

DRAFT

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

Thursday, May 21, 2020
Via ZOOM virtual meeting
6:30 PM

Present: Alderman Joseph DeLucia, Alderman Mark Bettencourt, Alderwoman Stacy Gould, Chairwoman of Board of Education, Heather Romanski, Carline Charmelus (BOE), Christine DiStasio (BOE), Swarnjit Singh Bhatia (BOE), Patricia Staley (BOE), Dr. Yvette Jacaruso, (BOE)

Staff and Administration present: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kristen Stringfellow, NPS Business Manager Athena Nagel, NPS Director of Student Services/Special Education Jamie Bender, City Comptroller Josh Pothier, City Manager John Salomone, Mayor Peter Nystrom

Media: Elizabeth Regan (The Bulletin)

Alderman DeLucia welcomed everyone and explained Governor Lamont's directive 7B-1, regarding the rules for holding a public meeting.

1. Call to Order: Alderman DeLucia called meeting to order at 6:34 PM. Quorum present.
2. Adoption of Minutes from 4/30/20 and 5/7/20: First, Alderman Bettencourt. Second, Ms. Romanski. One spelling correction to 5/7 minutes, DeVol Patrick should be DeVol Joyner.
3. Old Business:
 - a. Review of purpose and scope of Ad Hoc Committee: Explained by Alderman DeLucia.
4. New Business:
 - a. Responses to Alderwoman Gould's questions: She had asked a question re: discrepancy in grant funding between the budget book for 18-19 and

19-20. SOS attempted to answer, citing that she wasn't here those years. Ms. Nagel was able to explain that there was a carryover of funds from one year to the next. SOS explained grant timelines. Alderwoman Gould asked how they are able to put a budget together without knowing the exact amount of dollars the schools will receive in grants. The response was that it is very difficult to do so. Ms. Staley asked Mr. Pothier re: the Education Cost Sharing Grant, when will we know what we are getting and can it be used to bridge the gap between what the city is offering and what was asked for in the BOE budget proposal. Ms. Charmelus commented that the SOS has stated clearly, since the beginning of the budget process, that the NPS needs to lessen its dependence on grants, because we never know when they may be denied or discontinued.

A second question was if the BOE knows the actual dollar amount NFA's increase is equal to. Ms. Romanski stated that she sent an email to NFA re: whether there was any room for negotiations, and hadn't heard back.

Alderman DeLucia reviewed the cuts the SOS presented at the BOE's Budget Expenditure meeting on Tuesday.

Alderman DeLucia went on to express concern that the City Council members were asked to offer recommendations for where cuts could possibly be made, and that it was unacceptable.

Ms. Romanski spoke of the cuts proposed by the SOS. The SOS stated that those are not her recommendations for where to cut, but are the only places to cut, because everything else has already been.

Alderman Bettencourt mentioned the 7% increase in NFA's budget that he and Ms. Nagel arrived at, and what a large increase that is.

- b. Recommendations for the City Council: Alderman DeLucia asked if there were any recommendations for the City Council moving forward. Ms. Romanski stated, "We just can't live with 2.4." Dr. Jacaruso reiterated that whenever NFA was approached in the past re: negotiating their costs, the BOE was always told that there was no room for negotiation. Alderwoman Gould mentioned the costs listed for Norwich students to attend Waterford High School and Bacon Academy, and the possibility of cutting there. The SOS then discussed PPE for choice schools, and that they are working on trying to reduce the transportation costs to all choice schools.

Ms. Romanski made a motion for the committee to recommend the 5.5% increase. Ms. Charmelus seconded the motion. Ms. Romanski stated, "2.5 million separates what the city is giving us and what we asked for."

Ms. Staley asked the City Council members of the committee what they thought about the cuts that were proposed by the SOS. Alderman

Bettencourt replied saying that there are many unknown factors with the COVID situation, and that he didn't think the City Manager's budget "took some of these things under consideration". Alderwoman Gould reiterated, "How is a budget made with out knowing the grants awarded?" She expressed her frustration that, "we don't have a soft number". Alderman DeLucia stated that he is not "on board" with the amount the City Manager Proposed, he felt it was "too low", but is unsure of the BOE's figure of 5.5%. He said that cuts would have to be made on the "city side". Alderman Bettencourt then reiterated his concerns with the 5.5% increase, "considering all the unknowns."

Alderman DeLucia asked if there was any more discussion re: the 5.5% recommendation. None offered. He then called for a vote. 8 in favor- DeLucia, Bettencourt, Romanski, DiStasio, Charmelus, Singh, Jacaruso, Staley. 1 against- Gould.

There was some confusion re: the number of people, of each party, on the committee, but the situation was rectified to everyone's satisfaction.

5. Items for Next Agenda: None offered.

6. Scheduling of Next Meeting: Mayor Nystrom interjected at this time that, "where cuts need to be made needs to be discussed tonight". Ms. Romanski replied, "It is not the BOE's responsibility to tell the City Council where to find money". She also said that she didn't feel we should meet again. Alderman DeLucia mentioned to continue the meetings next school year. He then asked if another meeting should be held and the consensus was that it wasn't necessary.

7. Adjournment: Call for adjournment at 8:42 PM. First, Dr. Jacaruso. Second, Ms. Charmelus.

Minutes Respectfully Submitted,
Christine A. DiStasio , Board of Education

