

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence High School Cafeteria

2000 Pawtucket Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

School Committee Special Meeting

March 21, 2007

Open Session

Mrs. Morris called the Public Session to order at 7:00PM. No Executive Session was held. All School Committee Members were present: Robert Faria, Eileen Lovett, David Medeiros, Steven Santos, and Mildred Morris. Dr. Jacqueline Forbes, Superintendent of Schools was also present.

After the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, Dr. Forbes informed the audience that in 2005, the City Council hired B & E Consulting to review the School Department's budget. One of the recommendations from their report was that the School Department should develop a detailed Five Year Capital Budget Plan; according to the report it should involve the district and city personnel with the assistance of experts as needed. Once developed, it should be presented to the School Committee and to the City Council for

approval and funding.

Dr. Forbes explained that this forum is a workshop and the public has been invited to give input on the plan, which was put together by a Facilities Planning Committee that consisted of central office staff with input from the building level. The plan attempts to identify the needs of school buildings from a grass roots level and addresses four key areas: Buildings and Grounds, Learning Environment, Technology and Security. . Dr. Forbes thanked the facilities planning committee for their efforts. The completed plan will be forwarded to the School Committee and City Council to cooperatively make decisions regarding funding and timelines. Dr. Forbes related that the City has a total of \$155,175,000 worth of schools as determined by the RI Interlocal Trust replacement costs and the plan was prepared to maintain and improve the investment. Dr. Forbes thanked everyone for being a part of developing the plan. Following was a PowerPoint presentation as a walk through of the building needs of the district. Mr. Peter Barilla, Director of Buildings and Grounds and Mr. Robert Rodericks, Director of Attendance and Registration assisted with the presentation and questions following.

Public Comment

Debra Corrigan, 54 Bristol Avenue, asked how much money we can get through grants. Dr. Forbes advised that many grants do not entertain money for facilities, but we do apply for technology and

security grants. Mr. Rodericks explained that the School Department did apply for a security grant for doors, etc. but was turned down because they wanted the grant to cover more classroom items; there very few grants for heating, etc. as the government does not have the money to fix school buildings. Dr. Hilton, Finance Director, explained the process through RI Department of Education to obtain school building reimbursement; (the heating system for the high school will be included) state reimbursement comes from RIDE; we go out on a bond and receive 50% reimbursement.

Kathy Blackmar asked if recent lighting replacement was energy efficient; she also had a concern about the intercom system at Martin Middle School. Mr. Rodericks related that 99% of Martin is serviced by the intercom; the plan is to replace the system, but in the meantime, every administrator has a two-way communicator radio. During code red drills, most or all in the school received the message; the principal or designee goes to the areas not covered by the intercom message. Kathy said the priority is the kids and she asked about rooms with no windows and about the lighting system during a blackout. Mr. Rodericks said that every school has a need for better communication including Martin, Riverside and the High School; not one school has a state of the art communication system; code red drills are practiced all the time and he does not disagree that we need a better system. Kathy asked about the request for \$360,000 for high school doors; could we cut costs on some buildings to save money. Mr. Rodericks said the issue is not just a front entrance

being marked or about relocating the front entrance or doors, but that it needs to be in a supervised area. The greenhouse area might allow moving an office to that area with a physical barrier.

Carol Ann Calder, Lottie Drive – commented that it was a good presentation and she got a lot out of it, but questioned the need to replace the same things in every building. She asked why do we wait so many years to fix everything at once. Dr. Forbes explained that is the reason for this workshop; the answer is to stagger the projects out. Typically in budget crunches, we need to keep personnel (teachers) and there is no money left in the budget for bricks and mortar. Dr. Forbes said she hopes to do a better job with this than in the past; the idea is to get a plan and prioritize the items; these are only guesstimates. Ms. Calder asked if these items would be in the budget. Dr. Forbes said she needs to work with the city on that; she said it takes at least a year to have a five year plan implemented and the timeline needs to be determined. Ms. Calder said that the children are a priority and she will be at every single meeting.

Mr. Wilson III, Narragansett Avenue, asked about safety and code red drills. He questioned the cost of new seats in the auditorium and the fact that the doors and communication system will not be updated until 2009; therefore the kids will not be safe at Martin Middle School until 2009. Mr. Rodericks explained that he did not say that 90% was not working; the code red drills are working at 100% per the police department, but what is not working 100% is the loud speakers. The

plan is to say we need to do the work. The city does not allow capital improvements in our budget, we have asked for money in capital but we are not allowed to do it. We have trying to fix some of these things for decades, but could never get the money. Mr. Rodericks gave an example of the roof at the high school, which took over seven years at \$700,000. We can pay now or pay later. He explained that this is a formal effort to put a five year plan in place.

Kathy Blackmar commented that any plan to move Riverside Middle School into Martin is a huge problem.

Dr. Forbes explained that this meeting is to address the five year plan.

Adrienne Cardoza, 83 Park Drive, asked about replacing the roof at Grove Avenue School; why not sell the building and put the money toward the deficit and toward these repairs.

Michael Abrahamson, Dearborn, questioned technology infrastructure and how much of the \$1.2 requested may be covered by grants. Lori Fox, Director of Information Technology for the City of East Providence explained that the School Department has applied for about \$1 million dollars through E-Rate with the State Department of Education; we put in max; grants could cover about 58% of that amount if we get it (goes by free and reduced lunch). Mr. Abrahamson mentioned a meeting in Providence of “Geeks” and a

presentation called School Tools, which is a free administrative source for schools. He said there is money slated for an SIS system in the plan and suggested that maybe we could look into this plan. He will get us the information.

Susan DaSilva, Russell Avenue, has a medically fragile child and expressed concern about caring for chronically ill students during code red drills, even though they have worked well for her son in the past.

James Buzzy, 11 Allison, hopes local contractors might be able to do some of these repairs, because he remembers the window fiasco at Waddington School a few years ago; he questioned the amount of money in the report for Orlo and Waddington roofs. Dr. Hilton explained that they are on a 10-year lease plan.

Maryann Leonardo, Prescott Avenue, asked if these items will be included in a budget proposal. Dr. Forbes explained that the state does not allow the School Department to have a capital building fund and the debt service will be switched to city in 2009 for heating systems, etc. Maryann asked if some of these items may end up in the City budget.

Mrs. Morris explained that the School Committee and City Council have different rules; if we sell the Grove Avenue School, the money goes back to the City; all surplus money goes to pay down the deficit.

Discussion about expenses at Grove Avenue School, which are paid by the lessee.

Tom Riley, Pawtucket Avenue, commented that it was a nice PowerPoint, but what struck him was that as a property owner, he saw rust, corrosion, and peeling paint, which 95% was due to lack of upkeep. He understands about the roofs, but rusty columns, etc. can be brushed and painted; someone could do that work. He feels this is negligence, which borders on criminal and there is no excuse for this.

He has acquaintances in the trade and a maintenance schedule is followed. There should be no broken paint at the surface and he felt that lots can be repaired with simple maintenance. He asked what solid plans will be in plan to enforce maintenance so that ten years from now, everything is not in a rusted mess again because it was not maintained.

Mr. Faria explained that the first step is to identify areas, prioritize the items and the next step is the course of action; certain items need to be handled right away. Dr. Forbes said there is an asbestos abatement plan in every school which includes any tile work and she will work with the sub-committee to firm up a plan.

Mr. Riley expressed his belief that there is negligence in the maintenance department and a plan should be drawn up and adhered to for this extremely deferred maintenance, which will cost us more money in the end because of neglect.

Dr. Forbes explained that the maintenance staff has not had the funds to do some of this work and maintenance issues will be addressed with Mr. Barilla and the sub-committee. Mr. Faria said updates will be coming forward on this plan.

Victoria Sangi Brown, Fenner Avenue, asked about rumors and felt that not enough adequate information is being provided. She talked about replacement of the roof at Waddington and repairs at the administration building close to ½ million dollars. She believes that if the rumors are true, we should look first at schools that do not need money and the plan should be that schools that need the most work should be eliminated first. We need to think smart and look at things that way; administration needs more than the elementary schools. She wants some conversation about what will be going on in April; she hopes we will be financially smart this time.

Mrs. Morris explained that a separate meeting is being held in order to hear comments from parents, and everyone. Mr. Faria said there are many discussions going on simultaneously and things may change for the better. Mr. Faria felt that the School Department is trying to do the process the right way, as the five year plan should have been done long ago. Discussion took place about legislation and the five year plan; there are many things going on at the same time.

Ms. Brown felt she still did not know what is happening; if there is a discussion about closing two schools, what is the reason and is it this September or another year.

Mrs. Lovett said she does not know what the answer is, but that she is working hard on many things and this should not be an “us and them” situation. She asked that everyone be patient as all are working toward the same goal.

Dr. Forbes said she and other staff members are looking at cost saving proposals, and have been working on the five year plan since August. The School Committee will be meeting on April 9 and 10th and data will be given out on April 9, 2007 regarding proposals; discussion will start that night and continue at the April 10th meeting.

Anthony Artone, 35 Wannamoiset, asked about where the money goes when schools are sold; he said there are grey areas as to who is in charge of the money. Mrs. Morris explained about what happened when Warren Avenue was turned back to the City and then sold. He said that the City and Schools are both running a business with no one having control over each other.

Mrs. Morris encouraged everyone to address the City Council and legislators to work together.

Mr. Faria related that the Thompson School was turned back to the

City and sold, and the city took control of \$1.2 million, which is in the surplus. The School Committee asked on several occasions for a truck and received some money for one, but none of that money could be used for security needs, etc. Anthony said there is a need to address this with City Council.

Heather Ryan of Riverside Drive asked when a decision will be made; she is afraid that discussion will be held on April 9th and a decision made on the 10th. Mrs. Morris said if more time is needed the School Committee will listen and a decision will not be made on April 10th as people are concerned about their children.

Mr. Santos said it is unrealistic to have a forum on April 9th, receive proposals for study and make a decision right away; time is needed to study them and he does not think the School Committee can make a decision so quickly on such an important issue. Discussion about distressed city criteria.

Heather Ryan said the plan is a start because year after year the City Council chops money from the school budget and this is where it comes from. Mrs. Morris said there is a lack of funding from year to year.

Mr. Faria said the proposals will be given to the School Committee and the public on April 9th.

Someone asked about the roof at Grove Avenue; if we are earning only \$50,000 a year in rent and it needs a roof, are we losing money by not selling it and we will not have to pay the maintenance if we sell it.

Mary Ann Leonardo asked about air quality across the board and what can be done to help with legislation.

Mr. Faria said on Channel 5 state legislators were talking about mandates and people can ask legislators with emails to help. East Providence as a whole needs to support federal mandates; there is nothing wrong with it.

Dr. Forbes said there is also legislation on transportation such as the yellow bus law and bus regions which could help us with savings in that area. Mr. Linneman, Transportation Supervisor, explained that we send buses to about 68 schools each day in 13 cities, to private schools. We are trying to change a 1977 law that all children need to be transported in a yellow bus; some may be transported in RIPTA buses and this might reduce as many as five buses (\$70,000). Rezoning the busing regions could cut as many as three buses, we are asking to have the legislation changed, but this is very difficult to do.

Mrs. Morris said the public can go to the State House to speak at any hearings.

Mary Ann Leonardo asked if we can put the information on the website regarding the bill/legislation numbers and subject matter and any other information so she can write or call her legislators, speaking intelligently about these issues; she wants to know what she is asking them to support.

Mr. Santos said the problems we are facing also involve others in the State; we need to coordinate the efforts in the State to get more action.

Antone Gouveia wanted to clarify the difference between debt service and the accumulated deficit. He explained that the \$92,000 debt service has nothing to do with the accumulated deficit. (Waddington and Silver Spring – debt service) (Accumulated Deficit - \$50,000 dedicated from Grove Ave lease). When the School Department sold Thompson, they entered into an agreement with the City that \$775,000 would be dedicated to the accumulated deficit to reduce it. When the School Department turned Tristum Burges over to the City, it was sold for \$1.1 million and was supposed to be used for capital improvements, but the City can decide what capital improvements will be done. If a school closes, the city could sell it and put the money in a capital account; at that point, we could ask for some projects to be done, as the buildings do not belong to the School Department, but to the City. He thought it was a good PowerPoint and he hopes a decision will not be made on the 9th or 10th.

Heather asked about people registering for private schools and if the School Committee understands why. Mrs. Morris said she hopes to make the right decision and ask the City Council to fund our capital improvements.

Mr. Faria explained that this is a vision of what we have to do versus what we want to do, such as programs for students like robotics, etc. Mrs. Morris would like to bring back some good programs that were lost such as reading programs, but it all boils down to money.

Someone asked how the public could find out about what money is in a separate account.

Mr. Faria wished for more dialogue with the city.

Dr. Forbes will be meeting with the City Manager to discuss consolidation of services

Mr. Faria said the School Committee and City Council said they would work with the City.

Someone asked to invite legislators and City Council to the meeting on April 9th because this is not just a School Committee problem.

Kathy Grillo, Hamilton Street, suggested a Connect-Ed message to

get the word out; it is an excellent means of communication to all, as it affects all children

Lisa Anderson, Specter Avenue, asked who is drafting the proposals and who will present them on April 9. People need information to quell stories

Mrs. Morris promised that when research on the proposals is done, information will be given out.

A motion to adjourn at 9:15PM by Mr. Medeiros, seconded by Mr. Faria. Vote 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Eileen Lovett, Clerk of the Committee