

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

Joint Meeting of the School Committee and City Council

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue – Council Chamber

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

September 24, 2013

Open Session

A joint meeting of the School Committee and City Council was called to order at 6:30 PM. School Committee members present: Anthony Ferreira, Elizabeth Clupny, Timothy Conley, Richard Pimentel, Joel Monteiro. Also present: Kim Mercer, Superintendent of Schools.

City Council Members Present: Mayor Briden, Assistant Mayor Rose, Councilwoman Capobianco, Councilman Cunha and Councilwoman Rossi.

Salute to the Flag

Proclamations and Presentations-Recognition to the Eaton Corporation for the James R. Oldham Elementary School –A Plaque was presented by Kim Mercer, Superintendent of Schools and Elaine Allen, Principal of Oldham School who thanked representatives from Eaton Corporation for their donations and long hours of work at Oldham School.

A citation was presented by the City Council to Eaton Corporation.

Items for Discussion

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) East Providence High School Accreditation presented by Kim Mercer, Superintendent of Schools.

Discussion:

Councilwoman Rossi inquired if the bathrooms were part of Johnson Controls previous work.

The Superintendent stated they were and that these are repairs.

Ed Catelli is called to the podium.

Councilman Cunha inquired about the roofing at the high school.

Mr. Catelli stated they removed the atrium and put a new roof on that section which was leaking as well as at the front entrance by the clock tower.

Councilwoman Rossi inquired about Johnson Controls and the \$12 million bond and the work and repairs to plumbing, heating and electrical and asked if any of the reasons the bathrooms were not working was due to an issue from that work and if so is there a warranty?

Mr. Catelli stated this was not a duplication of work, with the bond money they did faucets, sinks and toilets but these were not completely done so that is why they have to continue in other areas where there are broken sinks etc.

Councilwoman Rossi asked if there was a maintenance schedule.

Mr. Catelli said there was and they are now adding a full time plumber for preventative maintenance which they were lacking previously.

They were also lacking in painters and the hope this may be added to the budget next year; the request is for two painters and an additional plumber.

The Superintendent acknowledged Mr. Feola who has worked very hard all summer as well as Mr. Catelli.

School Committee Member Mr. Ferreira thanked both and also stated that Mr. Catelli was the first person who has told the truth about how bad the situation really was in the school and what caused it.

School Committee member Mr. Ferreira added that the teachers are doing a good job, the scores are improving and now we have to start doing our job.

Mr. Catelli thanked the School Committee.

School Committee member Mr. Conley explained that the high school needs \$10-15 million in repairs or eventually will lose its accreditation. There have been 8-10 years of saying we would and some half-hearted attempts to fix things, but reality is that we have not invested in our school facilities. If we don't find this money we will lose accreditation and will be the only city/town in the state to have this happen. We have been on warning for over five years. With no accreditation, young families will not buy homes here; this has been kicked down the road and has reached the end now. With the EP Budget Commission's five year operating plan, it is not possible.

We need to speak with the delegation members and get assistance to find this money. This is the most important issue facing the City.

Roles and Responsibilities - Chairman Monteiro spoke regarding coming together to do what is right. The School Department is the backbone of the community. The quality of our education attracts people to our community and businesses to our community. We need to build on this and stress this importance as elected officials who chose to run, that we understand our roles and responsibilities. We need to communicate with each other and hand things off to the appropriate people to run an efficient system. The voters are looking for this. We need to change the culture and how we act with each other in meetings and every day; there are five new School Committee members and City Council as well and we need to gain the respect of the voters. He asked that all respect the process and know the roles and boundaries, but step up to work as a team.

School Committee member Mr. Ferreira expressed agreement; he felt that it takes so long to get things done because of the red tape

Mayor Briden stated to the Superintendent regarding the budget, on the last page, the capital expenses, we recognize problems exist and we have a desire to make these improvements but maybe the starting point is that we examine the 5 year program and look at the budget we have to plan going forward. We can't solve all this in one meeting and he would suggest that they meet again and that this be our objective, to prioritize the needs and look at the existing 5 year

improvement plan and get a better understanding of what we are doing over the next 5 years.

Assistant Mayor Rose asked if this should be scheduled for October. Mayor Briden stated that by October 24th we need to have a completed budget. There are a number of steps which have to be taken and much is left up to the voters to decide whether to approve a bond going forward, if there is a proposed or revised plan to be in place which might include a bond, as there isn't the funding otherwise.

The Chairman stated a maintenance schedule and what will be needed operationally should be in place before we commit to increasing. We need to see this 5 year plan of action but we are so far beyond a 5 year plan. We are underfunded. If you go from community to community you will see this.

Mayor Briden stated that we are where we are because of the lack of a 5 year plan but they can also look at the immediate funding of certain issues.

Assistant Mayor Rose asked if they could look to November after the budget is completed and look to have meetings in a more progressive manner over time.

Councilwoman Rossi stated she has been trying to get this meeting

since May and that the City Council managed to pull Pond view together in one week. Looking at requests received by the Planning Board which includes requests by the School Department what we have funded under the 5 year plan is the \$500 thousand level. Under the capital improvement plan there is \$200 thousand to the school for fire and safety issues.

The Superintendent stated there is a phase two depending on how much there is left.

Councilwoman Rossi asked if \$800 thousand will be enough of a band aid until we go out to bond during the election.

Mr. Catelli came to the podium and asked the Fire Chief to provide an explanation of the needs.

Chief Elmasian said this is life and fire safety issues which approximately 4-5 years ago they inspected the schools and generated reports. They worked with the School Committee to go before the Board of Appeal to seek for a relief of time and a bond which was voted on by the public. As time went on and items were still not able to be completed, the RI Department of Health came through and the asbestos abatement was larger than originally thought. The Fire Department prioritized the high school and the two middle schools adding if they were going to continue to rent these facilities they needed sprinklers installed. The Health Department came in for more asbestos removal. We have buildings in the City

without out fire alarms. Elementary age school children that need to be able to open a door, means of egress, means of escape and the hallways need to be rated.

Mayor Briden stated it is a challenge to try to put together a five year plan that works in conjunction with a multi-year budget plan and strikes the right balance and is affordable to the tax payers.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 13, 2013 at 7:00pm.

Mayor Briden requested a draft of a five year plan from the Superintendent, City Manager, Finance Director and Mr. Luba for that meeting.

Additional Discussion: RIGL 45-9 Explanation by Councilwoman Chrissy Rossi

Councilwoman Rossi asked the City Manager to explain the stage the City is in regarding State oversight. The City Manager referred to a memo in response to her inquiry which is also posted on line on the docket and in the Council packet. He added this is also to set the record straight as the local paper did not explain it quite right. The City Manager summarized the memo and stated the EPBC was dissolved only once not twice. The next phase is the fiscal advisor. We welcome the work done on the 5 year plan. In order for the budget commission to return the following would need to take place:

a joint request of the elected chief and city council and approved by the director of revenue and the auditor general and a return to a fiscal overseer per reasoning to return by law. Mayor Briden wanted to know why this was not presented to the City Solicitor to render a legal opinion. The City Manager stated he was not rendering a legal opinion but just responding to the question and providing a restatement of the statute.

Councilwoman Rossi stated that it did not occur to her that it was a legal question but if the City Solicitor could please provide a response in writing.

Mayor Briden stated the question is not even relevant to what we are discussing tonight but as a matter of procedure to follow the Charter and if it is a legal question then the Solicitor should render a legal opinion we can rely upon.

A motion to adjourn by Assistant Mayor Rose, seconded by Councilwoman Capobianco and on a roll call vote it is unanimous. School Committee agreed and unanimously adjourned at 8:32PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Elizabeth Clupny, Clerk of the Committee