

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CONTRACTS COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
JANUARY 25, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Jeanette Herron, Co-chair; Maria Pereira, Co-chair; Scott Burns, Richard Ortiz; Dasha Spell

OTHERS: Council Member E. Martinez; James T. Maye, Associate City Attorney; Thomas Gaudett, Deputy Chief of Staff; Benji Labrador, Parks Commission Chair; Aaron Curry, Deputy Director of Public Facilities; John Hosier, Parks Commissioner; Jose Tiago; Call-in User_1; Galaxy S10; 203-395-4604, 475-225-6136

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Herron called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. A quorum was present.

01-23 Proposed Lease Agreement with Aquarion Water Company of Connecticut regarding Vacant Land at the Fairchild-Wheeler Golf Course for the purpose of Installing a Water Pump Station along with any related Infrastructure or Appurtenances to the Facility.

Atty. Maye greeted the Committee. He said that at the previous meeting they had discussed the existing lease and terms of the proposed lease, but there were additional concerns about the price. The current lease amount now reflects a lease price of \$300,000 rather than original lease cost of \$146,000.

Council Member Pereira stated she had sent emails to the Committee members informing them that in 2022 Aquarion generated a daily revenue of \$631,315.00, which is \$19 million dollars a month. In 2022, they generated \$23.4 million in revenue.

She asked for confirmation that the evaluation for this undeveloped property was \$100,000. Atty. Maye said that Aquarion had received an assessment for a permanent easement on the undeveloped parcel was \$100,000.

Council Member Pereira wished to know if the City had hired the appraiser. Atty. Maye stated that the City appraiser gave them an assessment of \$146,000, which is why they had requested that amount from Aquarion.

Council Member Pereira said she refused to believe that the City would allow someone to submit their own property value assessment.

Council Member Spell said that she had visited the parcel after the previous meeting. She asked why the City was not selling the property since it was so small. She said she was not in favor of leasing it for 60 years.

Atty. Maye explained there had been concerns about selling the parcel because it is the Parks property.

Council Member Pereira said that the parcel was 9,640 feet and the lease amount was for 720 months, or 60 years. This would make the monthly rate would be \$203.00 a month for basically 10,000 sq. feet of property. This works out to .021¢ per square foot, which is outrageous. The standard market rate for the leasing of undeveloped land is 10% of the assessed value per year. Based on that formula, Council Member Pereira said that the lease should be between \$650,000 and \$700,000.

She also noted that there was no adjustment for inflation, which in Fairfield County, would be between 2% to 3% annually. This is unfair to the taxpayers. Council Member Pereira does not believe in corporate welfare. A standard garage in Bridgeport that would be 10’x 18’ or 200 sq. ft. would cost a resident \$200 a month.

Aquarion needs the second pump to sell water to the rate payers. This is not what any other person would pay for a fair market rate value. She wished to know why the City would be providing corporate welfare to a very profitable company.

Atty. Maye said he was relying on the figures that came from the two appraisals. In terms of a permanent easement, he felt the City was ahead of the game since they had requested \$300,000 rather than the original amount of \$146,000. Council Member Pereira stated that this was a not a fair market rate for property in Fairfield on a golf course for a profitable company.

She objected to the fact that on page 2, it states the leaser would have the option to have three options to renew for 20 years each after the original 60 years. Council Member Pereira said that Aquarion was controlling the lease rather than the City and felt that the lessor should have the control rather than the lease holder.

Council Member Pereira also objected to some of the language on page 2 regarding the phrase “as defined below” .

Council Member Pereira asked whether the contract would have to go back to the Parks Board for approval since it was edited and revised. Atty. Maye said that he did not think that the Parks Board would have to approve receiving more revenue.

Council Member Pereira said that the Parks Board needs to be respected and they should re-ratify the contract.

Council Member Ortiz said that he had several questions about the parcel. He asked what would happen if the City sold the parcel. Atty. Maye said that if the City sold the property, they would lose control of it. However, he said that they had not discussed selling the property and would have to check with Mark about this.

Council Member Burns said that he was not at the last meeting because he was out of town. He asked what the new structure would look like and how it would be assessed as personal property taxes. Atty. Maye said that they would have to check into this.

Council Member Burns pointed out that Craig's name was on the contract and he has since left the City. Council Member Herron said that whoever fills that position would be authorized to sign the contract.

Council Member Pereira said that Aaron Curry, the Public Facilities Deputy Director, had been present on the call. Mr. Curry is also overseeing the Parks. Council Member Herron said that Mr. Curry had been on the call earlier. She said that the Aquarion representative was supposed to be present on the call to answer questions. One of the callers identified himself as the Aquarion representative and said he was on the call.

Council Member Pereira said that Council Member Ortiz had spoken about the amount being \$300,000. She said that the proposal that the Council Members had received originally from Craig was \$146,000. At the last meeting, Council Member McCarthy had proposed the \$300,000 amount after joining the meeting late.

Council Member Pereira said that there was information from the Tax Assessor's Office in the original packet. That \$10,459,090 figure was for the entire parcel including Vasi's, the sprinkler head and the golf course.

Council Member Pereira said that many towns in Connecticut were banning leaf blowers because of the noise and exhaust. She asked if they had considered noise pollution.

Council Member Herron said that the contract said originally they had discussed \$147,000 but the Committee voted on \$300,000. The Aquarion representative said that the existing facility is vintage, but it has acoustic treatment. He explained that when the new facility is constructed and brought on line, the old pumps will be decommissioned.

The company has constructed pumps in residential neighborhoods and they address both the noise issue and vibrations by using acoustic tiles in the building.

The representative said for the record that the Authority pumps water to the water main and the water main in turn delivers that water to both the customers and the Fairchild Wheeler elevated storage tank. The pump station is not there solely to serve the storage tank, it serves the entire distribution system including all customers of Fairfield and Bridgeport for their consumptive use of water as well as non-consumptive uses such as washing dishes in restaurants. He also explained that the fire hydrants are also connected to the same water mains as the residential and commercial properties. The pumps will provide service to all of these locations.

Mr. Labrador said that there had been occasional comments about the City selling park land and that they appear to be unaware that the Charter addresses this. He said that people cannot pick and choose what part of the Charter they wish to use because it is very similar to law.

Mr. Labrador said that the Board never seems to receive a final break down on paper when changes are made to the park property. He said that he had discovered this meeting was being held by accident. He did not understand why this was so. The Park Charter need to be respected and the Board of Parks Commissioners needs to trust the City staff regarding issues like the property evaluations and other issues.

Council Member Herron said that she appreciated that Mr. Labrador was often not notified about issues, but it was an administrative issue. She said that she would look into this.

Council Member Spell said that she had been told there was a T-Mobile tenant on the property and wanted to know when that lease was up. The Aquarion representative said that there was no tenant on the property.

Council Member Pereira asked if the Parks Board had voted on the lease. Mr. Labrador said that they had seen the original lease with the amount of \$146,000 based on the assumption that due diligence and research had been performed.

Council Member Pereira said to Mr. Labrador that the City Charter was law, which is ratified by the voters. It is the law of Bridgeport.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PEREIRA MOVED TO AMEND THE CONTRACT ON PAGE 2, BULLET 4 BY DELETING THE PHRASE “AS DEFINED BELOW”.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER ORTIZ SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER ORTIZ MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM 01-23 PROPOSED LEASE AGREEMENT WITH AQUARION WATER COMPANY OF CONNECTICUT REGARDING VACANT LAND AT THE FAIRCHILD-WHEELER GOLF COURSE FOR THE PURPOSE OF INSTALLING A WATER PUMP STATION ALONG WITH ANY RELATED INFRASTRUCTURE OR APPURTENANCES TO THE FACILITY AS AMENDED.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS SECONDED.**

Council Member Burns said that he would like some clarification on the issue of property taxes.

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH THREE (3) IN FAVOR (BURNS, ORTEZ AND SPELL) AND ONE (1) OPPOSED (PEREIRA).**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER SPELL MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER ORTIZ SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Telesco Secretarial Services