



INFORMAL MEETING OF APRIL 23, 2018

Informal Meeting of the City Council was held in the City Council Chamber, Room 219, City Hall, on Monday evening, April 23, 2018.

CALL TO ORDER

Council President Scott J. Graves called the meeting to order at 7:00 o'clock p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Eleven (11) Councillors were present including President Scott Graves and Councillors Nathan Boudreau, James Boone, Craig Cormier, Ronald Cormier, Edward Gravel, Karen Hardern, Christine Johnson, James Johnson, Elizabeth Kazinskas, and James Walsh.

Others participating were Superintendent of Schools Mark Pellegrino and School Business Administrator Robert Detweiler.

President Graves introduced Mr. Pellegrino for his budget presentation.

He cited changing demographics since 2003 representing increases in high needs groups - ELL, Socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and SPED, thus impacting costs to the District.

He outlined Choice-In and Choice-out student counts. Choice-Out students cost the District \$5,000 per student and Choice-Out SPED at \$6,500 per student. Out-of-District SPED placements cost from \$58,000 to \$100,000 per student. In FY2018, Gardner lost \$1.6M to out-of-district placements. There are 11 SPED out-of-district students and 6 have never attended schools in Gardner. FY2018 is the first year that no students left for out-of-district placements.

\$588k set aside in School Choice to pay for salaries (on local side) – Choice unknown year to year.

He cited Excellence in Equity - Keeping Gardner Kids in Gardner Public Schools Foster Excellence

- Culture – Supporting a positive environment in schools – relationships!
- Academics – Increased levels of rigor.
- Enrichment – more robust robotics.

Embrace Equity – students with needs.

- Build Infrastructure

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- Be Inclusive

Accomplishments

MCAS scores

Goals

Keep “high flying students” and struggling students in the District.

Chapter 70

Aid tied to high needs students – the greater the needs, more money from the State.

Budget Challenges

Unanticipated needs, changing revolving funds and grant rules. Funds constantly transferred between line items to address shortfalls.

Data Warehousing/Analyses - \$15k licensing fee.

Nurses – 1 Nurse per building and 1 floater to fill in. Substitute nurses assigned for field trips.

Additions

BCBA – Board certified behavioral Analyst to train RBT’s Registered Behavioral Therapists.

Medicaid Reimbursements - \$370k reimbursed to City. Mayor used \$250k toward school budget. Question concerning entire reimbursement going to the School Department. \$ from one FY carried into next FY – a known quantity.

Salaries

GMS Administration – Dean of Students added – age group needs lots of support – part of building school culture. Discipline is not about suspending a kid, it is about building relationships. Also, 3rd guidance counselor hired back. 600 students at GMS - need people there to create a positive school environment and culture.

Councillor Walsh noted that the particular line item cuts are not for the Council to determine.

Questions concerning Central Administration - cited breakdown contained in the Budget.

Expenses – Other Operations and Control

- COLAs for union members (anticipate 3-year contract).

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- Buyback
- Facilities coverage.

Transportation increase due to transporting homeless children under McKinney Vento (regular ed).

Councillor Johnson questioned the reason that the School Department is paying for school transportation. A previous Mayor informed her that the City used to pay it. She asked if the private school in Gardner is being billed for their share of transportation costs.

Councillor Boone said that he thought that the City paid for the transportation costs.

Superintendent and Business Administrator will investigate the issue.

Councillor Walsh said that the Council is considering a Proposition 2½ Override, which is good for only 1 year. He said he is not persuaded that an override will achieve the school's needs.

Budget Adjustment Process

Councillor Christine Johnson questioned copier and supply budgets. She cited unexpended balances in prior year's budget.

Nate Boudreau suggested consortium buying to save money.

Mr. Pellegrino said busing and electricity are two examples of consortium purchasing.

Rob Detweiler noted that copiers are leased from vendors approved on the State Contract.

Councillor Christine Johnson questioned cutting maintenance and related budget line items to save some of the positions.

Mr. Pellegrino said that the schools have not been maintained over the years and that one unanticipated problem or issue would throw the entire budget off. Repairs done all year long – repairs to broken doors and windows, etc.

Councillor Christine Johnson questioned using the building Use Revolving Fund as another source of revenue (page 51).

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Councillor Craig Cormier cited his business budget management experience – noted that there is no room for error in most budgets.

Councillor Christine Johnson suggested saving \$50k by closing the Helen Mae Sauter building and relocating the after-school program to another building.

Mr. Pellegrino said that moving the after-school program to the Annex isn't feasible as there is no room at the Waterford Annex. The SPED staff and program would then have to move to Helen Mae Sauter. He said that he and his staff went through the Budget line by line and every dime asked for is needed. He said that he inherited a Level 3 School system where students were leaving the District and that past practices were ineffective.

He asked, "Look at where we are now? We cannot go backward." He said that the School District cannot give up on infrastructure and other needs of the schools. "The way that you did it before - it didn't work!" he said that "when a copier doesn't work and a teacher needs worksheets, then downtime is created." He added that the Schools should have good equipment that is functional, as it has to build infrastructure.

Mr. Pellegrino noted that Gardner is in the bottom 20% for per pupil spending in the entire State.

Five-Year GAP Projections

Goal is to stop kids from leaving the District.

Gateway Program (with MWCC) - A regional approach to GALT.

Final Budget Gap with HW&M Chapter 70 aid is \$720,186.

Mr. Pellegrino added that the construction of a new elementary school will create a bump in enrollments (via choice).

The meeting concluded at 9:31 p.m.

Accepted by the City Council: *May 7, 2018*