

Joint City Council / School Board Committee

January 29, 2016

City Council Committee members present: Jim Bouley, *Mayor*; Dan St. Hilaire; Fred Keach

City Administrators present: Mr. Aspell, *City Manager*; Brian LeBrun, *Deputy City Manager Finance*

School Board members present: Clint Cogswell, *School Board President*; Jim Richards; Rusty Cofrin

School District Administrators present: Terri Forsten, *Superintendent*; Jack Dunn, *Business Administrator*; Matt Cashman, *Director of Facilities & Planning*

Also attending: Fred Regan, Merrimack Valley School District

School Board President Clint Cogswell called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

City Manager Tom Aspell noted that after political candidates appear in the City, the opponents' campaigns may file 91-A requests for records, and advised the School District to keep all correspondence. Mr. Cashman noted that all campaigns are charged the same amounts according to School Board policies, but requests for increased Internet bandwidth, technical personnel, etc. are being charged additionally, as "anomalies."

Economic Development

Mr. Cogswell noted that the district plans to create a very nice brochure describing the schools. Mr. Aspell noted that Mayor Bouley has been seeking input from other groups interested in downtown development (Chamber of Commerce, etc.). The City is developing a three-part program: looking at policies and programs; re-establishing an Economic Development Director position (more a reactionary approach); and marketing. The City budget used to include \$25K for marketing; 8-10 years ago, several marketing firms suggested adequate development efforts would cost \$250K per year. The City Council is considering whether to work with a marketing consultant and whether to reestablish a marketing budget. The quality of schools is a draw for incoming businesses. Mayor Bouley noted that an optimal community requires healthy business recruitment; business retention; medical facilities; school quality. Superintendent Forsten commented that the District is analyzing how other school districts market themselves (Cambridge, MA) and also considering as a model the brochure developed by CRTC. Mayor Bouley noted that the main problem for business recruitment is training more people in marketable skills (i.e. welding). Mr. Aspell noted that the City would want to include private schools as well.

Community Safety

- Review safety and emergency plans

Mr. Aspell noted that he gave Mr. Cashman a copy of the Emergency Management Plan (covering 27 different types of emergencies) and the roles of the various responding agencies. The City was recently awarded an active shooter training grant for Concord Hospital and the schools (using Homeland Security dollars).

- Safe Walk to School routes

Superintendent Forsten noted that there is no sidewalk on a portion of Westbourne Road near the high school, where many students walk to and from school. Mr. St. Hilaire said this is a very dangerous situation. Mr. Aspell noted that the City Council will examine its plan to add or improve sidewalks in February, for the next 10 years. The City maintains about 110 miles of sidewalk; 90 are maintained on a regular basis. Mr. Richards noted that parents bring the safety of kids walking to school, and school drop-offs, to his attention (RMS, BMS, ADS); there is considerable traffic at the beginning and end of the day, and asked if there is anything the City and School District can do to make it safer. Mr. Aspell noted that police patrols find it is often the parents who are causing the unsafe situations.

- Homeless shelters near bus stops

Mr. Cogswell said that a parent reported a concern about their children waiting at bus stops near the new temporary homeless shelter on North State Street. Mayor Bouley noted that the homeless shelter closes at 7 a.m. and the bus does not pick up students until 7:50 a.m. There is no conflict at all. Mr. Richards reiterated that there is no concern about this issue.

Long-Term Development Plans

- Middle School facility

Mr. Cogswell said that the District has two bonding issues down the road, and RMS will be one of them. It may be five years before the School Board is ready to give the work at RMS consideration (2023 is considered a start if state building aid will be reinstated). The immediate bonding issue is \$10 million for the four older schools. The administration is conducting a study now; the work will happen within the next two years. The CHS bond will sunset next year. All four older schools need HVAC, roofing, flooring work. This year is the first that taxpayers will save again (got through the “bump”). Mr. Cogswell noted that the district has obtained an estimate to put natural gas into several school buildings. Currently, the following schools are heated by Concord Steam (CS): CMS, ADS, RMS, CHS. CMS/ADS were built to accommodate either steam or natural gas. RMS has its own boilers. To convert all four schools to natural gas will cost \$3 to \$5 million.

- Early child education programs

A number of Concord residents have come to speak with the Board with an interest in full-day kindergarten. The substantial costs will include staffing, equipment, furnishings and program development. The District has not established costing yet; there may be some federal grants available, but full-day

kindergarten is at least a year and a half out in the budgeting process for the District.

Mr. Cogswell noted that it has been estimated that full-day kindergarten will cost at least \$1 million; a 2% increase on the current budget. In response to a question from Mr. Aspell about the number of estimated kindergarteners, Mr. Cogswell replied that 350 students is our average grade enrollment, resulting in 10-11 additional teachers. Mr. Aspell noted that when MVSD added kindergarten, it really spiked the tax rate. Superintendent Forsten noted that per-student reimbursement by the state is still only for half-time kindergarteners; Senator Feltes' proposed bill would add to that reimbursement rate.

- **Concord Steam**

Mr. Aspell noted that he and Mayor Bouley met with PUC, the State Fire Marshal, Governor's people, General Services and other stakeholders working with Concord Steam (CS) on servicing City Hall. The City has worked with them on a plan for at least the last seven years. The purpose of the recent meeting was to determine the status of the CS facility itself (ungrounded electrical panels, blocked doors, worker safety, structural problems, water). The group considered whether CS clients would make it through this winter. Mayor Bouley noted that 140 businesses in Concord rely on CS. The PUC would like to have 2-year period to phase out CS, but the company still wants to build a \$17-\$18 million plant on the same site; this plan relies on the State signing a long-term contract. The State for its part is investigating switching over to gas, a decision that may happen in February. Mayor Bouley said the State Fire Marshal is very concerned about the building, and noted a standing order at the Concord Fire Dept. that no firefighter will go on the roofs of that facility. The PUC announced that it would be giving CS a significant rate increase just so it can continue for next year. The Executive Council may vote to move to natural gas. The State is 40% of CS' business, and Mr. Cogswell noted that the School District is CS' second biggest customer.

Mr. LeBrun will provide Mr. Dunn with a copy of a report for the City paid for by Concord Steam.

Mr. Aspell noted that the City is exploring another heating system to be installed before fall 2016. Mayor Bouley said that the City has done all the engineering analysis and has found that there is no need to dig Main Street; all the connections can be installed from the backs of the buildings.

In response to a question from Mr. Keach about opportunities to extract future costs from CS, Mr. Aspell replied that the state has no decommissioning fund and suggested that the School District should be prepared to move to another heat provider. He said that there is a small window for CS to get its plan together.

Election Locations (existing and potential)

Mayor Bouley asked the School Board members to consider the City's using one or more of its schools as polling places, noting that establishing adequate locations is a huge

problem for the City. The City currently pays for the Bektash Hall for Ward 8, and is experiencing handicapped accessibility and code issues with St. John's Regional School and other locations. He said that Wards 9 and 10 are problems; and Ward 7 has outgrown its polling place as has Ward 1.

Mr. Cogswell noted that the School Board has designated Election Day as a school district holiday in the 2016-2017 calendar.

Superintendent Forsten suggested having City Clerk Janice Bonenfant work through the Superintendent's office to establish polling places in the schools.

The suggestion to use Eastman School resulted in Mayor Bouley's comment that the building is not handicapped accessible and does not have a large open interior space for polling booths, etc.

Mr. Aspell noted that each City ward is about 4200 people, all of whom must be notified by letter and in advance of any change in polling location.

The schools that may be considered include Broken Ground School; Abbot-Downing School; and Rundlett Middle School.

Projected Major Capital Expenses: City and School District

Mr. Aspell distributed a document detailing several capital projects of particular interest to the School District.

Parks and Recreation, Terrill Park (p. 13 #59). The 10-year plan is to create an outdoor turf field complex at 93 Exit 13 (the dog park). A turf field is not practical at Memorial Field (see below). A number of community groups in a position to assist with the costs are being solicited. The lighted fields will include space for soccer and lacrosse. The project must act as a revenue source, for private camps, for example. The plan includes a 1500-person stand and parking for 350 cars. The location has great accessibility from 93; and works with Rail Trail idea (Mr. Aspell noted that the City just received \$100K to complete the Exit 13-14 trail). Mr. Keach suggested these turf fields, and the trail, can be positive economic drivers for Concord.

Citywide Community Center (p. 16 #443) – the City has budgeted \$11.4 million this fiscal year on the Community Center, after public hearings regarding what citizens want in a facility. The original price was estimated to be \$17 million; far too high. Mr. Aspell noted he will soon present a revised plan to the City Council for discussion and revision this winter/spring. A proposed indoor turf field was over \$4 million; this could be an add-on to the planned facility). Plan 1 is to demolish the building and build a state-of-the-art facility with a full kitchen; auditorium; gym, etc. Plan 2 is to save the current kitchen, refurbish the theatre, etc. Whatever gym is built needs to be collegiate-style gym (\$3 million); a high-school-sized gym costs about \$2 million.

Memorial Field (p. 14 #557) – Mr. Aspell noted the City recently spent \$20K fixing the stands. As replacement of the press box and football bleachers and fixing the baseball stands are examined, questions arose whether to replace them with something the same size or bigger; the City will solicit the School District regarding its needs and whether it can contribute to the cost. These questions are altered by whether the turf fields are built

at Terrill Park. The City bought some time by seating and walkway improvements at Memorial Field. Mayor Bouley noted that the turf fields could not be built at Memorial Field because the turf field needs drainage, which would leach into church-owned land; the whole area is just low; impact on neighbors of a louder speaker system, lights, traffic, late nights; loss of back fields and problems with drainage if the bleachers are moved. Necessary improvements at Memorial Field all deal with standing water issues. He noted that the City still very much feels the challenge for field space.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 a.m.

Linden Jackett and Superintendent Forsten, *Recorders*