

City of Taunton
Municipal Council
March 21, 2023

The Committee on Finance and Salaries

The meeting was held at Taunton City Hall, 15 Summer Street, Taunton, MA 02780 in the Chester R. Martin Municipal Council Chambers.

Present were Councilor Phillip Duarte, Chairman and Councilors Pottier and McCaul. Also present were CFO Patrick Dello Russo, City Auditor Ian Fortes, and Budget Director Gill Enos.

The meeting was called to order at 5:37 PM.

1. Meet to review the weekly vouchers and payroll for City departments.

MOTION: *Approve the payroll warrant in the amount of \$4,203,488.92. So voted.*

MOTION: *Approve the accounts payable warrant in the amount of \$10,722,436.70. So voted.*

2. Meet with the City Auditor to discuss the request to provide copies of all open and closed purchase orders since August 1, 2022 for any amounts over \$10,000 along with any quotes, solicitation documents, and contracts as well as, for amounts over \$50,000, all bid documents and contracts.

Councilor Duarte read letters from the CFO and finance team. The first was dated 2/24/23 and signed by Patrick Dello Russo which requested a narrower scope for the request.

MOTION: *Make the letter part of the record. So voted.*

Councilor Duarte read a second letter dated 3/3/23 signed by Patrick Dello Russo, Gill Enos, Christine Clymens, Paul Arikian, Ian Fortes, Richard Conti, Jim Howland, and Katherine Nunes.

MOTION: *Make the letter part of the record. So voted.*

Councilor Duarte stated that the Council had been provided with a list of Purchase Orders. He asked the City Auditor Ian Fortes to clarify his job as it relates to procurement and purchase orders. Mr. Fortes indicated that he is responsible for ensuring that funds are properly accounted for. He is responsible for preventing spending that is fraudulent, unlawful, or excessive. He explained that for purchases between \$10,000 and \$50,000 each voucher must contain a quote or agreement. For purchases over \$50,000 there must be a contract which is approved by the department head, vendor, Auditor's Office for funding, Law Department and the Mayor's Office.

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Councilor Pottier asked about the outside audit and, specifically, if there had been any findings on procurement. Mr. Enos indicated that there has never been any findings on procurement and that the PO system was instituted in January of 92. Mr. Fortes explained why the report that was distributed tonight was different from the report that had been previously distributed. Data is taken from Softright and dumped into Excel. Mr. Pottier suggested that such data can be manipulated. Mr. Enos explained that the audit firm has the ability to go right into Softright and look at the data there.

MOTION: *Made the list of purchase orders part of the record. So voted.*

Councilor Duarte questioned the use of blanket PO's and the team explained how they are used. Departments like to encumber their budget at the beginning of the year. He also asked about the accounting of ARPA funds and Mr. Fortes explained that all ARPA funds run through the Mayor's office.

Councilor Borges expressed her disappointment that Softright doesn't allow you to download everything without exporting to Excel because this can be manipulated. Mr. Enos took exception with this implication. Councilor Borges stressed that she does not believe this is a good system and that it should not require countless hours to generate the requested information. This should be available at the push of a button. Councilor Borges asked why Police cars were listed under the Mayor's new City Hall Construction and it was explained that this line was actually ARPA funded. Councilor Borges indicated that she would like the detailed documents on the new public safety building and on the architects for the project. She asked about the Police tasers that were purchased and it was stated that those were purchased with ARPA money. She stated that the reason that this had gotten to this point was because the finance team was singing the praises of the Procurement Officer and she wonders what occurred. She wanted to see where things went wrong or if things went wrong and to learn more about how things work. She was happy to hear that the Auditor's Office has controls in place. Mr. Dello Russo questioned the legislative body's role in transaction testing since they have been tested by professionals. Councilor Borges stressed that she believes her job is to protect tax payer money. Councilor Borges suggested the need for better systems to generate reports quickly and to be more transparent. Mr. Dello Russo stated that he does not believe transparency from his office is the issue and that he will provide the requested documents. Ms. Borges expressed her frustration working with a report that had changed since she had made notes on the previously provided list.

Councilor Pottier suggested sending the report in spreadsheet format so that Ms. Borges can sort the data as she wishes. He stated that he is happy that the auditing firm can access Softright. Mr. Enos pointed out that everything is approved by the Finance and Salaries Committee each week.

Councilor Duarte stressed that the finance team has a professional as well as legal obligation to be good stewards of the public dollar. He stressed that Mr. Fortes prohibits waste, fraud, and abuse. Mr. Fortes indicated that when he has a legal question he will go to the Law Department for guidance.

Councilor Pottier asked if Mr. Dello Russo signs off on the representation letter and Mr. Dello Russo confirmed. Mr. Dello Russo further indicated that this year the City is going through a far more detailed audit for the GFOA (Governor's Financial Accounting Association).

Councilor Dooner stated that she feels the finance team has been very transparent.

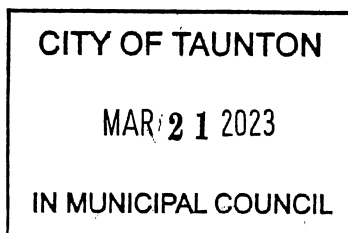
Councilor Coute took exception to a Councilor creating an allure of mischief or wrongdoing. He gave his thanks to the team and stressed that the Council is a legislative body which creates policy.

Councilor Sanders questioned Mr. Fortes on the process for handling items where more details are needed. He asked what happens when an employee submits things incorrectly and Mr. Dello Russo stressed that they work to make sure that the employee is on the same page. Mr. Sanders indicated that he had heard the words bid splitting before and indicated that sometimes the Council is treated more like an obstacle to be managed rather than partners in the process. Mr. Sanders referred to two employees who left and all the Council was told is that they are gone. He believes that a little transparency goes a long way. Mr. Sanders asked how many POs are waiting to be processed and Mr. Fortes stated that the bigger issue is that bills haven't been submitted to his office for payment. No check is issued without the signature of the Finance and Salaries Committee, the Mayor, and the Auditor.

Councilor Borges disagreed with statements that were made about the Council's role being only to create policy. She suggested that perhaps five councilors are privy to all the information but not all of them are. Ms. Borges asked if the vouchers might be shared with the Council in advance of the meeting. She asked for more information on the solar array and Mr. Enos indicated that negotiations are not complete for that. She asked about the smart cars that were purchased and suggested that this was a case of bid splitting. Mr. Dello Russo stated that this was not bid splitting. One car was identified on the current list of purchase orders but most were purchased prior to this list.

Mr. Duarte stressed that this issue is closed as far as the Committee is concerned.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:32 PM.



Respectfully submitted,



Maggie E. Clarke
Clerk of Council Committees

REPORTS ACCEPTED. RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED.


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Municipal Council
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The Committee of the Council as a Whole

The meeting was held at Taunton City Hall, 15 Summer Street, Taunton, MA 02780 in Chester R. Martin Municipal Council Chambers.

Present were Council President Kelly Dooner and Councilors Duarte, Borges, McCaul, Pottier, Coute, Sanders, and Quintal. Councilor Postell was absent. Also present were Chirag Patel and Eric Tavares of Botera Marijuana Dispensary, City Planner Kevin Scanlon, and Building Inspector Bob Pirozzi.

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 PM.

1. Meet to discuss the proposed onsite manager for Botera Marijuana Dispensary located at 295 Broadway.

Councilor Dooner read the letter from Detective Rutherford indicating that the proposed manager for Botera is Eric Tavares.

MOTION: *Approve.*

Councilor Pottier asked when they would be opening and Mr. Patel indicated they would be opening on Friday.

Councilor Sanders asked about the statewide process to become a marijuana dispensary manager and Mr. Tavares indicated that he had completed the process.

Councilor Borges wished them good luck.

Councilor McCaul asked for more information on Mr. Tavares' background. He was the inventory lead at their Franklin location and is moving to the Taunton location.

So voted.

MOTION: *Refer to the Committee of the Council as a Whole for a discussion on the process for approving marijuana managers. So voted.*

2. Meet with the City Planner and Building Inspector for an update on current business operations and building projects at 144 West Britannia Street.

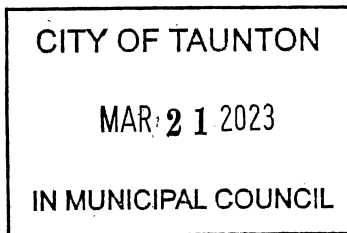
Councilor Coute, who had made the original motion on this topic, indicated that there is a lot of activity at that location and asked Mr. Scanlon and Mr. Pirozzi for an update on activity at 144 West Britannia Street.

Mr. Scanlon explained that when Reed and Barton closed they looked at segmenting the building and leasing the sections to different businesses. They did a special permit for the whole site and that has been in place since 2019. He stated that there have been three other hearings. Two are for marijuana manufacturing and delivery and one is for marijuana delivery. He said there is another upcoming for marijuana manufacturing. Only one is operational.

Councilor Coute asked about the timelines on each of these special permits and Mr. Scanlon indicated that the special permit from 2020, Freshly Baked, is operational. One was from August of 2022 so is probably still in the works. One special permit was issued in October of 2020, has not been acted upon and would, therefore, be expired.

MOTION: *Notify the individual that their special permit has expired and they need to come back and renew it. So voted.*

The meeting was adjourned at 6:47 PM.



Respectfully submitted,



Maggie E. Clarke
Clerk of Council Committees

REPORTS ACCEPTED. RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED.



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