked if there is a potential conflict with Mr. Benson working for the Housing Authority and serving on the Board. Atty. Anastasi answered in the negative, and echoed what Mr. Roach stated regarding the fact that a real estate background is not vital. He stated that Mr. Benson brings financial expertise, and that the Board operates as a unit, with different people bringing different skills. Council Member Brantley stated that Mr. Benson lives in her district, and that he was not introduced to her until this year. She stated that she is concerned about him serving on the Board given his tactics during the election. Atty. Anastasi stated that this was an inappropriate forum for those grievances. Council Member Brantley stated that she does not trust Mr. Benson and will not vote for him if the recommendation comes to

Council Member Taylor-Moye stated that they cannot anticipate if someone will go back to a job. She stated that while Mr. Benson is likely qualified, she is displeased that they are receiving

these applications now. Atty. Anastasi stated that there are many individuals who serve on Boards who are unemployed retirees.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PAOLETTO MOVED TO FAVORABLY REFER THE NOMINATION OF OYIBOKA BENSON (285 LAUREL AVENUE, BRIDGEPORT, CT) TO THE BOARD OF ASSESSMENT APPEALS.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER SMITH SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Charles J. Coviello Jr. (113 Waterman Street, Bridgeport, CT) to Board of Assessment Appeals

**** COUNCIL MEMBER FELICIANO MOVED TO FAVORABLY REFER THE NOMINATION OF CHARLES J. COVIELLO JR. (113 WATERMAN STREET, BRIDGEPORT, CT) TO THE BOARD OF ASSESSMENT APPEAL.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PAOLETTO SECONDED THE MOTION.**

Council Member Salter inquired about Mr. Coviello's arrest for assault. Atty. Anastasi stated that it is his understanding that this is a decades old incident, and that Mr. Coviello had previously served on the Board of Assessment Appeals. Council Member Salter noted that this fact was not brought up during the course of the interview. Atty. Anastasi stated that the incident goes back to a period prior to appointments, and that Mr. Coviello served appropriately for the incident.

Council Member Taylor-Moye stated the importance of getting these applications in on time, as it would've been nice to be able to get in front of these nominations before it became an emergency. Atty. Anastasi stated that the point was well taken, and noted that one of the issues they faced was their inability to get a quorum for the Ethics Commission. He presented a packet of the Ethics' Commission's finding to the committee, and stated that they are unanimously in favor of the applicants.

Council Member Olson stated, as someone who served on the Board, he had confidence that Mr. Coviello would be a good candidate.

Council Member Martinez stated that, as Bridgeport has recently begun to practice 2nd chance with offenders, they shouldn't judge an action that is several decades old. She further stated that Mr. Coviello is well-educated and a community activist.

Council President McCarthy stated that he supports the nomination of Mr. Coviello.

Council Member Lyons expressed her support of Mr. Coviello.

Council Member Taylor-Moye clarified that Council Member Salter's remark had more to do with the lack of disclosure regarding the charge against Mr. Coviello, rather than his quality as a candidate. Council Member Salter confirmed this.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PAOLETTO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER FELICIANO SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting concluded at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Ramos
Telesco Secretarial Services