

# **EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT**

## **School Committee Meeting**

**East Providence City Hall**

**145 Taunton Avenue, Room 306**

**East Providence, Rhode Island 02914**

**April 29, 2008**

### **Open Session**

**Mrs. Morris called the meeting to order at 7:15 PM. School Committee Members present: Anthony Carcieri, Stephen DeCastro, Robert Faria, Steven Santos, Mildred Morris. Also present: Dr. Jacqueline B. Forbes, Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Andrew Thomas, Esq.**

**Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was observed.**

### **Report of the Superintendent and Staff**

**Personnel Recommendations – Mr. Barham, Director of Human Resources presented the following personnel items recommended by the Superintendent:**

### **APPOINTMENTS**

**Cristina Carlotti Department Head, World Languages, EPHS**

**John Gendron Department Head, Phys Ed/Health, EPHS**

**Scott Abrahamson Department Head, Fine Arts, EPHS**

**Cathleen Medina Part-time Senior Project Coordinator, EPHS**

**Bradley Wilson Coordinator, Special Education, MMS**

**Kerrie Calabro Guidance, RMS**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Carcieri. Vote 5-0.**

## **RETIREMENTS**

**Rosemarie Falls (32 yrs) Math Teacher, EPHS**

**Joyce Simeone (31 yrs) Math Teacher, EPHS**

**Diane Luther Baxter (22 yrs) Reading Teacher, Oldham School**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.**

## **RESCINDING RETIREMENT**

**Claudia K. Rowley Teacher, Reading, MMS**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. DeCastro. Vote 5-0.**

## **RESIGNATIONS**

**Ben Figueiredo Coach, Girls' Soccer, EPHS**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.**

## **LEAVE OF ABSENCE – UP TO 13 WEEKS**

**Jennifer Clark Teacher, Grade 3, Kent Heights School**

**From May 12, 2008, to end of 2007-2008 school year**

**Kristine Ricci Business Teacher, EPHS**

**From May 19, 2008**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.**

## **EXTENDED PERSONAL LEAVE**

**Fatima Avila (Year 2) Teacher, English, MMS  
2008-2009 School Year**

**Gregory McCarthy (Year 2) Teacher, Phys Ed, RMS  
2008-2009 School Year**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Carcieri. Vote 5-0.**

## **LEAVE WITHOUT PAY**

**Agnes Wright Bus Assistant  
March 20, 2008 – March 19, 2009**

**James DeBlois Teacher Assistant, MMS  
April 28, 2008 – April 27, 2009**

**Motion: Mr. Santos/Second: Mr. Carcieri. Vote 5-0.**

**Mrs. Morris expressed disappointment with the interview process regarding the Fine Arts Department Head, as there were no music or art teachers on the interview committee. Mr. Barham explained that because this was a leadership position, it was difficult to get objective opinions from members of the department. Dr. Forbes advised that the complaint was so noted.**

**RECALL OF 52 TEACHERS – Motion by Mr. DeCastro to approve recommendation of the Superintendent, seconded by Mr. Faria.**

**Discussion: In response to Mr. Santos request as to why the recalls are necessary, Dr. Forbes explained that teachers are needed to teach students and class sizes have been maxed out; with 41 retirements and the Job Fair coming up in May, positions need to be filled and not recalling the teachers would have a destabilizing effect and would not be in the best interest of the learning community. Vote 5-0.**

**Motion to adjourn this meeting by Mr. Carcieri, seconded by Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0**

**Joint Workshop with the East Providence City Council was called to order by Mrs. Morris and Dr. Ramos. City Council Members present: Mayor Isadore Ramos, Bruce DiTraglia, Valerie Perry, Bryan Silva, Robert Cusack. School Committee members present: Anthony Carcieri, Stephen DeCastro, Robert Faria, Steven Santos, Mildred Morris. Also present: Richard Brown, City Manager, William Conley City Solicitor, Dr. Jacqueline Forbes, Superintendent of Schools and Andrew Thomas, Esq. School Department Legal Counsel.**

**City Manager's Deficit Reduction Memorandum and Superintendent's Deficit Reduction Plan**

**Dr. Forbes explained that as a result of the direction given by the**

**School Committee and the City Council at the January 7, 2008 joint meeting, she participated in meetings with the City Manager to address the school department's impending 2007-08 fiscal year deficit. The City Manager presented a report to the City Council on March 14, 2008; the report includes a recommendation to sell the School Department's Grove Avenue, Platt, and Watters properties. Dr. Forbes recommended that the School Committee vote to approve the sale of the properties and asked for a motion to surplus the properties; sale proceeds would be used to pay down the deficit. A motion was made by Mr. Faria, no second.**

**Mr. Cusack asked for discussion. Mr. Carcieri asked to get ideas on the table. Mr. DeCastro also had concerns and a problem with selling the Grove Avenue School.**

**Mr. Faria - need to understand the implications of what we are doing; where does the money go, etc. and how does it affect the deficit.**

**Mr. DeCastro asked if we surplus Platt and Watters, where will administration go; need a plan before we can surplus buildings.**

**Dr. Ramos – we need to go forward; there is a meeting with the Auditor General on May 9th and there is a problem with prolonging this; we need a plan or we will be in real trouble.**

**Mrs. Morris asked about moving the administration building to Union School.**

**Mr. Brown said when discussion began it was the understanding that administration would be going to Martin Middle School; since then, the Superintendent has identified Union School. The Community**

**Center has a 50 year lease; however, the good news is that they have not paid rent in six years and they are not in a strong position to have rights to the building.**

**Mr. Brown - have forecasts for long time of a \$3.4 deficit; compared to when he wrote the letter, the forecast from the state is even worse and we have to make a move very quickly; the plan he has does not cause the school or city side to suffer; we are not eliminating band, sports, or closing the Senior Center and will try to maintain essentials without having to go to a supplemental tax; there is no support for a supplemental tax according to public opinion. Even if we implement draconian methods, the school year ends in June and there is no time to put anything into effect.**

**Mr. Cusack asked how we best obtain money instead of just up or down; this workshop should be for discussion about this. Mr. Brown – if more facilities than we need, why not?**

**Mr. Cusack – how to get the most money from these properties. Mr. Brown already has an offer for Grove at \$823,000.**

**Mr. Carcieri said he is new on the School Committee and has not been involved in this as long as others; there is not a lot of information out concerning this and no certified appraisals. Mr. Brown said his staff did the appraisals. Mr. Carcieri would like objective appraisals; he thought some of the numbers were ambitious and should be talked about; should we sell or lease, who expressed interest, etc.**

**Mr. Brown – suggests borrowing money to pay down the debts; lease does not generate enough capital and there is maintenance involved with a lease and some responsibility toward the property and our track record is not good there.**

**Mr. Carcieri said it seems like we are under the gun and good moves are not made that way by moving quickly; he does not know if this will cure our ills.**

**Mr. Brown agreed it is not, but it would be \$2.9 on a \$4 million deficit; after the deficit plan goes into effect, the School Committee needs to get the costs down going forward.**

**Mr. Cusack – if market is weak maybe the lease number would be higher; we do not know these numbers as they are assessors' office numbers. If the number is low, would we still want to do it.**

**Mr. Brown – not suggesting that we sell at a disadvantage;**

**Mr. Cusack – does not know the cash flow from those properties as no market evaluation has been done; \$2.9 would be great and we can dream about these numbers, but we need to know alternatives and need hard numbers from experts.**

**Mr. DeCastro asked about the value.**

**Mr. Brown said the buildings are about \$900,000 each; all add up to \$2.9; not exactly science and tried to be realistic since we have a \$3.9 million deficit and would like to deal with it before the end of the year.**

**Mr. Brown – bonds need approval by Auditor General and legislature to borrow, but we may not have to go to voter approval.**

**Mr. DeCastro asked if voters turn it down, the School Committee will have given up the buildings, would have no more control over them, and where are we then? 5.1 with interest and fees over five years, does not sound like a good deal.**

**Mr. Brown asked if there were any alternatives.**

**Mr. DeCastro: felt that 25% over five years was a little steep in his mind; but he had no alternative.**

**Mr. Brown has not heard any alternatives.**

**Mr. DeCastro – we would be borrowing money at a huge cost.**

**Mr. Brown - The City is not in deficit; he thought about coming up with a solution to share the pain; he may be optimistic on the numbers and we may not get those numbers. Other than borrowing money and paying it back over time, he does not have another alternative to finish the fiscal year.**

**Mr. Cusack – asked why the bond council could not say yes or no; he was concerned about the timing as the unpaid bills today are \$4.1 and money is needed today for bills such as the diesel fuel for buses; we need money to pay Brennan now and there is a tremendous amount of urgency. We should be able to figure this out. Regarding voter approval in November, problems are now. He talked to Mr. Conley today and understands that even with general obligation bonds, we will not get the money until after the lights are off.**

**Mr. Brown – cannot tell when proceeds are available; he has asked the questions, but does not have the answer.**

**Mr. Cusack – Could it not be general obligation bonds?**

**Mr. Brown -greater hurdle; in dealing with the Auditor General, the problem is he does not like general bonds and wants us to manage our way out of this; he wants to see fewer fire, sports, etc. and the alternative he leaves us with is massive reductions in the way we do business.**

**Mr. Cusack – if we could know the cash flow from schools, we can determine it pretty fast.**

**Mr. Brown wants the City Council to vote for him to market the properties; what buyers tell us and not appraisers. Mr. Carcieri asked**

**if there is a buyer for Watters.**

**Mr. DiTraglia – asked if the Auditor General has given a time frame for a plan and if we do not have a plan, what is the sacrifice.**

**Mr. Brown explained that he and the Superintendent met with the Auditor General and another appointment is scheduled with him. Mr. Brown would like to be able report a unanimous decision. There is risk in telling him (Mr. Brown) not to go in this direction. The Auditor General does not like to exercise certain powers, but Mr. Brown does not know what powers he will exercise. All are in this together; this is not just the School Department in deficit; we need to look at the whole community.**

**Mr. DiTraglia – We need to show a plan; Mr. Brown cannot sell the property without the City Council's agreement.**

**Mayor Ramos – this is the plan we need to go with; some things he does not agree with, but we need to go with a plan.**

**Mr. Cusack – need the maximum value out of the property; figure creatively what we can extract; when certified appraisals come in, work out a better deal by leasing or selling.**

**Mr. Brown would like a strategy; the Auditor General is interested in a quick pay off. This is the reason to show as sale; balance against**

**deficit; if we can structure lease payments, etc.**

**Mr. Cusack – find the most advantageous way; the Auditor General is reasonable and would draft well to that**

**Mr. Carcieri – Watters lease more interesting; lump sum up front with a long term and we would still own the asset; we should have a workshop to see how deals could be massaged. He still would like appraisals; he does not think we will be near the number thought.**

**Mr. Brown - needs direction to proceed; the market may not be good for sale, but may not want depressed lease.**

**Mr. Carcieri - could have a 15 year lease in advance with money upfront; could work on all those variables first.**

**Mr. Cusack – why carte blanche; Auditor General wants to make sure there was serious planning.**

**Mr. Brown asked for deficit reduction strategy to raise money; if Council would rather, we could send a supplemental tax bill.**

**Mr. Cusack – false choice; we need to get sophisticated; sale or some other arrangement; why just yes; why not more creative. With the Tristram building, we probably lost \$800,000; it was botched; he wants to explore more alternatives to get the numbers and he would say yes**

**if he had assurances to really work this.**

**Mr. Brown – real reason he needs direction and vote on record is so the Auditor General knows we are serious about making change.**

**Mr. Cusack – we can do that; we want to realize funds from these properties.**

**Mr. Brown does not have a problem with exploring a range of alternatives; we need to change the way we do fire service, business, etc. and he needs to know the people he works for are behind him on this; through teacher attrition, city and school consolidation; he wants to know the Superintendent and others are behind him. When we go through the work of a lease/purchase or whatever we come up with, everyone should be in agreement and will take the next step.**

**Dr. Ramos – how many more meetings can we have with taxes waiting and the deficit still there; we have to come together to go to Auditor General; making a plan is on the City Council and School Committee; we can debate different philosophies, but must come together.**

**Mr. Brown – wants authority to put the mechanism in place to achieve the sale of property to maximize assets; he does not need to surplus, but needs to know now that if he comes back with an attractive offer, he hopes there will not be sentimental value with Platt and Watters.**

**Mr. DeCastro – has not seen any good alternative for the administration building and Martin is not the right thing to do.**

**Mr. Brown – Superintendent would like Union School and he needs to work out some glitches.**

**Mr. DeCastro – it is not simple to move people – what are the costs to wire, make repairs; that number will reduce proceeds; is there enough space. He will support to save money. School Department also kept jobs open in anticipation of consolidation; the goal is that and he thinks everyone will support that.**

**Mrs. Morris asked if the School Committee members could tour the Union building. Mr. Carcieri asked if it will accommodate needs in future – Mr. Brown said the Superintendent looked at it.**

**Mr. Brown – will need the action of the City Council for that; the building is used from 9-1; the footprint is more space than needed. No rent has been paid for six years and he will get grief, but anticipates taking it back and putting administration there.**

**Mayor Ramos– City Council and School Committee should make a recommendation to the City Manager and Superintendent to move forward with the plan immediately to show taxpayers we are moving on it; we will be saving two jobs through attrition in those areas and**

**this is the opportune time to show we are serious about consolidation. Mr. DeCastro wants to know how it will work. Mr. Brown said it involves how the work gets done and they will go to the bargaining units. While this was tried several years ago, this time is different; collective bargaining units will not stop us.**

**Mr. DeCastro asked who the employees will be reporting to; this is a monumental task for the City Manager and Superintendent to make that happen.**

**Mr. Brown – we need to eliminate the deficit and the goal is to never get in deficit again. We need to create an organization lean enough to never have that again; we need to have an environment appropriate for educating kids.**

**Mr. Faria supports this and it is long over due; his only concern is elimination of the School Resource Officers who are more of a resource, role model and provide safety for the kids.**

**Mr. Brown – fully understands parents do not want this and if eliminated he knows he will be sending officers in to the schools more often; he is willing to back off on that as he said before.**

**Mr. Cusack asked why we are not including the purchasing function in the consolidation, according to Roger Williams University, which would be a significant savings.**

**Mr. Brown will be looking at purchasing department also to streamline operations; the idea is moving with the ones mentioned by the Mayor first, which are vacant and the next step will be looking at purchasing and payroll integrated into finance. Mr. DeCastro reminded that the Finance position is on leave.**

**Mr. Cusack – Roger Williams also said to consolidate custodians.**

**Mayor Ramos said they talked about privatizing, but the people could change day to day and week to week; the concern is about the safety of kids; custodians are familiar with the buildings and who is in them; privatizing would be hard to keep the same staff; our custodians are in during the day and at night activities. He would be against privatizing.**

**Mr. Cusack – Roger Williams did not quantify the savings on it; why not put those employees under city also.**

**Mayor Ramos agrees with that; they probably will all be under the City; he is not looking for anyone to lose jobs.**

**Mr. Brown understands moving the costs to a larger department but does not need to talk about privatization now.**

**Mr. DeCastro – felt libraries could be consolidated into schools; he**

**brought up moving Weaver to Martin and using the library building for administration; we need to look at all the possibilities.**

**Mr. Brown – anything is possible. The Mayor believed it was a gift and we need to check into it. Mr. Brown – there is a Board of Trustees; it could reduce the level of funding; he tried to do something like this before many years ago in another place; the mission of schools is different from municipal libraries.**

**Mr. Cusack – libraries are open to the public; this needs serious consideration (safety concern).**

**Discussion regarding libraries, materials, etc. and the City Manager agreed to look at this.**

**Mrs. Perry said that Weaver was donated to the City for library use. We have talked about consolidation before; the School Department cannot pay bills and something must be done now. The City Manager's plan was creative and he needed to come before the City Council and needs to start something as time is of the essence with an Auditor General meeting on May 9th. Mrs. Perry asked what will happen to the bond rating and how it will be affected.**

**Mr. Brown – believes deficit reduction bond backed by school property and savings; he thinks we have a competitive issue**

**Mr. Brown – not only is the deficit important (three times before) but**

**also the entire financial condition of the state with no help from the legislature.**

**Mrs. Morris – this is the third meeting and some decision should be made tonight.**

**Mayor Ramos – we know what the problem is and the City Manager needs to move on it – we need to vote the plan up or down tonight; there are no other ideas to bring to the Auditor General meeting; we need a plan to take care of the deficit and asked to not point fingers; think of the taxpayers pocket and make a team effort.**

**Mr. DeCastro – if we are able to get purchase and sales agreement or up front lease, what about a bridge loan or some other interim financing to lower the costs of borrowing.**

**Mr. Brown – will talk to bond counsel; more creative reason is a bridge loan; he did not know how we would come out depending on how this shakes out, but he will look at the most appropriate financing method. His estimates are based on the going rate in the market place.**

**Mr. Cusack was alarmed at the memorandum listing the unpaid bills and the letter from Brennan Oil about diesel fuel for the busses. A \$5.5 million total with \$4.1 not paid, he asked how this relates to the \$3.1 million deficit at year end in October; does this mean a higher**

**number at the end of the year.**

**Dr. Forbes – deficit projected at \$3.2; this is a cash flow issue and the City Finance Director, Mr. McDonald, will be forwarding cash to pay bills sooner which will help with immediate problems such as the fuel.**

**Mr. Cusack – regarding the unpaid bills, any School Department bills are the city's responsibility; we owe them and need to figure out a way to pay them; some of the bills are owed to small business and non profits.**

**Dr. Forbes – receives phone calls every day from vendors and we promise payments after School Committee meetings.**

**Mr. Cusack – proceeds from the bond will not come in until later in the year; can the School Department operate between now and then?**

**Dr. Forbes – has been contacted by RIDE asking if we need to divert funds from the General Assembly to Charter Schools; she will prioritize those she expects law suits on and some vendors will stop services on. Updates are provided every month on what the deficit looks like and it changes monthly, but is in the ball park of three million dollars.**

**Mayor Ramos – motion to adopt the deficit plan of the City Manager**

**subject to the City Manager coming back for proper approval at each step of implementation. Mr. Conley advised that votes would be needed from the City Council and School Committee for motion to carry forward to the Auditor General.**

**Motion seconded by Mr. Silva. Mr. Cusack objected to borrowing and a supplemental tax, but has no other plan; he voted aye; Mr. DiTraglia voted aye, Mrs. Perry voted aye, Mr. Silva voted aye and Dr. Ramos voted aye.**

**School Committee voted. A motion was made by Mr. Faria, seconded by Mr. DeCastro to approve. Roll Call vote: Mr. Carcieri aye; Mr. DeCastro, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mr. Santos aye; Mrs. Morris, aye.**

**Motion to adjourn by Mr. Faria, seconded by Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0. City Council adjourned by vote: Mr. DiTraglia, seconded by Mr. Cusack. Vote 5-0.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant**

**Steven Santos, Clerk of the Committee**