

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW LONDON

A Public Hearing held by the City Council was called to order by City Clerk Ayala at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, October 4, 2021. Due to the ongoing national Coronavirus pandemic, this Public Hearing was held virtually via Zoom.

Present for the City Council:

Acting President James Burke, Presiding
Acting President Pro Tem Reona Dyess
Councilor Kevin L. Booker, Jr.
Councilor Curtis K. Goodwin
Councilor John D. Satti

Councilors absent:

President Efraín Domínguez, Jr.
President Pro Tem Alma D. Nartatez

Also Present:

Mayor Michael E. Passero
David McBride, Finance Director
Jeanne Milstein, Human Services Director

The Subject of this Public Hearing:

The public hearing was held for the purpose of receiving comments on the American Rescue Plan Act Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds and how the funds will be used in the City of New London.

City Clerk Ayala called the Public Hearing to order at 6:00 p.m. Five councilors were present. President Domínguez and President Pro Tem Nartatez were absent.

Councilor Goodwin moved to appoint Councilor Burke as acting President for the Public Hearing. The motion was seconded by Councilor Dyess. The motion passed 5-0.

President Burke moved to appoint Councilor Dyess as acting President Pro Tem for the Public Hearing. The motion was seconded by Councilor Goodwin. The motion passed 5-0.

Public Comment

Spike Lobdell, 19 Mystic Point Lane, Mystic, I am the CEO and founder of NESS. We value our long-term relationship with New London. In partnership with New London Recreation, we are proposing to bring unique educational experiences to each neighborhood in New London by creating mobile classrooms to engage students in their own backyard.

Dr. Eric Isselhardt, 140 West Broad Street, Pawcatuck, these mobile classrooms serve as youth services hubs that go where you are, offering programs to build confidence and

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW LONDON

experience how perseverance often wins the day. They will meet the needs of kids where they are in a coordinated manner.

Jose Garaycochea, Groton, CT, Executive Director of Expressiones, there is increasing evidence that proves art expands brain function. Art is invaluable to our proper function. Expressiones serves low income and underprivileged children through our program. This program includes cultural enrichment. Children can better express themselves and it provides a safe environment. The program will also feature community artists.

Regina Mosley, 167 Vauxhall Street, New London, I am speaking as a citizen. I am here to talk to you about the needs of the actual people who live in this community, like the services FRESH provided throughout the pandemic. If we need mobile classrooms, invest more money in the Birth-8 program and the schools. We don't need anybody from out of town to help us save our own children. We can do that we just need the resources. I'm hoping you will disseminate this budget to address racism as a public health issue.

Baylee Howard, 1107 Ocean Avenue, New London, I don't want our waterfront to be a wealthy person's playground. I want to see more stores with stuff made by New London folks. This money gives us real options. We know we need more services. The survey was taken by less than 120 people. We aren't seeking out and listening well enough. People want money to go to health and mental stability.

Frida Berrigan, 246 Connecticut Avenue, New London, a survey done in August found that 45,200 CT households are behind in their rent. In New London at least 60% of residents are renters. This is a worrisome future for us. Hundreds of millions of dollars is available to landlords and property owners but renters remain under protected. In the people's budget survey, 52% said an affordable apartment would improve their lives. Only 14% said more police funding would make their lives better. More than 30% of renters in New London pay more than half their earnings to landlords every month. This process to distribute the ARPA funding needs to be truly responsive to the needs of New London.

Alicia McAvay, 38 Lincoln Avenue, New London, I am the Director of Fresh New London. When I first learned about this funding I was excited. Many said this would be an opportunity to fund projects identified by residents in the people's budget. The process leaves us questioning the intention and impact of these funds. It is hard to know where to advocate or know why FRESH's proposal was cut by more than half. FRESH staff never took a break during this pandemic. We filled gaps in service when other organizations couldn't or wouldn't. We built backyard gardens for 30 families and expanded our own footprint so we could get out more than 7,000 pounds of home-grown food. I am asking you to fully include us.

James Diaz-Saavedra, 12 Farnsworth Street, New London, we should improve Ocean Beach Park with cameras and a new perimeter fence. It was vandalized heavily this year. The city owns OBP but doesn't earmark funds to maintain it.

Nicolo Festa, New London, submitted the following written public comment that was read by Councilor Booker: As I understand it, the purpose of this plan is to address the impacts of the

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW LONDON

coronavirus pandemic. It is my understanding that the funds are to be used to address public health, negative economic impacts, services to disproportionately affected communities, infrastructure, and administration related to those matters. Mayor Passero has publicly stated that the proposed budget represents a commitment to the city's disenfranchised communities, and he is hoping to use the money to make strides in improving decades of poverty that have existed in New London. The budget in its present form needs revision and shifting of funds if it is to be optimally successful in making good on that commitment and achieving the goal of reducing poverty. The budget, as written, strongly suggests that the creators of the budget are out of touch with the needs of the community. I don't know how they came up with the current allocations for particular projects, but in some areas, they appear to be tone deaf as to what New Londoners want as priorities. The People's Budget would be a good starting point to assess need and craft a budget more in line with community expectations. Equally important, it would be a process of budget development that is far more transparent from start to finish. I have numerous problems with the budget as presented. Why is the Police Department being given additional funds for very worthy projects without first considering how to reallocate current funding to meet those needs? Why is Ledge Light Health District given only a 1% increase in funding when the bill's first purpose is public health? Many people in New London are still woefully ill-informed about coronavirus and a massive education campaign would help reduce its spread. What could possibly be the justification for \$2 million – full funding – for middle school marine educational programs in a city as poor as ours? What kind of bang for the buck are low-income New Londoners going to get from that program? And why is FRESH New London being given less than half of its requested funds when its operations not only address the nutritional needs of poor and low-income citizens but also enhance the general health of the people who avail themselves of its services? Furthermore, FRESH youth programs teach young people urban gardening and leadership skills that have far more potential to lift a larger number of citizens out of poverty than a marine sciences program. This budget approval process needs to slow down to better reflect the priorities and needs of the citizens and the intent of ARPA. It is my hope that the city council revises it to reflect those needs, the economic welfare of the city, and the bill's intent.

Brenda De Los Santos, 117 Blackhall Street, New London, submitted the following written public comment that was read by President Burke: On behalf of the Board of Directors at Fiddleheads Food Co-op I would like to support *fully* funding FRESH New London's request for ARPA funds. FRESH has done tremendous work in supporting the community and our local food system during the coronavirus pandemic. Their commitment to food justice, community building, and building a robust local food system is backed up by their actions. Healthy communities, a resilient local food system and investment in our children will help New London overcome future challenges it may face, and these are just some of the things this local community organization does. By investing in the urban farm project at Cottage street, New London will allow FRESH to grow their capacity to do this work. Investment of ARPA funds in this project will be money well spent - these funds will go to an organization that is accountable to their community and the money will stay largely in the community through investment in underutilized city space and jobs for local people and local youth.

Elizabeth Spurr, 134 Ledyard Street, New London, submitted the following written public comment that was read by Councilor Goodwin: I currently serve on the Advisory Board for

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW LONDON

FRESH New London. I'm writing to ask that our hard-working City Council members and Mayor Passero take a deeper approach to the allocation of the ARPA funds that are intended to hold up and support the needs of New London Citizens. It's clear that this is the beginning of a process, which so far seems like an attempt to offer some hope in a hurry. I viewed the 300+ page document with the information provided from all proposed recipients and the line items for funding. Unfortunately so far it's looking like we are less focused on New London's already existing funding gaps and the New London based non-profits and groups which have consistently taken on the burden of our community needs. I believe that the intention here is to support the community and so far this is not being communicated to us with clarity. There have been some surveys in the community, recently one put out by the City of New London - I'm curious about how many people (in total) took that survey. If anyone can speak to that number I'd like to know. The Peoples Budget Survey should also be considered as a guiding light for this discussion. The Peoples Budget Survey was conducted at a grass roots level and I feel very accurately represents our community's needs. New London has declared racism as a public health crisis, and this guiding principle needs to be in our hearts and minds at every step of the process. An important community initiative created by New London Citizens which has helped measure community needs is the 5 Year Urban Agriculture Plan led by FRESH New London. This plan was created by New London citizens who dedicated countless volunteer hours working on ideas to bring food security to New London. During the last two years of crisis FRESH has been working overtime to get food and educational resources into the community in the most direct way possible. At this juncture, FRESH has requested ARPA funds, backed by a clear solid proposal to build a greenhouse, staff our sites so we can grow more food, create more snack beds, build backyard gardens and support people to grow their own food through outreach and education. Please fully fund FRESH's proposal and sustain the support that FRESH continues to bring to New London. I'm glad to see that there is so far, full support for the SE CT CLT, Step Up New London and some other groups who do so much important work that is needed here. There are winners and losers and that seems haphazard. There are so many groups doing fine work with intense need, and I'm asking that we take a closer look so that we can feel good about these very tough choices. I'm asking that our choices be based on organizational merit and actual tangible benefits rendered.

Karen Paul, 281 State Street, New London, I am here speaking on behalf of the Senior Affairs Commission. We are requesting that at least 10% of the funds the city is receiving be set aside for senior citizens programs. We ask you to remember that at least 20% of the population and 1/3 of registered voters and a good majority of our volunteers to boards and agencies are senior citizens. We feel as though most seniors are pushed to bottom of the list when it comes to our needs and respect from the city.

Mirna Martinez, 19 Prospect Street, New London, when the survey came out I believe only 100 people filled it out. That is dismal. I was not aware of it as chair of the education committee for the long-term recovery committee until I reached out to our finance director and it came out in conversation. That is poor planning if we are looking to illicit feedback. I am asking for more transparency. I recommend we properly fund the Latinx community and those that have been historically marginalized.

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW LONDON

Claudio Melendez-Cooper, I am Co-Director of the Hispanic Alliance of SE CT. For over 20 years our aim has been to foster the Latino community that contributes to the vibrancy of our collective community. The Latino community has been historically disadvantaged. We are doing our best to level the playing field but we can't do our work without financial backing. Help us help our community.

Maegan Parrott, 44 Summer Street, New London, I am the Director of Step Up New London and a member of the people's budget coalition. Please slow down the process in determining how the ARPA funds will be spent. The current timeline is too fast. The people's budget survey was completed by about 1,000 people. Respondents said teen and youth programs, affordable apartments, and job training programs, among others, would improve their lives. Please look at ways of addressing systemic issues.

Aaron Ide, 44 Pacific Street, New London, submitted the following written public comment that was read by Councilor Satti: Thank you to the council for allowing me to comment on such a unique and wonderful opportunity that has been given to this city. This is truly a windfall for our community in a time we definitely could use it. My concern is that we need to treat it as such, we should be looking to spend it in a way that gets us the most bang-for-our-buck. All of this money should be 'invested;' not 'spent.' However, a number of these proposals are new social services that will be carried by the New London taxpayers come 2025. If the total amount is amortized to ~\$8.7M/year, that equates to nearly a 10% increase to the FY22 city budget, and therefore a potential 10% increase to our future taxes. If we expect to stand up new social services, we should at least be open and honest with our intention to grow our government and its dependence on the taxpayer. I would challenge the council to make the responsible decision that none of these funds be spent on recurring programs. The new capital needs to be invested only in projects the city would otherwise be unable to afford, and which provide a measurable return on investment. This grant money needs to be treated like the capital it is, not a 'free sample' that locks us into a costly long-term contract.

Tasha Hosendove, 239 Williams Street, New London, submitted the following written public comment that was read by Councilor Booker: I am a single mother of one seventh grader who attends BDJMS. I transitioned to New London from Hartford about 5 years ago. I am proud to call New London my home now. When I moved here 5 years ago, I did need to stay at the Homeless Hospitality Shelter for 3 months, where FRESH was involved, listening to the homeless community providing snack beds throughout New London. I stay involved in anything in my community where my pre-teen son is growing, and FRESH was and continues to be accessible to every community organization I was a part of. At one point, I was involved with quite a few opportunities in New London. COVID-19 jeopardized my chances with all of them except FRESH. People in my neighborhood were hungry. People in my building were hungry. I know I received stimulus checks, and I know people who did not. These situations caused stress in many households, especially with the world on hold, including our incomes. We did not have to worry about nutrition because of the collaborative effort of FRESH, Step Up New London and Ledge Light. I was like many, frightened to even go outside. These events did NOT stop FRESH from reaching out to our community and responding generously AND delivering the food to hundreds of stomachs weekly. This is the type of establishment that authorities need to maintain and thank and keep fully funded. Food, water and shelter are necessities and FRESH

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW LONDON

maintains providing 2 out of those 3. Now what is the question? Of course, as a tax payer whose self and child benefitted I do expect that FRESH would get fully funded. I am certain every single one of us knows someone in New London who benefitted from FRESH during COVID and beyond. We are talking about monies specifically allocated to NEW LONDON for COVID. It just makes sense to fully fund the hands that feeds us, especially when we have the means to do so. I pray that as a community, our voices matter, and that FRESH will receive what they asked for in which they will respond by it giving it back to New London. Now that's a solid win for us all. Thank you for your time.

Kat Goulart, 54 Dow Street, New London, I agree we need to slow down this process. I didn't hear anybody come and ask for more money for the recreation department. There is only one request in there. This is \$26 million. Why there is not more money going to the rec department I don't know. We need more programs there. This proposed budget is shameful. This is Covid money and there is no money allocated for testing, vaccination, or contact tracing. There is no money going towards eviction prevention. There is no money going towards management, early learning, yet we've got over \$1 million going to the sailing program. We need to look at supplementation. When this money is gone these non-profits will need support.

Maya Sheppard, 72 Vauxhall Street, New London, submitted the following written public comment which she read herself: The American Recovery Plan Act funding is an opportunity for our community to substantially remedy the drastic effects of system failures escalated in and predating COVID -19. The People's Budget Coalition spent the better part of November 2020 to June fighting hard for equitable funding in our communities and because of this we caught a glimpse of what it could look like for our community to start to be in real engagement when it comes to the monetary resources flowing through our community. Mayor Passero in the last hours before the final 2021 Budget vote you told myself and Alicia McAvay from Fresh NL the federal funds will be your chance to get the money that you want and for us to show up then. A glimpse of hope. So here we are. And in the past few weeks I've heard familiar reports from our community organizations that our city's administration has been unresponsive, unclear and unorganized in the process of how this money will roll out. This is unacceptable. For once again we are in a moment that could actually transform how our community could live, and we cannot afford to fumble it. Not by adding more funding to a police department that already received an increase just a few months ago, not by faulty communication with our city about this process. With the final reading just a few weeks out, there is so much confusion - we need more time to involve more community member participation! Push this by a few weeks to allow for this to happen in a more transparent way. I want to remind you all that: the Peoples Budget survey reached over 1000 people in just a few weeks which is 900 more than the city's survey completed by about 150 people - and the results are already - we did the work for you. A few quick results: 85% of New London residents considered the schools "Extremely Important." Step Up New London has been advocating for an inclusive, anti-racist and equitable education and housing experience for years hear them. 67% of residents responded that the Recreation Department is "Extremely Important." Leaders of our community have spent their time building the blue print for a recreation center. Hear them - be responsible and be accountable for the labor of your community's people. 55% of New London residents responded that the Senior Center/Human Services is "Extremely Important." 50% of New London residents considered the Public Works department "Extremely Important." Prioritize the proposals of the Community Land

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW LONDON

Trust as the work needs to continue to be done to push closing the home ownership gap for black and brown people. Cultured AF a black led arts space that is consistently pushed out, under resourced and inadequately supported! Let's fix that. Fresh New London's continuing to do the work to build a healthier more sustainable community. And many more! We could train and hire more community based mental health practitioners - give money to families that are struggling to making ends meet - which was 67.5% of our survey's participants. Housing, education, safety and income are human rights all the responsibility of our city's leadership and responsibility to build and grow stronger. So slow down, engage community, do the job. And a final reminder that when Black people have what we need and are free than we are all free so black leadership to the front always.

Jon Persson, 127 Hempstead Street, New London, submitted the following written public comment that was read by President Burke: I am currently the Secretary of the Southeastern Connecticut Community Land Trust. This evening the City Council of New London has been presented with an opportunity to build a strong and resilient community based on home ownership which is permanently affordable, and benefits the residents of this city instead of business interests with no connection to the city. A decision to fully fund the proposal submitted by the Southeastern Connecticut Community Land Trust will result in a community of home owners who will bring stability to the city for generations to come.

Anne Scheibner, 30 Broad Street, New London, submitted the following written public comment that was read by President Burke: I am writing in support of the SE CT Community Land Trust's proposal as part of the American Rescue Plan. The need for affordable housing has grown markedly in New London over the last 20 years. We need to be working proactively with neighborhoods and community residents to restore the many houses which need rehabbing in order to make them part of the city tax base and renew our home ownership base. The SE CT Community Land Trust provides us with an opportunity to create permanently affordable housing. Now is the time! Thank you for your consideration and support.

Adjournment

Councilor Satti moved to close the Public Hearing, seconded by President Pro Tem Dyess. The motion passed 5-0. The Public Hearing was closed at 7:00 p.m.

Attest: _____
Jonathan Ayala, City Clerk

Approved 10/18/2021

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW LONDON