

**SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
CITY COUNCIL AND BOARD OF EDUCATION
AD HOC COOMMITTEE**

Thursday, April 30, 2020
Via ZOOM virtual meeting (recorded)
6:30 PM

Present: Alderman Joseph DeLucia, Alderman Mark Bettencourt, Alderwoman Stacy Gould, Christine DiStasio (BOE), Heather Romanski (BOE), Swarnjit Singh Bhatia , Yvette Jacaruso, Mark Kulos (BOE), Al Daniels (BOE), Carline Charmelus (BOE), Superintendent Dr. Kristin Stringfellow, Patricia Staley (BOE)

Others present: Jamie Bender, City Manager Salomone, Athena Nagel, Josh Pothier, Mayor Peter Nystrom, Claire Bessette (The Day), and Bill Kenny (Norwich Bulletin)

Alderman DeLucia welcomed everyone and reviewed Governor Lamont's directive regarding public meetings and the rules that must be followed.

- 1.) **Call to Order:** Alderman DeLucia called meeting to order at 6:33 PM. Quorum present.
- 2.) **Adoption of 4/23/2020 Meeting Minutes:** Patricia Staley stated that an error is present within the minutes. Minutes accepted as amended. First, Yvette Jacaruso, Second, Mark Bettencourt.
- 3.) **Old Business**
 - a. Alderman DeLucia reviewed purpose and scope of committee.
- 4.) **New Business**
 - a. Review of Budget Summary examples: Alderwoman Gould presented examples of budgets from New London, RHAM, and West Hartford School Systems. She asked if BOE could prepare a budget similar to that of New London to present to the City

Council, and perhaps more concise. Ms. Romanski said it is not possible at this time. Ms. Gould, “for transparency sake, effort should be made” and have the budget also show all grants and where they are spent in the budget. Ms. Romanski replied, “okay” after reviewing New London’s online. At this juncture Dr. Stringfellow asked if everyone had received her responses to Ms. Gould’s questions. Ms. Gould hadn’t. Mr. DeLucia said for people to ask him questions for the SOS so everything would get dispersed. In other words, answers should go to Mr. DeLucia and also to the person asking the questions. Ms. Gould should have received answers directly to her questions. Ms. Romanski apologized for that not happening. Dr. Stringfellow said she would’ve had to begun the school year with the new format; this is the format that was used in the past and she had not been given anything new to use. She will attempt to meet that request but not having a grants person means she will be doing it. Mr. Kulos offered his opinion that at this point it would be difficult to change the budget format due to time constraints and to just stay with what we have. Ms. Charmelus concurred with Ms. Gould that her example would be something worth looking at. Mr. Kulos also commented that having charter schools adds another variable.

- b. Discussion of questions submitted by Ms. Gould: Discussion commenced regarding question #1 the timeline for joining NPS payroll with the City finance department. Dr. Stringfellow expressed concern for the people presently employed. They are already trained in Munis she stated; she also mentioned that NPS and Adult Ed are merged which poses another variable. Mr. Pothier, the city comptroller, mentioned food services, which Dr. Stringfellow pointed out, are not under the NPS umbrella. In regards to the facilities manager vacancy she asked whether she should move forward with the hiring of a new person for that position. Ms. Gould then asked the timeframe for the merger of NPS payroll with city finance. Ms. Romanski said the

Board is open to the possibility of sharking services; she asked how to go about this because we have an opening in maintenance now. At this point Mr. DeLucia reiterated that we need to refocus on the budget. Mr. Kulos offered that if new staff have to be hired on the City side where is the saving. Mr. DeLucia stated that the SOS and City Manager need to have that discussion. Mr. Salomone said he has looked into the maintenance issue and it would be complicated because of the Union issue, citing differences in job descriptions for city maintainers versus school custodians. In regards to a payroll merger Mr. Pothier questioned whether there would be savings. It is not an “overnight solution” due to the time for a transition to take place. He went on to explain that he would like to see the people already hired absorbed and create depth at those positions with cross training, for example. Ms. Charmelus asked for clarity regarding shared services and whether it will be done in this budget cycle. Mr. DeLucia said that they made it clear that they want SOS and City Manager to pursue the possibility of a merger. Ms. Gould reiterated that she is looking for cost savings in this budget, not meaning to “bust unions” or anything of that sort. Mr. Bettencourt said we shouldn’t go about business as usual, and forget about this topic of a merger. He concurs that we probably wouldn’t be able to get anything done in this budget cycle. He mentioned “Institutional Inertia,” wherein ideas get spoken about but no action ever takes place.

c. Discussion and possible action on recommendations to the City: Mr. DeLucia said we need to speak regarding dollar numbers. He asked the SOS what would 9.11% be equal to in dollars, referencing plan number 1 on the budget handout. In regards to where we stand right now budget wise...we were 1.1 million in the red but with Covid19 occurring things have changed. SOS said the Governor thought there might be savings but with the need to purchase additional software, hardware, the possibility of needing a summer camp, support services, transportation for

summer camp, we might not have any savings. She also stated that the 9.11% is equal to 88.4 million dollars. Ms. Nagel mentioned that there are many moving parts and they are making every effort to track all costs and also the cost for the possibility of reopening. Mr. DeLucia asked regarding the NFA numbers. The SOS said the numbers presented last week were as close as they could be. There are two students whose programs have not been determined as of yet. Mr. DeLucia said he wants to know what the NFA costs are. Mr. Kulos mentioned the 1.2 million increase on NFA's part. Ms. Nagel said NFA's number is 24.4 million plus related costs, for example, transportation which is approximately 7 million. SOS states that we pay for their para educators and we won't know how many NFA needs until summer or possibly October, which makes it difficult to budget for that cost. But at this point it doesn't appear that there will be much of a difference between this past year and next year. She expressed that it is hard to tell until all the students have had their meetings, to determine para educator needs. Ms. Bender stated because of what is going on with Covid19 many meetings have not been held making it more difficult to determine the individual student needs in regards to para educators. Ms. Gould asked "Where are we now with this budget year?" The SOS replied we have a 1.1 million deficit as of now. She explained that they are always getting new mandates from the Governor such as bringing back transportation; hence the situation is constantly changing day to day. Ms. Gould asked if we are going to stay at that 1.1 million. Ms. Nagel responded that there has been an issue with Munis, and we are currently running in the black. The problem is being worked on. The City is aware of the problem. Ms. Gould asked, "When can we get the numbers?" Ms. Nagel said she is trying to get Munis to come out and work the problem but due to Covid it has been very difficult. She has even attempted to schedule a webinar with them. Mr. Daniels suggested that the

City give us direction by coming up with a number that we can work with. Mr. DeLucia stated that we need to focus on the new budget, we can't continue taking from K-8 for NFA. He understands that the amount needed is a "moving target." Mayor Nystrom said there is a meeting tomorrow with the City Manager and Klein. He wasn't notified until tonight. He will work on having the SOS and Ms. Romanski included. Mayor Nystrom asked regarding the Special Ed budget and NFA. The SOS and Ms. Bender said as of 3/23 NFA knows where those students are placed. The Mayor said the Head Master appeared unclear. Mr. Bettencourt concurred that we shouldn't be raiding K-8 for the high school kids, we can't afford to use anymore of the fund balance, other than the 1.1 million that we may need this year. Ms. Staley brought up what was mentioned earlier, that we talk about things repeatedly and that there is a need for a charter revision regarding costs K-8 and NFA. Mr. DeLucia asked the committee if there are any recommendations regarding the upcoming education year. Ms. Gould asked if the BOE thinks we can live within the 83 million present by the City Manager. She also asked if we could possibly separate out what each age group costs to run, she feels this would make things much clearer for the tax payers. Ms. Romanski replied, "We can't live within the 83 million dollars," we will attempt to discuss options at our meeting.

- 5.) Items for next meeting agenda: Mr. DeLucia explained how to go about adding items to the agenda and the timeline for doing so.
- 6.) Scheduling of next meeting: Mr. DeLucia recommended meeting 5/7, asking if there were any conflicts. None were noted.
- 7.) Adjournment: Motion to adjourn at 8:21pm. Ms. Jacaruso, Ms. Romanski second.

Minutes respectfully submitted,
Christine DiStasio