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

Friday, March 13, 2020
Norwich City Hall - Room 335
100 Broadway, Norwich
6:15 PM

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

Committee Members Absent: none.

Administration and Staff Present: John Salomone – Norwich City Manager, Josh Pothier – Comptroller

Citizens and Others Present: Claire Bessette-New London Day paper, Bill Kenny-Bulletin paper, Alderman Derell Q. Wilson.

1. **Call to Order and Quorum:** Alderman DeLucia called the meeting to order at 6:17 PM. There was a quorum present.
2. **Introductions:** Alderman DeLucia asked for introductions. The committee members introduced themselves for the record.
3. **Election of a Chairperson:** Alderman DeLucia asked for nominations of a committee chairperson. Mrs. Romanski nominated Alderman DeLucia. The nomination was seconded by Alderman Bettencourt. There were no other nominations. Alderman DeLucia called for a vote on the nomination which was unanimously approved.
4. **Election of a Vice-Chairperson:** Alderman DeLucia asked for nominations of a committee vice-chairperson. Ms. Staley nominated Alderwoman Gould. The nomination was seconded by Ms. DiStasio. There were no other nominations. Alderman DeLucia called for a vote on the nomination which was unanimously approved.
5. **Election of a Recording Secretary:** Alderman DeLucia asked for nominations of a recording secretary. Ms. Romanski nominated Ms. DiStasio. The nomination was

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seconded by Alderman DeLucia. There were no other nominations. Alderman DeLucia called for a vote on the nomination which was unanimously approved.

6. **Citizen Comment-1:** Alderman DeLucia called for citizen comment. There was none offered.

7. **New Business:**

a. **Review of the Purpose and Scope of Ad Hoc Committee:** Alderman DeLucia stated the city's Corporation Counsel, Atty. Michael Driscoll had made it clear that this committee cannot set mandates for the Board of Education, heretofore known as the BOE. The committee's purpose is for an open discussion re: the budget for the Norwich Public Schools, heretofore referred to as NPS. Mr. Kulos commented that he is in favor of the formation of the committee, as did Mr. Singh, and Ms. Jacaruso, saying that it will encourage open lines of communication between the BOE and City Council, hence transparency. Mr. Bettencourt expressed that he was in agreement and mentioned an article written by Ms. Bessette regarding the BOE acknowledging budget limits and still meeting the needs of our NPS. Ms. Gould was also in agreement that the new BOE leadership, including our Superintendent, Dr. Kristen Stringfellow, heretofore referred to as SOS, is making things more transparent. Ms. Romanski said that she knows the SOS is putting great effort into creating a budget that works. Ms. Staley commented; "it won't be fixed in one year."

b. **Review of 2020-21 Education Budget Draft and Related Documents:** Mr. Kulos reviewed the Long-Term Plan that the SOS presented to the BOE at their last meeting on 3/10/20. Discussion followed. Mr. DeLucia and Mr. Kulos then reviewed all remaining forms that had been given to the BOE by the SOS that contained information relevant to the budget. Mr. DeLucia wants to ensure that all members of the Council have the most recent information and will have copies made.

There was more discussion re: the feasibility of the increase requested and how it would affect the city budget and taxpayers as a whole. Mr. DeLucia said that the 9.34% increase requested is actually much more. He would like to know how many dollars this is equal to and what that figure represents.

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Mr. Kulos reviewed the grants, the ESC contribution and funding. There was discussion re: when the grants expire and the need to know that information for budget purposes. Ms. Gould stressed the need to know the expiration dates for the grants NPS has received. She also discussed the timeline for when we receive the state's contribution verses when the budget is due for submission to the City Council.

Ms. Romanski was charged with having all documents received from the SOS dated and forwarded to Mr. DeLucia for dispersal to the City Council.

Alderman DeLucia began a discussion regarding the ten questions he submitted to the SOS that reference the budget documents. In reference to questions #8, #9 and #10, Mr. DeLucia, as well as Ms. Gould questioned the hiring of a new Payroll Manager and Human Resource Manager for the NPS Central Office, and whether there was a true need for these positions. Mr. DeLucia asked the City Manager, Mr. Salomone, who was in the audience, if any discussion had been had with him prior to these hirings. He responded in the negative. At this time, several members reiterated that the SOS does not have to consult with anyone else when making hiring decisions within her department. Also mentioned by several members of the BOE was the need to update the antiquated systems, within the Central Office, that this SOS inherited, with the hope that the improvements and new hires would increase the overall efficiency of said department. One such system is the Munis system that was installed months ago, but continues to have glitches. When Ms. DiStasio stated that Munis representatives were actually here this week to work on the system, Mr. Joshua Pothier, who was in the audience, concurred.

Both Mr. DeLucia and Ms. Gould both suggested that the possibility of job sharing might have occurred in reference to the new hires, or the placement of a payroll clerk position in City Hall dedicated to NPS. Mr. Kulos stated that with the new hires, overtime that was being worked by Central Office staff to fulfill the HR and Payroll duties was eradicated, and costly mistakes eliminated, hopefully culminating in savings in the long run. Ms. Gould questioned whether the savings equal the pay and benefits of the new hires.

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In reference to question #1 re: an early retirement incentive being offered to NPS teachers, Ms. Romanski stated that because of the low number of teachers likely to qualify, the SOS felt she would look for savings elsewhere at this time.

Discussion on shared services throughout the city when it comes to maintenance. Mr. DeLucia commented that there would be difficulty with that proposal because of the various unions that represent the city's employees.

Discussion on question #6: The Transportation Coordinator position the SOS has included in the budget. Ms. DiStasio explained that one of the responsibilities of this position, which is now carried out by the NPS Business Manager, Athena Nagel, and the SOS, would be responding to incidents of disruptive behavior on the buses, occurring when students are being transported to and from school. The SOS has mentioned that there may exist a possibility of sharing buses, for our students that attend programs out of district, with neighboring towns. She has already been approached by at least two. If this occurs, the sharing would have to be coordinated and this would be another duty that the new hire would perform and could also result in a cost savings.

- c. **Discussion of Next Steps:** Mr. DeLucia proposed that the questions he compiled be forwarded to the SOS, who along with Ms. Nagel, will be present at the next meeting on 3/20, to enable her to give more in depth answers.

8. **Items for Next Meeting Agenda:**

- a. Discussion of submitted questions.
- b. Discussion and possible action on recommendations for March 23rd BOE Budget meeting.

9. **Citizen Comment-2:** Mr. DeLucia called for citizen comment.

Bill Kenny, of Lincoln Ave., asked that the committee please keep in mind that what we are doing now, sets the tone and direction for the “reincarnation of the city”.

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10. **Schedule of Future Meeting(s):** The committee then discussed the timing for the next meeting in relation to when the budget needs to be submitted to the City Council and reached a consensus that the meeting would be held Friday, March 20 at 6:30 PM in room 335 in City Hall.
11. **Adjournment:** Upon a motion by Alderman Bettencourt and seconded by Alderwoman Gould, the committee unanimously voted to adjourn at 7:58 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted,

Christine DiStasio,
Recording Secretary

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