

**Norwich City Council/Board of Education Ad Hoc Committee**  
**Wednesday, March 17, 2021**  
**6:30 PM**  
**Virtual Meeting**

**Committee Members Present:** Chair Alderman Joseph DeLucia, Alderman Mark Bettencourt, BOE Chair Heather Romanski, BOE Member Patricia Staley, BOE Member Swarnjit Singh Khalsa, BOE Member Charlene Charmelus, BOE Member Christine DiStasio, BOE Member Yvette Jacaruso

**Ex-Officio Members Present:** NPS Superintendent Dr. Kristin Stringfellow, City Manager John Salomone, Comptroller Josh Pothier, Mayor Peter Nystrom (arrived at 7:08 PM)

**Committee Members Absent:** Vice Chair Alderwoman Stacy Gould

**Administration and Staff Present:** Director of Student Services Jamie Bender, Assistant Superintendent Tamara Gloster

**Guest:** Robert Sirpenski (hired as Business Manager to start in April)

**1. Call to Order and Determination of Quorum:** Alderman Joe DeLucia called the meeting to order at 6.32 PM. It was determined that a quorum was present.

On a motion by Alderman Mark Bettencourt, seconded by Heather Romanski, the CC/BOE amended the agenda to add review of prior meeting minutes.

Review of Prior Meeting Minutes:

On a motion by Yvette Jacaruso, seconded by Alderman Bettencourt, the February 17, 2021 CC/BOE Ad Hoc meeting minutes were unanimously approved with the change of the use of the word dialog to dialogue.

**2. Review of Committee Scope and Purpose:**

Alderman DeLucia briefly reviewed the scope and purpose of the CC/BOE Ad Hoc meeting to be: Promote transparency, collaboration on the school budget between the CC and the BOE with the purpose to make recommendations to the CC regarding BOE funding request for the next fiscal year.

**3. Public Comment:** None presented

**4. Old Business:**

**a. Discussion: Anticipated Items of Focus for the Board of Education (BOE) Budget**

No items of focus were raised. Discussion ensued on the process for exchanging information.

Ms. Romanski noted that the BOE Budget subcommittee held two meetings.

Dr. Kristin Stringfellow shared that a document was emailed to all members prior to the meeting. She reported that the portal through the NPS website, referred to as Board Docs, serves as a repository for documents. She offered to ask her executive assistant, Amber, to

teach anyone on the committee how to use it. This system allows for the historical reference of meeting documents. She offered to email her current PowerPoint presentation to the group.

Discussion was held on when the BOE budget will be presented to the CC. Alderman Bettencourt noted that he would like foundational information at this point with serious discussions to begin in April when the City Manager proposes his budget. It was decided that the PowerPoint presentation would be held off until the entire City Council had the proposed BOE budget.

Alderman Bettencourt asked City Manager John Salomone to share the budget hearing dates with Ms. Romanski. Mr. Salomone agreed to do so.

## **5. New Business:**

### **a. Report: Norwich Public Schools (NPS) payroll transition impacts/outcomes**

Comptroller Josh Pothier gave a summary of the document which had been shared with all committee members prior to the meeting. In July, 2018, a bond was passed in the amount of \$675,000 to integrate and improve Norwich Public Schools and City administrative functions. His report shows that most projects moved along pretty well. Human Resources & Payroll had difficulties. He recommended a temporary increase in staffing for 12 – 18 months to get NPS payroll onto a positive trajectory. This cost would be covered by the bond. This staff person would be dedicated to fixing and improving processes with no operating budget increase.

Discussion was held on how attrition of staff affected the break-even of the cost savings of the project. Discussion was also held on the extent of the challenges faced during the project and efforts to mitigate them.

### **b. Discussion: COVID related impacts to the upcoming BOE Budget**

Alderman DeLucia introduced the agenda item as an opportunity to talk about what the city might have to absorb, beyond financial assistance from the federal and state governments. He asked Dr. Stringfellow if she had an idea what related expenses are on the horizon.

Dr Stringfellow noted that she had a summary in a shared document. Between salaries and high school tuitions making up the majority of the operating budget, there is not much room in the budget to absorb expenses. The district received \$8 million to reopen in full. This funding covered many, many items. She noted that the boiler at Stanton will be replaced this summer.

### **c. Discussion: Norwich Free Academy & Other High School tuition impacts to the BOE Budget**

Dr. Stringfellow reported on tuition increases while Alderman DeLucia displayed the tables on-screen. This information was emailed to members prior to the meeting.

She reviewed the high school tuition rates, specifically including those of Norwich Free Academy (NFA). She noted that the number of students in the programs are estimates and may change. There will be a savings realized however, the balanced BOE budget request needs \$1.7 million additional for a 3.95% overall budget increase. She noted some assumptions, such as 3 – 7.6% increases for general high school programs and increases in fuel costs. Collective bargaining agreements will be negotiated this year. She pointed out that the document she sent has great details. She intends to honor the budget and has stop measures in place to avoid shortfalls. She expressed gratitude to staff that are performing extra duties since staffing was reduced by about 100 positions this year.

Alderman DeLucia agreed that the overall city budget is also holding this year. He also noted the many staff that had to pick up the slack and did so with professionalism. It did not go unnoticed by him. It is appreciated by pretty much everyone he talks to.

Alderman DeLucia took the opportunity to welcome Tamara and Bob, as both are new staff at NPS.

#### **6. Agenda Items for future meetings**

Alderman DeLucia reminded the CC/BOE Ad Hoc committee members of the April 21, 2021 meeting. This meeting will be virtual at 6:30 PM. The agenda will include capital projects and a line-item budget.

Dr. Stringfellow reported that she will not be present at the April 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. Prior to the meeting, she will send documents on capital projects that were discussed in the Norwich Public Utilities (NPU) audit and NPS' five-year strategic plan.

#### **7. Adjournment**

On a motion by Heather Romanski, seconded by Yvette Jacaruso, the CC/BOE Ad Hoc committee meeting adjourned at 8:01 PM.