

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

January 11, 2016

Open Session

School Committee Members Present: Charles Tsonos, Jessica Beauchaine, Nathan Cahoon, Anthony Ferreira, Joel Monteiro.

City Council Members Present: Robert Britto, Tracy Capobianco, Helder Cunha, Timothy Conley, Mayor Thomas Rose.

Update from Joint Sub-Committee Regarding High School Repairs vs. New Facility

Mayor Rose stated this is a working session between the School Committee and City Council to move forward and to solve some of the issues which have been ongoing for almost 30 years. He notes that he spoke with Chairman Tsonos and it was agreed they should start with the immediate issue of the heating system at the high school and also begin a discussion on where the City needs to be

regarding patching the old school or building a new one. This is a long term process and we will still need to make repairs along the way.

Chairman Tsonos added it is great to see the members of the school department, and both bodies working together because this is a vital issue to the City and our School Department. We are at a cross roads and need to move forward together. He thanked the City Council and the City Manager because they can't do this by themselves and they need to get more help and this is a critical meeting.

The City Manager stated tonight's meeting provides a report back regarding the subcommittee's work. The subcommittee was formed at the October 21, 2015 Joint Meeting. They were tasked with a study and analysis of the status of education in the City of East Providence, where it is and where it is going. This included the level of funding from the City Council and to tackle one issue of importance to see if they can work together and solve that one problem. The committee consists of 2 members of the City Council, Assistant Mayor Cunha and Councilman Conley and 2 members of the School Committee Chairman Tsonos and School Committee Member Tony Ferreira, Ed Catelli, Tony Feola, the Superintendent the Principal of the High School, Colin Caine from Peregrine Development and Jim Baxter a retired Engineer with FM Global during his career he was in charge of underwriting and inspections of large schools. They received a walk thru for a good hour indicating where certain repairs were made and

where retro fitting was done and where new repairs are needed, various compliance and code issues and various issues where there are not best practices. The building is 61 years old, it was built in 1951 and at the time the pool was new and part of the original school facility. The pool is in tough shape and has been closed a few years. They had a lengthy discussion on what to report back. Both Caine and Baxter said it is a job for an outside consultant and for that size of a project a feasibility study on repairs vs building a new school are needed. Additionally, money needs to be put in on an annual basis. Included in the memorandum is to go out to RFP for engineering or an architectural firm with expertise in school buildings. There needs to be an analysis on demographics expected for a 10-20 year timeline.

What are the financing issues, State and Federal and bonding as a group. The subcommittee is not qualified to make the decision on our own.

Councilman Britto asked before any type of discussion the City will need to focus on the problems of immediate needs. How do we intend to address those cost factors attached with these?

Mayor Rose stated the heating has to be fixed now and we will need the feasibility study for the other items.

School Committee Member Jessica Beauchaine asked if anything was surprising to those who went on the tour and if they happened to go into the underground area. She has done this before and the first

time she did this she was very shocked to see the problems down there. Every time a construction project takes place as soon as they peel it back it's 3 times as bad as they thought. The problem is that the building was neglected and it has out lived its expectancy. Previous school administrations have kept it hush-hush because they didn't want to talk about anything bad. When a city funds their school department among the lowest in the State this is what happens. Ten million dollars would need to be multiplied by four to fix the issues there.

Assistant Mayor Cunha agreed that in his line of work, construction and building and finance the biggest concern with the high school is how much it will cost to fix it vs. building a new one. Especially considering the condition of the building, and the plumbing is a big issue. Money needs to be invested and made to go in the right direction and allocated appropriately.

School Committee Joel Monteiro stated they all agree that it is wise to go down the path of new vs to continue to invest but he thinks from this meeting tonight what they need to focus on is the immediate needs. Is the City in a position to engage in financially supporting some of those needs and are we agreeing that there will still need to be on going investments which need to be done down the road even if it is good money following bad.

Mayor Rose asked if there was anyone that could give a ball park

amount on the cost to fix the heat. As was stated earlier, the heart is replaced but all the arteries clogged.

School Committee Member Jessica Beauchaine stated that a plumber had to dig a hole to put himself in to fix a problem as the pipes were all buried. We are looking at millions.

School Committee Member Joel Monteiro stated when you look at the heating system we are looking at phases. We need to have a plan to engage our plumber and HVAC guys on staff to look at the heating system. We can sit down with an understanding of where there is a need.

Councilwoman Capobianco stated that without an estimate we can't say. That is why we are here to support this. There is no way not to.

School Committee Member Joel Monteiro stated that at their meeting tomorrow night they will give a directive to the Superintendent to get an estimate with phases.

School Committee Member Nate Cahoon stated the High School is the flagship of one of 12 schools in various stages of disrepair.

The Superintendent came to the podium and discussed her 42 years of experience. In Smithfield the high school was built in 1963 and underwent two major renovations. She noted that in her time in the

Bristol/Warren school system in the early 1980s they also underwent major renovations. Again in the Town of Johnston their school was built in the early 1960s and that high school underwent major renovations. In Little Compton where she just came from they just came off a major renovation of the entire school. East Providence has had no major renovations since it was built in the 1950s. Prices will be in the millions of dollars. An independent study and also a full assessment is needed. Yes there are buried pipes and yes there is asbestos and abatements of all windows is needed. Plus all around they sealed with tape or wood but the top portion is full of asbestos. If you don't think about the big picture the City will be throwing good money away as we try to update this.

School Committee Member Nate Cahoon stated that all of the larger districts in Rhode Island have multiple high schools and if we are looking at a serious construction effort we might want to move toward two.

The Superintendent stated that a demographic study shows the population is going down, not as quickly as others but going down.

Councilwoman Capobianco stated she would like to confirm that they will provide an assessment and estimate for immediate the need of heating.

Councilman Britto asked what do she meant by estimate.

Councilwoman Capobianco stated that from what she understands the school department has stated they will utilize in house people to do a feasibility study as to how much it will cost to fix the heat.

The City Manager stated the estimate will be \$75,000 to \$125,000 to get a feasibility study to include demographics, retro fit vs new school, time lines etc...they will have to go out for RFP.

Mayor Rose asked if there can be an RFP for the next meeting. The City Manager replied there could be.

Councilwoman Capobianco asked if the City had \$125,000 to spend on the study.

Finance Director Moore stated that although it was not budgeted for they do have it.

Councilwoman Capobianco stated there has been a lot of information on the rainy day fund and how much exactly there is and is it available and she asked Director Moore to come to the podium to explain.

Director Moore explained the rainy day fund and how it can be utilized and explained the emergency provision.

Councilwoman Capobianco asked if the heating would count as an emergency. Director Moore stated that he did not believe so.

School Committee Member Tony Ferreira stated they could ask the State and the Federal government what the heating requirements for a district are as there are federal regulations and if we don't start following them we will be in trouble.

Councilwoman Capobianco asked if money is available for use to fix the heating and make the necessary repairs and directed this question at both the City Manager and the Finance Director.

Councilman Conley stated if they read the City Charter and what was passed in the previous election regarding the rainy day fund there are only four instances you can access emergency funds and school repairs are not one of them. If there is consideration to change this they could amend it on the next ballot but right now that is what it calls for.

School Committee Member Joel Monteiro asked if there is a limitation to the wording for the use of these funds what is stopping the City Manager from doing an adjustment and moving some funds to a capital account.

Director Moore stated \$2.2 million was re-appropriated this year. It is set up as a budget reserve fund and you can't transfer it as you have

to replenish it and use it only for those 4 requirements.

The City Manager referred those in attendance to the appendix to the budget for capital monies to be spent. The most appropriate way for the heating repairs to be handled is for an immediate analysis to be done with estimates and the Council can see if it can work with the School Committee thru the budget to see if there are additional monies.

Councilman Britto stated that back in September and October, when the Council talked about funding, he had suggested looking into the possibility of tapping into the rainy day fund, the \$3.2million which is over the \$10 million.

Director Moore stated that the way it was written anything above the \$10 million would have to be specific to capital needs only. In the current re-appropriation \$2.2 was allocated for capital.

Councilman Conley stated that it is very restrictive but in section D more than 10 % transferred to capital improvements only is allowed. If you hit the revenue thresholds you shouldn't be touching the money.

Paul Luba was called to the podium and stated that anything over \$10 million can be used for capital and it is his opinion with a million left, it can be allocated to capital. He noted that they should keep in mind the State does reimburse the school 45% for capital. Get your costs

in order and go to RIDE.

The Superintendent stated they would be positive about it and make a really good case and certainly would try for it. She doesn't feel they would have any problem proving a health and safety issue.

School Committee Member Joel Monteiro stated that \$224,000 from RIDE originally went back to the City general fund so the School Committee had requested the City forward that back to the School Department to reinvest. It can pay down the bond or put it back into more facility projects.

Director Moore stated that the auditors haven't reviewed for 2015 and this will be done in April.

The Superintendent asked if the study money for the RFP would be there.

Mayor Rose stated yes and asked if all agreed to ask for RFP then no vote needed to be taken as it is the general consensus.

School Committee Member Jessica Beauchaine requests Ed Catelli to help with Tony Feola as Ed worked on this for so many years.

It is stated that this was all transferred to Mr. Feola and that there is no need.

Mr. Feola speaks briefly about how all this information was

transferred to a disc.

Assistant Mayor Cunha asks for a copy of the disc.

There is a discussion on the heat and whether or not it is uniform and its dependency on where the break is.

Councilman Conley invokes executive privilege to make a statement. He states that a number of accusations about his integrity and ethics have been bandied about because last spring the City Manager offered members of the City Council health care. The City Manager had stated that he did not agree with the Budget Commission taking this away. What his motives were you can ask him but as far as he is concerned his son who was born with birth defects and has medical bills totaling \$2.8 million, what was offered to him was a better plan than what he currently had with a lower cost. He added that he guarantees that if anyone else was presented with this offer they would have made the exact decision he did. His son received a kidney transplant and the costs for the drugs he needs to take for the rest of his life are astronomical. Other families have sought to have fundraisers he never did and he never asked for this. Quite honestly what an East Providence City Council member makes is \$60 a pay period. To think you earn this for financial gain is absurd. At the next opportunity for open enrollment he is going to decline the health care because of all of the horrible things being said. However, there is nothing unethical and there is no malfeasance. If you don't think we

should have it then discuss it with me, call me, don't hide behind Facebook. The ringleader doesn't even pay property taxes, I do and I consider it a personal affront. If you don't agree that is fine but I made what I thought was the best decision for my family.

Assistant Mayor Cunha stated that it is one thing to come after him for his political decisions but don't come after his kids or wife. If you are going to insult someone don't be a keyboard warrior, this is not an easy job and it is certainly not a part time job. He added that he takes great pride coming in here and its tough decision making. He tries to take the emotion out of it and to make the best decisions for the City as a whole. You may not always agree but he has taken an oath to make the best decisions he can. This is like a corporation and the tax payers are shareholders of the corporation.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion to Adjourn is made by Councilwoman Capobianco, seconded by Assistant Mayor Cunha and on a roll call vote it is unanimous.

Motion by Ms. Beauchaine to adjourn School Committee, seconded by Mr. Cahoon. Vote 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Nathan Cahoon, Clerk of the Committee