

# DRAFT

## SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES CITY COUNCIL AND BOARD OF EDUCATION AD HOC COMMITTEE

**Thursday, April 23, 2020**  
**Via Zoom virtual meeting (recorded)**  
**6:30 PM**

**Committee Members Present:** Alderman Mark Bettencourt, Alderman Joseph DeLucia, Alderwoman Stacey Gould (Norwich City Council), Swarnjit Singh Bhatia, Carline Charmelus, Christine DiStasio, Yvette Jacaruso, Mark Kulos, Heather Romanski, Patricia Staley (Board of Education).

**Committee Members Absent:** None.

**Administration and Staff Present:** Dr. Kristen Stringfellow, Superintendent of Norwich Public Schools, Athena Nagel, Business Manager for Norwich Public Schools, John Salomone, Norwich City Manager, Josh Pothier, Norwich Comptroller, Peter Nystrom, Mayor of Norwich.

**Citizens and Others Present:** Elizabeth Reagan Norwich Bulletin, Bill Kenny.

Mr. DeLucia read the ruling by Gov. Lamont re: the process, and rules, for holding public meetings.

1. **Call to Order and Quorum:** Mr. DeLucia called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM. There was a quorum present.
2. **Adoption of 3/13 Meeting Minutes:** Ms. Romanski noted an error in the nominations; 1) Christine DiStasio was nominated for Recording Secretary by Alderwoman Gould, and 2) Joseph DeLucia was nominated for Chairman by Mr. Kulos. Motion to approve the minutes as amended by Ms. Gould, second by Mr. DeLucia, unanimously approved.
3. **Old Business:**
  - a. Mr. DeLucia reviewed the scope of the Ad Hoc Committee by resolution.
  - b. Review of NPS 2020-21 Budget draft and related documents.
4. **New Business:**
  - a. Discussion of submitted questions (DeLucia)  
Questions #9 and 10. The hiring of an HR Director by the SOS. Mr. Kulos noted that HR for NPS is very different than that for the City. Mr. Pothier had told Mr. DeLucia that he would need 2 full-time people to meet the HR needs of NPS. Ms. Staley asked what would it look like to have people at City Hall handling NPS. Mr. DeLucia said possibly the needs of NPS could be handled at the clerk level instead of administrator level, which is the level the new hire is getting paid at. Ms. Staley then asked what if we had 40-100 applicants for a job opening, who would be responsible for looking at them? Mr. DeLucia responded that it would be the HR Supervisor at City Hall. Ms. Staley said that would be unacceptable, that that job belongs to an administrator. Mr. DeLucia and Ms. Gould both expressed their

dismay with the HR hire being paid \$125,000.00 plus benefits, and that the position could possibly have been filled in a different, less expensive, manner.

Dr. Stringfellow responded to the question re: the reasoning behind the hiring of a payroll manager. She stated that they had lost one staff member thru attrition and a clerk quit with less than 2 weeks notice. The hours these people worked were being covered through overtime and temporary workers. Ms. Nagel did meet with representatives from City Hall's business office and was told they couldn't handle the NPS payroll without added staff. She also said that without the assistance of people at City Hall and Central Office the payroll deadline would have been missed twice.

In summation, Dr. Stringfellow said that we have 900 NPS employees that report directly to her. The auditor recommended the hiring of a payroll manager specializing in schools. She is willing to meet with Mr. Pothier re: payroll person and cross-training to see what can be done. In regards to the HR person, she feels they are definitely needed. The NPS job is performed in a totally different manner then how it is at City Hall.

Mr. Bettencourt concurred with Ms. Staley re: HR administrator should deal with those responsibilities not a clerk. He feels that SOS/BOE could have done a better job re: the payroll issues. Ms. Gould said she believes an offer was made to have NPS payroll handled by the City and was rejected by the BOE. Mr. Salomone said he was copied on a memo re: savings if City did payroll, stating that an offer had been made and was declined.

Dr. Stringfellow responded by stating that the suggestion to merge the NPS payroll with that of the City was not summarily discharged as claimed. Central Office was given only 2 weeks to make a decision. Ms. Nagel, as previously mentioned did meet with staff at City Hall.

Mr. DeLucia stated that the possibility for a long-term plan re: working together may exist. Dr. Stringfellow responded by saying that they are willing to work on a plan to merge with City Hall (i.e.: payroll, facilities, etc.)

#### b. Discussion and possible action on recommendations to the City Council

Mr. Kulos spoke in re: NFA's special education budget and any explanation for where the money is going. Ms. Romanski mentioned that there were math mistakes in the information given to us. Dr. Stringfellow asked Ms. Bender, Special Ed. Director for NPS, to speak with Ms. Wheeler at NFA, and she mentioned that there might have been students not accounted for in the numbers given. Dr. Stringfellow said she did send out a revision of that information that accounted for the difference in the numbers to City Council and BOE members. The new information shows how many students are in which program at NFA. Mayor Nystrom mentioned that he did receive it, but some members didn't. Dr. Stringfellow apologized, stating that she thought all members of the CC would get it if she sent it to Mr. Salomone's administrative assistant. It was explained that it has to be sent to each person individually.

Mr. Kulos asked Dr. Stringfellow re: \$1.2 million for NFA tuition, and she reviewed all of their costs.

Mr. DeLucia then brought the focus back to the budget itself, expressing that his understanding was that the primary goal for us was to get away from deficit spending. The second goal being reduction and reliance on grants. How could we accomplish both in 1 year? This is in reference to the table of budget plans Dr. Stringfellow distributed to all

members of the CC and BOE. Ms. Gould was under the same impression, but then realized that we would still be tapping into the unrestricted fund balance, with the plan proposed by the BOE. Mr. Bettencourt expressed his opinion that, "We can't go into the unrestricted fund balance". Mr. Kulos said his understanding was that we would only be dipping into it the first year. It was explained that if the 3-year plan was chosen, we would be dipping into the fund balance the first three years to balance the budget.

Ms. Romanski reiterated that she doesn't have "not staying within the budget" in her mind.

Mr. DeLucia said he doesn't think anyone is doing anything with "malice aforethought".

Mr. Bettencourt concurred that he doesn't think people are proposing a budget with no thought to the overall budget. He stated, "We have to start dealing with real numbers, can't tap fund balance anymore".

Mr. DeLucia then asked if anyone wanted to comment further on where we go from here.

Ms. Romanski asked how Mr. Salomone arrived at 2.4 mil. Mr. Salomone said it is not his purview to tell the BOE where to cut. He looks at the overall City budget and comes up with a figure. He doesn't look at individual line items.

Mr. Singh stated that he shares the concerns of the City Council re: taxes, etc. He thinks that it is an "honest budget". He would like to see "NPS on par with NFA achievement wise". He asked the City Council to see "what more they can give", and then look at what services can be cut. Mr. Kulos offered that NFA is increasing our portion 2.4 mil, so we have to raise our increase or take away from our budget to pay them.

Mr. Bettencourt said he doesn't want to take away from K-8. Ms. Gould questioned the accuracy of a hand out she received saying NFA was increasing by 3%, and if that figure was accurate. She also asked if the BOE would be "sitting down to discuss cuts to be made?"

Ms. Romanski replied, "Yes, we would be sitting down to discuss cuts".

Mr. DeLucia asked for any further comment from the committee.

Mayor Nystrom said he had reached out to the NFA Board of Trustees, and will again. Ms.

Romanski asked if she and Dr. Stringfellow can be a part of that conversation. Mayor Nystrom replied, "Yes, he'll try to make that happen". Mr. Bettencourt stated the need for a total breakdown of their numbers, and his willingness to help the BOE, but not go broke doing it.

Mr. Bettencourt mentioned that he never remembers any discussion re: the NPS budget in the past years that he served in City government, but welcomes information re: what is needed. He stated, "There are difficult decisions to be made, especially with COVID-19. We need patience, and things should be done the way they're supposed to be done."

**5. Items for next meeting agenda:**

Mr. DeLucia asked if there is anything the committee members want added to the next agenda, to please email him.

**6. Scheduling of next meeting:**

Mr. DeLucia offered 4/30 at 6:30 PM, and asked members to contact him if that date works for them.

**7. Adjournment:**

Meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM.

**Respectfully Submitted,  
Christine DiStasio  
Recording Secretary**