

Unofficial transcript of the Detroit City Council Public Health and Safety Standing Committee meeting on October 29, 2012 by James Capizzo, starting at about 40 minutes into the meeting; most “um”, “ah”, etc., and false starts omitted

Gary Brown: Last three cards Russ Bellant, Dennis Green and Maddox (sp?) and Joe

Russ Bellant: Thank you Mr. Chair. I’m also speaking to the EMA contract issue.

Gary Brown: OK

Russ Bellant: And I was encouraged by your comments today that the City Council is exercising some due diligence and some skepticism over the no bid nature of this contract. On the question of splitting the contracts on the job reclassification and putting say whatever number winds up being 22 million dollars together I’m going to tell you that the City of Detroit water department and central HR were doing reviews of job classifications for many years and I want to basically repeat you know go a little bit into what I said before that what they’re really talking about doing is not creating 30 job classifications but 150 and calling them 32. They’re saying they’re going to put a job classification together and put three to five levels on those classifications so instead of having sewage plant operators, senior sewage plant operators, assistant head sewage plant operator, head sewage plant operator and sewage plant supervisor you’re going to have one title with all those encompassed in it and you’re going to collect 22 million dollars. They’re going to take what we’ve already written because they’ve been vetted and tested and processed over a number of years. They get periodic reviews based on technology updates and there’s no need to pay somebody those millions of dollars. If there’s a desire on the part of the key parties to do a complete review of those classifications then – I get contacted by the City of Chicago to be a consultant on job classifications. I choose not to participate because I’m too busy in Detroit with too many things in Detroit but we could get a team of people together for practically nothing to do a review and comprehension. All you’re basically doing is looking at the discreet job duties, codifying them in a job description with the minimum requirements to perform those duties and vetting it thru a process, sometimes in consultation with a bargaining unit, always with management and everybody comes to a consensus of what it is. That doesn’t take tens of millions of dollars to do that and I think it’s another wasteful – if anybody is concerned about their rising rates – needs to say stop to that. Additionally job descriptions are kept discreet so that more skills can be developed for key areas. If you have 60 ah 40 electrical workers and 20 instrument techs you don’t need to combine it into 60 people who have half the skills of the other job area. I looked at the training requirements of instrument tech under the apprenticeship program and electrical worker. An instrument tech gets about 40% of the training that an electrical worker gets. The idea in EMA’s 90 day wonder recommendation that you combine them makes no sense operationally because there’s enough work for instrument techs to stand alone and become more highly skilled and electrical workers to stand alone and become more highly skilled. You’re dealing with high voltage power distribution systems up to 22 thousand volts on the electrical side. Why would you down skill that and try weaken the standards which is what you would have to do for some of their proposals. So I really believe that if anything goes forward on job classification it should be the internal HR should give a justification as to why their job specs are off the mark to begin with and why they need a whole resale review. And I don’t think such a justification exists. I thank you for your time, Mr. Chair.

Garry Brown: Mr. Green you have the floor.

Dennis Green: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I recently retired from DWSD as head water systems engineer after 41 years. My specialty was automation systems which is the centerpiece of the EMA

proposal. And I say EMA must be totally unqualified for this job. I see no reason why an out of state contractor was brought in. The automation they're proposing is a violation of MDEQ standards. I was on the design committee for [unintelligible] for Waterworks Park. We assessed this type of automation and found it non-cost effective on top of the fact that it's illegal. So this just shows why we shouldn't be dealing with contractors unfamiliar with the system when there's plenty right here in Detroit who know that system like the back of their hand. But even then I don't endorse the idea of outsourcing. In 2000 a fire shut down three fifths of the wastewater plant. The advice of the consultants and the outsourced maintenance people was budget 25,000 dollars a day for the next six months while we rebuild this facility that burnt down. Because I bad mouthed them a little too loudly they called my bluff. I was delegated Mayor Archer's emergency manager powers over the plant with the power to award no bid contracts and control recovery plan. You never heard of it because we succeeded. The union workers of the plant were able to restore from the rooms of that station enough equipment to get part of the pumping system running to keep the plant on-line. We succeeded in rebuilding that station in six months. We did have to of course hire construction companies to do that. When the consultants plagiarized the design to rehabilitate the other two fifths that didn't burn they ended up spending twice as much money as we did. Later on after three years fooling around with metering systems I proposed the new metering system for suburban wholesale water metering. The consultant proposed a contract of \$1.3 million to design that system but they didn't want to guarantee it because they didn't believe my plan would work. I was allowed to design it in house with our staff. On overtime we brought the project in for 360 thousand dollars, not 1.3 million, won an international design award and you see there's no more lawsuits over rates and incorrect billing to the suburban customers due to that system. The problem is the City employees are not allowed to compete fairly with the contract workers. Work rules put in by director Mercardo disabled employees ability to work. The bans on overtime forced crews to make three trips out to the Ypsilanti pumping station spending three days to repair a valve that could have been done in half a day if they would have been allowed to work a little bit of overtime or work thru a lunch hour. By forcing employees to break for lunch at noon just so it doesn't look like they're goofing off when they're seen at Big Boy drinking coffee at three in the afternoon forces them to bring another truckload of equipment to cover excavations up so that they can break for lunch. It takes about half an hour to an hour to cover the excavation. They go to lunch, come back, remove all the covers, start work again. Then they have to quit at 3 o'clock to cover the excavation again to break and get back to the Huber facility downtown before quitting time since they can't work overtime. So that turns a little old six to eight hour job into a three day job. And these are the kinds of silly things that have gone on in the department. There are lots more that I could tell you. I try to get people's attention but nobody wants to listen to the middle managers caught in the middle between the politicians and the union people. We're the ones that have to get the work done under all the ham stringing rules that come down. The union leaders get interviewed for the reports. The top managers get interviewed but people on the front line making it work get ignored. And I urge you to listen to them and not approve this contract. It's really not an engineering study. It's a sales proposal. They went in there and they looked and mined for facts to support their preconceived idea of what should be done. No alternatives were evaluated like we do under a normal engineering study. And I think this is a farce and should be stopped. Thank you.

Gary Brown: Thank you.