

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

School Committee Meeting

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

Special Joint Meeting with the East Providence City Council

Open Session

May 31, 2007

Mrs. Morris called the meeting to order at 5:25PM. All School Committee members were present: Robert Faria, Eileen Lovett, David Medeiros, Steven Santos, Mildred Morris. Dr. Jacqueline Forbes, Superintendent of Schools and Robert Silva, Esq. and Andrew Thomas, Esq. School Department attorneys attended.

City Council members were present: Dr. Isadore Ramos, Bruce DiTraglia, Valerie Perry, Robert Cusack, Bryan Silva. Also Present: Richard Brown, City Manager and William Conley, City Solicitor. The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by Mr. Medeiros and the Invocation given by Councilwoman, Valerie Perry.

Report of the Superintendent & Staff

Five Year Facilities Plan - Dr. Forbes reported that the City Council hired B & E Consultants in 2005 to review the School Department's budget and that one of the recommendations from their report was that the School Department develop a detailed Five Year Capital Improvement Plan. The plan, developed by a Facilities Planning Committee and presented to the School Committee at a public meeting in March, will now be formally presented to the City Council. Dr. Forbes thanked the members of the Facilities Planning Committee: Mr. Peter Barilla, Dr. Jim Hilton, Bill Capron, Lori Fox, Bob Rodericks, and Edward Daft who worked with her in developing the plan which focuses on four areas: physical facilities repairs, learning environment, technology, infrastructure, and security. Dr. Forbes described the format of the home grown report, which identifies the needs of school buildings from a grass roots level. She stated that given the budgetary constraints facing the City and the School Department, she is not suggesting that all projects begin immediately, but will look to the City Council to assist the School Department in determining priorities and a funding mechanism. Since the City owns the buildings, it is the responsibility of the School Department to inform the City Council of the needs and the potential fiscal impact on the City. The City has a total of \$155,175,000 worth of schools as determined by the RI Interlocal Trust Replacement Costs and this plan is prepared to maintain and improve our investment. Dr. Forbes also presented a handout of a PowerPoint presentation with pictures of some of the facilities which were shown at the public meeting in March. Dr. Forbes asked that

the City Council review the report and she asked for questions and/or comments. (There were none).

Legislative Update - Dr. Forbes reported:

 Bill 5242 passed in the House; an act relating to Superintendents and School Committees with a similar Senate Bill under consideration. This bill, which is important to East Providence, allows School Committees to seek relief from state directives that are unfunded and which exceed federal limits and guidelines by bringing an action in the RI Superior Court.

 The Draft Final Report of the Foundation Aid Technical Advisory Group to the Joint Committee to establish a Permanent Foundation Aid Formula for RI becomes public; a formula for education. If accepted by the General Assembly, \$10,671 is the average per pupil foundational support, weighing students by need (poverty, special education, English language learners, Career Technical education) to achieve vertical pupil equity. More specific information will be provided in the future.

 House Bill 5231 – Act relating to Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals – Community Residences – (exempt any facility operated by Bradley Hospital from being considered as a group home or community residence). Dr. Forbes met with the House Finance Committee Chairman to discuss the Bradley Hospital Craft Program

reimbursement to the School Department and is hoping to receive increased reimbursement for group homes. Status of this bill is not known at this time.

 A letter was sent by Congressman Patrick Kennedy to the Commissioner of Education in support of a school funding formula and proper group home reimbursement.

Dr. Ramos thanked school staff for their efforts toward effecting changes in legislation, which will ultimately affect the city's budget. Dr. Forbes thanked parents who called, emailed and testified at the State House regarding legislation; she will be reviewing the information to find out the impact of this legislation on our budget.

Budget Update - Dr. Forbes reported that in the 2005-2006 budget audit requested by the City Council and prepared by B & E Consultants, the centralized nature of the School Department budget process was reported as a specific weakness. The auditors recommended that the Finance Sub-Committee of the School Committee and the Superintendent met with individual building principals and program leaders to discuss the budget preparation process.

Mr. Faria, a member of the sub-committee, related that three to four meetings of the Budget Sub-Committee were held at different buildings in order to discuss budget requests with administrators and

to understand the process. A meeting was held on May 30th and the notes will be reviewed to make improvements to the process so that the budget will be an expression of the collective needs of the community. Next year, the budget will be a needs-based budget and administrators will be encouraged to level fund services and supplies. Dr. Forbes commented that from now until August, she will be putting together a tight budget with the assistance of B & E Consulting, who will be investigating staffing requirements, efficiency, and program needs, while reviewing law, regulation and contractual agreements. The Budget Sub-committee plans to have a balanced budget at the end of this year and not to have a deficit next year.

Councilman DiTraglia asked why nothing was budgeted for capital for the 2005-06 fiscal year; he looked at pictures of 15-20 year old repairs and no money was ever allocated in the capital budget for them. Dr. Forbes said that in hard times, capital is the first place to be cut; she needs the assistance of the city on some of the project numbers. Mr. Faria said that most parents had issues with the lack of routine maintenance, but money cannot be put aside for capital items while we have a deficit and the big ticket items usually need to be done first. We can go back over the past, but we need to stop, go forward and get rid of the deficit first. Dr. Ramos said there are rumors about the city taking over the schools; there has only been discussion about looking at certain areas, which everyone needs to agree on; there is only discussion at this point and the pieces need to be put

together first..

Discussion took place regarding reorganization. The City Manager, School Committee Chair and the Superintendent met regarding consolidating the areas of finance, human resources, purchasing, technology and information regarding work load, etc. When that information is received, they will be able to look at the budgeted dollars at both municipal and school levels

Mr. Faria asked if anyone had any ideas; he expected to see something at this meeting. Mr. Brown said it takes time to do the research for each organization and what services that should be left at the schools or consolidated; can the City worry about buildings and grounds, cleanliness, etc. and let the School Committee do the educational piece. Mr. Faria said in his opinion the major goal is the education of the students; Dr. Forbes is the Chairman of the Board; her main responsibility should be education with maintenance on the city side. Mr. Faria thought some decisions would have been made today. Mr. Brown said he had concerns about School Committee level as to what might happen; this needs to be ironed out first. The Chair will have a discussion with the School Committee. Mr. Brown said underlying work needs to be done first.

Mrs. Morris said she thought Mr. Brown would bring information forward after the last meeting and there is no more information now than two and half weeks ago. She realizes this cannot be done

overnight, but thought they could start talking about it. Dr. Ramos asked what information is specifically needed from the School Department.

Mr. Brown said at the last meeting, he asked for an organizational chart for staffing, work load and expenditures because he does not have sufficient information. Dr. Forbes thought that Dr. Hilton had sent the information, but she will check into it. Dr. Forbes asked when discussion could start on key areas.

Dr. Ramos asked what can be done; maybe the School Committee and City Council can agree on some things right away and other items may take longer. Dr. Forbes and Mr. Brown can work together.

Mr. Faria said there is a lack of public trust; this is not about ego or power; it is about if the city has any options so that we can operate better (like using city trucks, etc.) Mr. Brown said there are questions which need to be answered first as to how duties would be assigned to city employees; the organization has to be defined.

Mrs. Lovett said she thought this would be what would be worked on tonight and she is not sure how the process should work from here.

Mr. Brown said he would like to know what areas of administration the School Department would be comfortable in the city looking at, and then can do the hard work with costs after the approval from the School Committee. Mrs. Lovett asked in what forum the matter could

be discussed. Mrs. Morris said she asked Mr. Brown to bring information to this meeting.

Mr. Cusack said that spending plans, long term cap, legislation, etc. are all great, but have nothing to do with consolidation; he asked to stop the line of reasoning that the city did not bring anything here and the School Department did. He asked if the School Committee would consider legitimate areas of consolidation in the four areas mentioned; the City Mgr. alluded to documents from the School Department on work load etc.

Mr. Brown reported that after the last meeting he needed School Committee to say what areas could be worked on? Mr. Cusack said the private sector does this every day and there are hard decisions to make, which are usually done with management consultants in private with an independent, objective opinion for potential savings, which could be millions.

Mr. Brown has done organizational studies like this before which typically take 1-1 ½ years; when done not a lot of money is saved, but increased efficiency is realized; he wanted to do it in-house because of the cost.

Mr. DiTraglia asked for the City's Facilities plan; the City needs to counteract, come to a happy medium and work out some figures. Dr.Ramos felt it should be a team effort to get more done; Dr. Forbes

and Mr. Brown should get together. Mr. Cusack said the School Committee has not acted on this and should indicate what they can work on.

Councilman Silva felt that both groups should issue a report at their meetings. Dr. Ramos said there should be a workshop to get ideas on paper with Dr. Forbes and Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown said the School Committee should give marching orders first rather than having twelve people giving information. Mr. Cusack asked for the next step.

Mrs. Morris said the School Committee will discuss this matter on June 12th to see what the School Department can give up and bring it to the City Council. Mr. Faria thought all would be looked at. Dr. Ramos thought the School Department should meet on what they thought could be relinquished. Mr. Cusack felt that with the two bureaucracies, it would be natural, as there are probably certain areas that

cannot be relinquished legally and he recommended starting from there as to what the School Committee must do and what the City can do and what is in the middle. A legal opinion is needed for both entities, regarding statutes, etc. and what cannot be changed according to law; that process should be ongoing and then get down to units. It should be a public process regarding what items cannot be relinquished.

Dr. Ramos recommended the legal research so that Dr. Forbes and Mr. Brown will know have those answers and Mr. Brown will put a

report together, and a meeting date will be set up again after the 12th.

Mrs. Perry said this is not a new issue; until everyone does what is best for the City, this will go no where; this is not about one side or the other giving up things.

Mr. Faria said the School Committee voted on researching the operations at the Platt and Watters buildings and were to initiate discussion about finding a way to reallocate students, sell property and make arrangements for the funds to cover the deficit; he wants discussion and thoughts on this.

Mr. Cusack said there is a five year plan at \$10.6 million and it would be nice to keep asset money, but allocate it to long term needs. Mr. Faria said he would love the School Department to have a capital budget, but they can't until the deficit is gone. Mr. Cusack asked about the status of negotiations with the NEA and any further discussions as the public needs to know where we stand on this.

Dr. Ramos said the agreement is between the negotiators and the union and we can't get into it. Mr. Faria has seen nothing; there has been no feed back.

Mr. Cusack has no knowledge of any discussion and is not asking for details, but would like to know if there have there been any contacts?

Dr. Ramos felt the City Council should talk with the negotiators; if there is a stalemate, then so be it, but Mr. Faria is on the negotiating team with Mr. Medeiros and Mr. DiTraglia and he does not want an unfair labor practice charge.

Mr. Faria wanted to talk about consolidation of services and closing schools etc. as he keeps getting asked about it; we keep doing the same thing over and over again, which is insanity; the School Committee has no leverage or power which is frustrating because they cannot get consent on any ideas.

Dr. Forbes advised that the EPEA has sent a letter; proposals are at a stalemate but she remains hopeful; at the June 12th meeting, she will be reviewing proposals from the AFSCME (custodial union) negotiating team with the School Committee.

Mr. Cusack advised that he is placing an item on the docket to proceed with a declaratory judgment to stop payments on buyback; if voted, it would proceed and there will be potential savings if the City Council CC prevails. He urged the School Committee to pursue savings with administration of the health plan to see if substantial savings could be made, as this was done at the state level with no change in benefits. He will be asking for City Council to consider that and will follow-up.

Mr. Faria advised that he will be presenting some general ideas to the

School Committee regarding preparation now for future negotiations.

A motion was made by Mr. Medeiros to adjourn, seconded by Mrs. Lovett at 6:50PM. Vote 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Eileen Lovett, Clerk of the Committee