

MINUTES
JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND CITY COUNCIL
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2010
WACTC -ROOM 303 - MULTIMEDIA LAB
6:00 PM OPEN SESSION
BUDGET WORKSHOP SESSION

All Woonsocket School Committee Members were present, as well as Dr. Robert Gerardi, Supt., Mark Garceau, Director of Instruction and Administration, and Stacey Busby, Finance Director.

Members of the Woonsocket City Council present were: John Ward, President, Stella Brien, Chris Beauchamp, Daniel Gendron, William Schneck, Suzanne Vadenais. City Finance Director Tom Bruce was also in attendance.

Mr. Dubois noted that Mayor Leo Fontaine was not feeling well and couldn't make it this evening.

BUDGET WORK SESSION:

Stacey Busby gave a PowerPoint presentation on the budget, which highlighted the concerns the WED has for FY11 due to factors such as mid-year reduction in FY10 funds and a reduction in state aid in FY11. She noted that the current budget exceeds the state cap (9%+). The WED also assumes that the district will be level-funded by both the city and the state for FY11. Busby reported that there will be a definite increase in the department's health care costs by 14.6%. Additional staffing will be required because of new mandates. An increase in utilities is also expected. Increased expenses include allocations for needed textbooks, capital improvement and reimbursement of deferred salaries of FY09. Dr. Gerardi indicated that no textbooks have been purchased for the last three years. "That's one way we balanced the budget," he said. As far as the capital improvements, Gerardi said, "You can't let your buildings fall down around you. He explained that we have gotten a pass for one-year on meeting the new fire code requirements, but we won't get that again. Gerardi explained that a new heating system is needed at Bernon Heights School and there are district-wide roof repairs that need to be done. "Additional staff is required by contract, which was needed last year and the union gave us one year to solve the problems. The reimbursement of deferred salaries from FY09 is also an obligation that must be met," explained Gerardi. Potential reductions to the proposed FY11 budget being recommended to the school committee tonight are: 1) Shifting \$1,669,970 in stabilization funds from local to grant salaries for a one-time saving in FY11 only; 2) Open negotiations of health care with the unions for a potential reduction of \$1.2 million+; 3) Appropriate \$500,000 of the \$600,000 reimbursement from E-Rate to cover half the cost of capital improvement projects, which are reimbursable; 4) Transportation (in-district and out-of-district); 5) Reduction of sports, other programs and staff; and 5) Reorganization of Guidance at the elementary and high school level, social workers/truancy officers and special educational administration.

Dr. Gerardi told the City Council that these are the best ideas for reductions that the WED could come up with, but the department is very lean. He welcomed any other ideas. He noted that we saved money through the statewide consolidation program for out-of-district busing. However, he noted that the other groups have been paying more money. To decrease in-district busing costs, the time schedule has been changed for next year to reduce the number of buses that will be required. Gerardi couldn't give an accurate amount of savings until a mock busing schedule is done. This mock schedule is being worked on to get a more accurate figure. Gerardi noted that sports and other programs may have to be cut if necessary, but added that he has worked in three of the five urban communities and hasn't seen a district work as leanly as Woonsocket does. Mr. Schneck thanked Dr. Gerardi and Mrs. Busby for their presentation. Schneck reported that they got good news today about the excise tax money for the 3rd qtr. being released. He didn't have any other suggestions, however. Dr. Gerardi said he was very glad that Mayor Fontaine fought the state for the excise tax payments. He thanked and commended him for doing a great job, adding, "There are no easy answers. In the RIDE initiatives, the Commissioner knows that there won't be extra money available and she is saying, 'use what you have'. It may be that we have to use the funding for all-day kindergarten for these new initiatives. We believe in all-day kindergarten, but we know more mandates are coming down the pike."

Stella Brien said that she went to half-day kindergarten and she turned out alright. Her daughter went to full-day kindergarten. She would hate to see money being spent in an area that's not mandated because it's babysitting. She said she's a little on the fence about that. Brien asked how the start times for school will be affected next year to save money on transportation. Dr. Gerardi explained how the start times affect the number of buses required and by staggering the times, the same buses can be used for more runs. He also explained that the support for all-day kindergarten is because kindergarten now has standards. "It's not like it used to be when it was just for socialization. Kids can get the socialization skills in preschool now. They are being taught a lot more in kindergarten now," said

Gerardi. Chris Beauchamp remarked that with the new WED administration, he has noticed that the communication is much better and it's much more open. He asked if the new boiler for Bernon Heights has gone out to bid. Stacey Busby said that it will definitely go out to bid, but the amount given is an estimate by Peter Fontaine. Beauchamp said that we can't keep paying the salaries we have been paying. He appreciates what we are trying to do with the busing and other cuts. He appreciates the teachers and what they do. His wife is a teacher's aide. "In business, pays are cut and people are laid off," he said. Dr. Gerardi said the WED would like to have a City Council Liaison when the negotiations are opened up.

Suzanne Vadenais was surprised that Pothier Elementary has a roof leak already. Dr. Gerardi told her that John Ward knows the history of that building. "How about turning the WACTC over to the state?" she asked. Dr. Gerardi said that the WSC had him write to the Commissioner about that and the Board of Regents. "I was told that when this building was built, it was sought after by the community and it's our responsibility to maintain this program. They realize that the CTE funding is part of the fair funding formula and it was never properly done. The Deputy Commissioner said that they have revised all their policies in the BEP except for the career/tech centers and they will be working on that. We are working on getting more revenue from the sending communities with their tuitions," said Gerardi. "My son came here and I don't want the school done away with. I would just like to see the state help out more with the funding," said Vadenais. She spoke about additional teachers being needed for the middle schools when they were told that there wouldn't be. Dr. Gerardi said that it's not possible to run the two buildings without this being done. He believes they were misled by a previous administration. Vadenais feels that the cities and towns need to stand together to fight the state forcing you to institute more mandates and not give you any more money. "We need to change the mandates," she said.

Mr. Gendron noted that he's a graduate of the WACTC and he appreciates the three years he came here almost 30 years ago. "It still looks good," he said. He spoke about the budget being balanced with deferrals. He would like to not see that happening because we just have to deal with it later on. Dr. Gerardi said that it got us through the last two years and we were the only community to get that from its unions. "Our unions have gone above and beyond what other communities have done," he said. Tom Bruce asked if we foresee any shifts in enrollment in the district. Gerardi explained that, overall, it has been fairly consistent. "It may be affected over the next few years because of the elimination of some public housing in the city that's proposed," said Gerardi. Mr. Ward asked about the career/tech tuitions going up and if it includes the addition of special education costs. Mrs. Busby confirmed that the tuitions will be going up to include these costs. Ward also questioned the amount of projected Medicaid reimbursement funds because in the suburb of Lincoln where he works, they have gotten \$900,000. He asked why it isn't more for an urban district like Woonsocket. Mrs. Busby explained. Ward asked about the \$1.6 million in stabilization funds. Busby explained that this year, we have to request the funds as a grant. Last year, we were told to put it into the local funds. Ward suggested that the WED get out the salary schedule from the 2003 contracts and that it would pretty much balance our budget if we used it. He also spoke about the health management group that we have versus what the city uses. Dr. Gerardi suggested that Mrs. Busby and Mr. Ward work together to see what they can come up with. "We have been looking into it since the former Mayor suggested it. The problem is that they require more frequent payments," said Gerardi. Ward asked about the 14.6% increase in the premiums based on claims. Mrs. Busby explained that the increase is because of the number of claims. "The last two years, we have had very high claims. We get a breakdown of the claims by department," she added. Ward said that the formula for fair funding that RIDE is working on is one that most towns will benefit from. He said that the Senate President holds all the power and she's from Newport, who will lose any way you cut it if a fair funding formula is passed. Dr. Gerardi thinks we should make it more public that the state legislator isn't working in the best interest of everyone and maybe we could get it changed.

Mr. Ward noted that Roger Jalette was unable to make it tonight because it's February 11th and he's a florist.

Respectfully submitted by,

Nancy G. Belisle
WSC Recording Clerk