



CITY OF NEW BRITAIN

EST. 1871

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
THE HONORABLE ERIN E. STEWART

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The Honorable Mark H. Bernacki
Town and City Clerk
Clerk of the Common Council
27 West Main Street
New Britain, CT 06051

June 18, 2018

**Re: 2018-2019 Fiscal Year Budget
Resolution No. 34258-5**

Dear Mr. Bernacki:

At its June 9, 2018 special meeting, the Common Council, by a vote of nine to five, amended Resolution No. 34258-5 concerning the General Fund Budget for Fiscal Year 2018-2019. Reductions were made in the Mayor's proposed budget by eliminating a number of positions and line items. There were also additions made in various line items, including \$25,242 into the Common Council budget. While I appreciate the time and effort the alderpersons invested to put forward this amendment, I have significant reservations and concerns about the changes that were made.

The budget passed by the Common Council on June 9, 2018 calls for the elimination of a number of critical function City jobs, including the Deputy Finance Director, Manager of Facilities and Energy, Director of Elderly Services, the Community Services Administrator, Civil Engineer I and Engineering Project Manager. These positions are all part of our Local 818 bargaining unit. Section 4-3 of their Collective Bargaining Agreement states: *"If a position is eliminated under the terms of this section, the significant functions of the position must cease to be performed by the City or its agent."* This section prohibits the layoff of a Local 818 employee unless the significant functions of the position cease to be performed by the City.

Eliminating the functions of these Local 818 positions would be detrimental to day-to-day operations and result in both a loss of services to our residents, and also added costs to operate the City. The elimination of these positions is a clear violation of the collective bargaining agreement and would be grounds for an unfair labor practice complaint by Local 818.

If these positions were to be eliminated, I am concerned as critical functions will no longer occur. For example, the Manager of Facilities and Energy oversees a division of over 30 employees who are responsible for the maintenance of all 1 million square feet of city buildings, properties, equipment and systems. The Director of Elderly Services is responsible for overseeing our Senior Center and administering the programs and activities that take place daily at that facility. With no one else on staff who will perform those duties? Who would then assist our seniors or maintain our buildings on a daily basis? (Not to mention, the Senior Center serves a lifesaving role as our cold weather shelter in the winter and cooling center in summer during regular business hours.) I reiterate

that, per contract, the functions of these positions cannot simply be shifted to remaining personnel. If these layoffs are allowed to go forward, these services can no longer be offered by the City.

The Council majority has also proposed the elimination of Local 1303 and Local 1186 positions. Local 1303 and Local 1186 have provisions in their collective bargaining agreements that provide an order of layoffs, which has to be followed. Prior to permanent employees being laid off, temporary and seasonal employees, part-time employees and full-time employees serving an initial probationary period must be laid off. These part-time and seasonal employees would include life guards, camp counselors, and landscapers. Furthermore, the Local 1186 contract contains a minimum staffing requirement for field staff personnel. When I took office, the minimum staffing requirement was 120. However, I have since been able to negotiate the reduction of that number to 112, which it is today.

The Council majority has also chosen to eliminate the position of Human Rights & Opportunities Officer. I originally proposed downgrading this position to Administrative Assistant in an attempt to save money but local leaders reached out to me to express concerns about the downgrading of that position as they felt that the Human Rights & Opportunities Officer position was too important. I was also approached by some members of the Common Council and Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities with the same concerns. As a result, my administration kept the title of Human Rights & Opportunities Officer and filled the position. To see it now eliminated leaves me to question the proponents' motives and sincerity.

Now let's get to the math: the Council's calculations of savings from the reductions does not take into account the unemployment costs that the City would be required to pay if these positions were eliminated and employees were laid off. That would approximately cost us an additional \$327,000. In addition, the Council has also not taken into consideration the buyout of accrued vacation time should employees be laid off. This will be a substantial amount that would not result in the savings the Council members hoped to achieve with this budget. Unfortunately, there are costs to cuts that were not factored into the ultimate budget amendment that was presented and passed. Therefore, the numbers do not add up when attempting to calculate the new mill rate in order to balance the budget.

What I find most disturbing about the entire budget process is that the Council scheduled a number of committee meetings and invited department heads to attend ostensibly to answer questions about the budget. Department heads were asked to attend these meetings and, for the most part, were not asked any questions relevant to their department budgets. This would have been the ideal time to vet the Council's "cost-cutting" proposals and get immediate feedback from the departments. It is disappointing to see that Council members did not take those opportunities (while we were paying everyone compensatory time) to get answers to their questions. What's even more troubling is that the finance department for the city was never consulted on any adjustments.

Since being elected to the Office of Mayor four and one-half years ago, I have made the difficult decisions necessary to solidify the City of New Britain's financial situation, while ensuring that we have adequate personnel to manage and provide services for our residents.

I have worked with our unions to fill management-level vacancies at significantly reduced salaries and have also decreased a number of positions within Local 818. In the 2014-2018 Local 818 Collective Bargaining Agreement, the City was successful in obtaining Local 818's agreement to remove a number of director positions - as well as attorney positions - from the Local 818 bargaining unit upon the departure of incumbent employees. For example, the City Attorney hired on May 29,

2018 is no longer in the Local 818 bargaining unit and the starting salary for the position is \$49,914.52 less per year than the predecessor. In addition, the former *Director* of Public Safety Telecommunications retired in 2017 and his replacement was hired in the new position of *Manager* of Public Safety Communications on March 20, 2017 at a salary of \$76,187.30 or \$41,570.24 less. Similarly, the *Director* of Property Management retired in 2017 and his replacement was hired on March 20, 2017 as a *Manager* with a salary of \$73,491.80 which resulted in a salary savings of \$50,905.26.

Attached to this letter, you will find projected impact statements from the department heads should the adopted budget adjustments become law. They share the same concerns I have herein expressed regarding the function of City business, as well as the unintended significant costs to taxpayers. My office in the last week has received numerous calls, letters, and messages from City residents expressing concerns with the budget passed on June 9th.

When looking at budgets, future forecasting is of utmost importance. There was not one single question asked about what the out-years of our budget looks like. It is important to note that we received a reduction of \$2.1 million in state aid for next year. We will have to continue to be creative with our budgeting, and the ways in which we provide the services that our residents expect and deserve. My goal has always been to save money and find better ways to provide necessary services so that pain felt by our taxpayers is mitigated as much as possible. That said, I've never once shied from making the difficult or painful choice if I felt it was the right thing for the long-term sustainability of our City. With inevitable budget cuts on the horizon in the coming years, we need to be strategic with budget reductions rather than make reductions haphazardly, or worse, to score cheap political points

It is my duty as Mayor to make sure the most accurate and fiscally sound budget goes into effect. It is also my responsibility to make sure the residents of New Britain have the essential services they need. I have therefore concluded that the budget adjustments adopted by the Common Council on June 9, 2018 are not in the best interests of city operations or our taxpayers.

For the aforementioned reasons, I hereby veto Resolution No.34258-5 as amended by the Council.

Sincerely,



Erin E. Stewart
Mayor

cc: Members of the Common Council
Jodi Latina, Chief of Staff
Gennaro Bizzarro, Corporation Counsel