

**WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2013
OPEN SESSION MINUTES
Woonsocket Middle School @ Hamlet, 60 Florence Drive
Woonsocket, RI 02895**

Meeting called to order by Vimala Phongsavanh at 6:30 p.m. in Open Session.

Roll Call: V. Phongsavanh, Present; E. Nadeau, Present; J. Donlon, Present; C. Roberts, Present. A. McGuire-Forcier, Present.

V. Phongsavanh stated the individual whose job is being evaluated had the option of going into Open Session and has waived that option. At this time, the Committee made motion to convene into Closed Session.

Motion to convene into Closed Session in accordance with RI Law 42-46-5-(a)(1) – Job Performance at 6:30 p.m.:

V. Phongsavanh	2 nd : J. Donlon	Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes
Motion to come out of Closed Session: V. Phongsavanh	2 nd : A. McGuire-Forcier	Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

Meeting called to order by Vimala Phongsavanh at 7:00 p.m. to reconvene in open session.

Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call: V. Phongsavanh, Present; E. Nadeau, Present; J. Donlon, Present; C. Roberts, Present. A. McGuire-Forcier, Present.

V. Phongsavanh stated to the public that no vote was taken during Closed Session.

Public Good and Welfare:

Charles Lemoine, 174 St. Barnabe Street – He said he noticed there are handicap ramps in the back but a couple of weeks ago he received a letter from the city saying he was not getting the handicap ramps and then Thursday the handicap ramps were here; he said it must be because he called Channel 12 news Susan Hogan to see what was happening with the handicap ramps. He asked what’s going to happen after the election on the 5th; does the school committee on December 1st get taken away. V. Phongsavanh said she believes they have a meeting in December but she is not sure what the process is. He said say two of you get voted to the City Council and asked how can you be on the School Committee and the City Council at the same time. A. McGuire-Forcier said this is why both mayors should have a plan on how they will appoint School Committee; Mayor Fontaine has a plan and she has not heard from Lisa Baldelli-Hunt but she is sure they will have a plan by election day. He said the public has not heard this plan.

Jeffrey Partington, President of the WTG – He came here tonight to talk about the “surplus” that we have in the city. He is troubled; he knows that a number of positions have not been filled and he knows that we do not have a human resource department right now so a lot of these positions cannot be filled. He knows this is sort of a badge of honor for a city with financial difficulties to have a surplus and this is considered to be positive news; but, for him, it is not positive news because we all know that this department has been stripped down tremendously in the last two to three years and there were many program cuts made at the time. The Superintendent has done a fantastic job justifying every single position within the system as a need and when it is trumpeted that we have a surplus because a lot of things were not filled, he does not think we are delivering the educational services that we truly need saying we have a surplus by not filling a lot of the positions that are budgeted and approved. As you all know, we have cut and cut and the Committee has made some votes that have been very difficult over the years. We are all hoping that we have hit the bottom and now we can rise back up; he thinks we are at the point where we can start to grow the system again; but not let the bean counters control the education system in the name of saving money at the expense of quality education. He is hoping that if you have the opportunity to speak in public about how much the system has been abused over time and you have the opportunity to say hey , let us go and start hiring the people that we need to hire and get back the things we know that we need to service the children of Woonsocket. He is hopeful that the Committee will recognize this and that it is time to start moving the system forward.

Superintendent Recognitions: G. Donoyan said this morning along with School Committee Chair V. Phongsavanh she met with high school students, administration, teachers at the high school, and Mr. Cosentino was there as well; the students were representatives of the student council, national honor society, athletics, and other organizations and, in essence, they represented the best of the best that we have at the WHS. They voiced their concerns to improve the image of Woonsocket, WHS, school department,

and the community at large; she is recognizing these young leaders; there were about 20 to 25 of them around the table; they were all in dress code; they spoke profoundly; they were rich in their thought patterns; they understood as educated young adults that there are roots to the problems that exist here and the most important thing is not once did they blame anyone; they sought to explain their solutions to problems. It is with the most impressive recommendations that she has to salute those young adults and if they are the future of Woonsocket, then Woonsocket is in phenomenal hands.

Motion to receive and place on file: V. Phongsavanh 2nd: A. McGuire-Forcier, J. Donlon (Unanimously Approved)

**Approval of September 17, 2013 Closed Minutes; September 25, 2013 Open Minutes; October 9, 2013 Open/Closed Minutes:
Motion to approve minutes of September 17, 2013, September 25, 2013, and October 9, 2013:
A. McGuire-Forcier 2nd: V. Phongsavanh (Unanimously Approved)**

Consent Agenda:

C. Roberts would like additional information from the Superintendent and the Finance Director about St. Mary's Home for Children; he is seeking an update on exactly what we are paying for \$60,500 a month. He asked if they can follow up with an email. C. Lerner addressed the Committee and gave a brief background of the program. C. Roberts would like to know what exactly \$60,500 is getting us in people; he would like to see how this is doing in comparison to what Feinstein was doing. He would like an update via email.

Motion to approve the consent agenda in its entirety: V. Phongsavanh 2nd: C. Roberts Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

Communications: None

Committee Reports: V. Phongsavanh announced that the dress code committee is meeting on November 4th at 4:00 p.m. at the WHS Principal Conference Room; this is an open meeting so anyone who can make it is welcomed to join the committee; she has chosen J. Donlon and E. Nadeau to be part of this committee. C. Roberts asked R. Ackerman if other members of the School Committee could participate in this meeting. R. Ackerman said yes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. None
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NEW BUSINESS:

1. **Finance Update – G. Donoyan, J. Spagna**

G. Donoyan read the 10-17-13 statement released by the Budget Commission which gave the reasons for the \$3.99M surplus for FY12-13. J. Spagna also handed to the School Committee the first quarter financial report for FY14. C. Roberts recommended that we build within the budget a \$1M medical expense reserve line.

No vote was taken. Discussion only.

2. **Discussion/Vote to extend Legal Counsel Contract – G. Donoyan**

G. Donoyan said she would like to renew and extend R. Ackerman's contract by 60 days even though he is retired; she said he is requesting an additional extension of his contract at this point in time. R. Ackerman said he is not fully retired, the Committee has extended his contract in intervals and said the question is what does the Committee want to do. A. McGuire-Forcier requested to extend his contract for another three months. G. Donoyan said at this point in time she is waiting for the Committee's approval to go forward with re-posting and then go to the Budget Commission to also approve the job description; it is up to the Committee on what they want to do; she can counsel the Committee and make suggestions as to what is important as we grow this school department but certainly we cannot be without legal counsel. She would recommend an extension of R. Ackerman's contract for at least two months. E. Nadeau suggests we wait to hire an attorney until the new School Committee is chosen. C. Roberts asked the Superintendent to send to the School Committee a copy of what she received under this RFQ which was submitted for law firms.

Motion to approve to extend legal counsel contract for additional three months: A. McGuire-Forcier

2nd: V. Phongsavanh Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

3. **Discussion/Vote of the Family Medical Leave Act Policy – 1st Passage – G. Donoyan**

G. Donoyan stated this document has been worked on in conjunction with Dan Kinder. This policy is used by many school districts in Rhode Island. The policy has X's where the name of the Human Resource Director should be listed because we are still in the process of figuring out who that replacement will be for Human Resources. It is important that we have an FMLA policy because we do not have one in house as thorough as this one. G. Donoyan is seeking 1st passage of this policy. C. Roberts said in a number of spots we just have a string of XXX; he would like the X's to read Human Resource Director or Superintendent or her designee.

Motion to approve the FMLA Policy for 1st Passage with the amendment to add Human Resource Director or person designated by the Superintendent as the interim Director or the Superintendent for the areas currently marked off with X's and or blanks within the policy: V. Phongsavanh 2nd: A. McGuire-Forcier Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

Conferences – None.

Superintendent's Report – G. Donoyan said she knows that lately there has been a lot of talk about the surplus but she would like to speak to the fact of the resiliency of the school department and its employees; let's be clear about the fact that the budget of the school department's \$66.6M of last year was made up of approximately 20% contribution of the city, another 75% of the state and the rest federal, local and national philanthropic associations. We are, and she can state this with the best creditability possible, at our best right now being the best fiduciary members of this community. We are taken taxpayers dollars, we know where these monies go, we are using them efficiently, effectively for the children, for your children, for the children that are your neighbors, and for the children that walk on the street by your homes to go to school in the morning. We are doing the best we possibly can; we are working to make sure this community grows and thrives. She is asking that anyone out there who is running for any kind of office to please stop using the school department as a crutch and she is looking at the people that are in the audience and is asking them to help us and say good things about the school department. There are phenomenal children that are being educated and they are being educated by phenomenal teachers. When Mr. Cosentino walked into that meeting today it was like he walked in like a God because those students said Mr. C, Cosentino is here. There is such respect, and yes love, of our teachers and that has to be publicly displayed. She is asking the community to understand that we are doing the best we can to work for our children, for your children.

Motion to receive and place on file: V. Phongsavanh 2nd: J. Donlon (Unanimously Approved)

School Committee Good and Welfare:

E. Nadeau – She said she did not attend the Autumnfest parade and a person asked her why the WHS Marching Band was not in uniform but wearing school colors; E. Nadeau asked if the band was in uniforms. A. McGuire-Forcier said they were in black pants and white shirts and also stated we do not have money to buy uniforms. Ellie said other bands had uniforms on and this is why the question was asked. She thinks with all the fundraisers we have, which she personally contributes to a lot of them, that this is one fundraiser that should take place; our own band should have uniforms; this project would be a good project for someone to take on because in all reality we are the host city for Autumnfest. Our kids perform very well and this is a fundraiser we should look into. Let us do something to have our bands have uniforms. Maybe a local company or companies can sponsor our bands so they can purchase uniforms; this is a community project that we all should look into.

A. McGuire-Forcier – She said we need to look into our capital improvements because many of our schools are overdue to be repaired like the walls, the stairs and if we take care of them we will have them a lot longer. We need to move quickly on technology; a lot of people don't realize that this is going to be the last year of NECAP because we are moving to what they call PARCC testing and this is supposed to be done on computers; our technology is not updated enough to support this and we do not have enough computers; this will put our children at a great disadvantage compared to the children in other Rhode Island communities; this will lower our test scores; she thinks between grants and extra money we need to come up with creative ways to build up our technology; technology is the new way and everybody is moving away from textbooks; this is her opinion and maybe every year we can start putting money away to bring technology to our students in the 21st century. She wished everyone a good night and said remember to vote on November 5th.

V. Phongsavanh – She wanted to thank and talk a little bit about Bonirath Chay; she is the current national honor society president. The whole idea of the group of the youth at the WHS came from her because she wanted to interview her for a class project she was doing; she asked her how do you have a voice in this city, make an impact, and be decision makers especially when we are making decisions that are directly affecting them. Another thing they talked about in the meeting was school spirit; they said when the uniform was first presented and implemented and since then the morale with school teachers and students has gone down really low and it is also probably because of a lot of the cuts that we have made on our end and a lot of the tough years we have had financially which have really affected them. She thinks there will be a lot of voices in the next few years and what she wanted to do in the last four years was really to have a youth council; to have youth voice even though they cannot vote; they are the most important people in our city. She is really excited to work with them; she will help to organize this and to get this going because it is exciting, great, and a refreshing moment when you get to see them and hear them directly. They will be meeting pretty often to get this going and hopes they are able to make policies that affect them which will make big changes in this city. She is really proud of Bonirath for putting this whole group together.

J. Donlon – He congratulated the football team for their excellent season they are having; they lost last Saturday but it was a non-league game so they are still in 1st place in their division and hopefully they will go on to win the superbowl again this year. He reminded everyone that Halloween is next week and there will be a lot of children out on the streets; a lot of parents bring their children from neighborhood to neighborhood now which increases the vehicles on the roadways; he reminded everyone to look on the roadways for children because they will be dressed in dark clothing and our streets are not lit. Please be very careful out there and hopefully we will get our streetlights turned on shortly. He said don't forget to vote on November 5th for the candidate of your choice and hopefully everyone will be happy with the results.

C. Roberts – He said he omitted to do this earlier when they were doing the moment of silence but they have touched upon many challenges that we have had as a school department and we have said thank you to our teachers and staff who stuck it out; he asked if everyone could take a minute to think of the teacher from Danvers, Massachusetts who lost her life at school at the hands of a student; her name was Colleen Ritzer and she appeared to be a very young and promising teacher; so as much as our troubles every day here as a School Committee seem great and monumental, at the end of the day we all need to say thanks for everything we do enjoy. This is a parting note for tonight and a little food for thought.

Motion to Adjourn at 7:51 p.m.: C. Roberts

2nd: V. Phongsavanh (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully Submitted:

Kimberly Blais, WSC Recording Secretary