

Concord School District
Board of Education
Joint City Council / School Board Committee
January 20, 2017

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

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

School Board members present: Clint Cogswell, *School Board President*; Jim Richards; Maureen Redmond-Scura; Tom Croteau; Nathan Fennessy

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

School Board President Clint Cogswell began the meeting at 7:35 a.m.

FY 2018 School District budget

Superintendent Forsten noted that the administration is preparing its proposed 2018 budget presentation to the Board on February 1. Significant budgetary drivers for the upcoming year include an increase in NH Retirement costs of about \$700,000; rising special education costs (and this may be managed differently going forward); and the cost of the urgent conversion from steam to natural gas heating, which will be paid through a \$12 million bond. Work done to lower health insurance costs, by charging employees a percentage of their health insurance, will result in an increase of less than \$30,000.

Mr. Aspell asked whether rising special education costs are a result of regulations, or whether the District is attracting more special education students with its good programs. Superintendent Forsten noted that there are strong special education programs throughout the state, and that, rather: children may be coming in from traumatic experiences and acting out in class; parents may be addicts with associated problems; children may have had medical support to survive significant birth traumas and will then live with lifelong disabilities. Mr. Cogswell noted that the population of autistic students has increased, and this is also national phenomenon. These students sometimes require extremes in terms of special education support.

Superintendent Forsten noted that the School Board has asked the administration to include two options regarding kindergarten in its proposed budget: 1. full-day kindergarten; 2. Combination of half-day and full-day kindergarten as an option in some schools. The financial impact, in rough numbers, would be \$1.2 million for the first year and an annual estimated cost of \$1 million thereafter. She said that the Board is not likely to simply add this cost to the budget; the administration is looking carefully at enrollment

and where staff reductions across the district could be made. This may lead to larger class sizes at the elementary level, upward of 27 students per class. Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that \$1 million per year for full-day kindergarten would continue indefinitely.

The second option would include identified groups that would most benefit from full-day kindergarten. This would be a nearly budget-neutral option.

Mr. Aspell asked whether there are any revenues that would result with the implementation of full-day kindergarten, including perhaps monies from the state. If the currently proposed bill to fund full-day kindergarten is passed, that would increase revenues.

In response to a question from Mr. Aspell about potential impact on the Eastman School building, Mr. Cogswell replied that the District values its current tenant, Girls Inc., and noted that Eastman is an asset the District takes advantage of in a variety of ways.

In response to a question from Mr. Aspell whether the study included any analysis on local businesses, daycare facilities or private kindergartens, Superintendent Forsten noted that this was not a specific part of the committee's research. She said that one daycare owner was a member of the study committee, who commented that her business would shift its focus to preschool programming. This is the same response she has heard from other communities as well.

Mr. Aspell asked whether the district could accommodate all the private-kindergarten students as well. Mr. Dunn replied that the District will take be able to them all.

Concord Steam update

Superintendent Forsten noted that as recently as January 18, the District has had problems with steam going to ADS and RMS. Heating bills have increased dramatically, from \$86,000 in December 2015 to \$142,000 in December 2016 *for CHS alone*.

Mr. Dunn noted that the City, State and School District, as the largest, final Concord Steam customers, will be carrying the full burden of the rise in rates until Concord Steam closes.

Superintendent Forsten noted that bidding for the remainder of the conversion project will start next week, with the most substantial moves beginning in February. She said the District anticipates being off steam heat in May.

Mr. Cashman noted that the plant at CHS will be 1400 sf and will house six natural gas boilers. The District is fortunate to have a patch of ground at Westbourne Road that will not impact parking, although the construction fencing will temporarily displace roughly 15 parking spaces.

Mr. Dunn commented that, when putting the plans for the bond together, there was a discussion of the old CRTC preschool building, created around 1994, which had become termite-infested and was declared unsound. The administration wanted to create a "placeholder" for bond funds.

Brian Lebrun reported that the regarding the City's plan for conversion from steam to natural gas, they are getting final design drawings soon and will be able to bid by mid-

February, with an executed contract in March. The price has increased somewhat from what was originally anticipated. The City is including some landscaping into the project as well as some work at the COMF. The City will be on target to have heat in October, with final completion of the project in November. They will likely realize a 6-7-year payback. The City makes its own domestic hot water.

Rundlett Middle School study

Superintendent Forsten noted that, prior to the steam issue, the Board had been talking about Rundlett Middle School, which is approaching 60 years old and has had many renovations. The school was built in the style of a junior high school, and there are some limitations in that, as it is currently a middle school. The District has now contracted with the architectural firm HMFH to create a study of viability for either renovation of the existing building, or development of a new building. The School Board has scheduled a public meeting with HMFH next Wednesday evening and encourages the public to attend.

Mr. Croteau noted that the Board is interested in HMFH as educational advocates, who will analyze the building not only from a physical but also an educational standpoint, to seek better alignment with a middle school rather than a junior high concept.

In response to a question from Mayor Bouley about the differences between a middle school and a junior high school, Mr. Croteau noted that in a middle school students are clustered within their own age groups, and there is not as much movement between grade levels throughout the building. This concept encourages cohesiveness within an age group and minimizes mixing with student of other ages. RMS' physical constraints include its very long, narrow hallways and necessary large movements of students between classes.

In response to a comment from Mr. Aspell that a middle school is closer to an elementary than to a high school, Mr. Croteau noted that middle school tends to be less teacher-directed and lecture-based, with students in smaller groups.

In response to a question from Mayor Bouley about the timeframe for a renovated or new middle school, Superintendent Forsten suggested that the preliminary conversations will take from three to five years, but there is also a level of urgency related to the impending need for major repairs on the building. She noted that the School Board may be interested in growing capacity with a facility that can function as more than simply a middle school; for example, another performing arts center, or more athletic fields; a facility that could be used 24 hours per day, seven days per week. The administration is beginning to look at other communities which have developed business partnerships for a greater investment in the community.

In response to a question from Mayor Bouley about how much this will impact the city budget, Mr. Cogswell replied that when the new elementary schools were built, the Board tried to stay within 5% of budget. While the Board was on course to reach that goal within 3-5 years before Concord Steam problem, it will be more difficult. While addressing the needs of the middle school has been a goal of the Board, community support is still extremely important.

Mr. Cogswell noted that the architectural study will lay out options for a new or renovated middle school, which will include community involvement to solicit community support. He said that the easiest option would be to build a new middle school in the field and demolish the old building, although some people may want to save the existing gym, or other rooms.

Mayor Bouley noted that, when the City Council was considering a community center at the old Dame School, they spent time and effort reaching out to agencies and entities providing services so that programming efforts were not duplicated. They wanted to consolidate City services on the Heights, and provide something the City is not already providing. When the Board consolidated the elementary schools, one of its arguments was to provide space for public use in the three new elementary schools. He asked if the administration has used a matrix to analyze the use of the new schools – to determine which groups have used them, how they are used, when they are used, whether they are more greatly utilized in differing seasons. Superintendent Forsten noted that the district has that data but has not compiled it into a report.

Mr. Cogswell noted that the schools do work with both the Boys & Girls Club and the YMCA for after-school and some before-school programming, and that the 21st century grant keeps the buildings open.

Mr. Aspell noted that the District has allowed the City to plan to use several schools for some programming during the construction of the community center.

Mayor Bouley suggested that the District make a specific point of informing the community that schools are being used by the public, as many people do not realize this.

Anticipated City growth and Steeplegate Mall

Mr. Aspell said that last year's real growth number was \$14 million net exclusive of abatements and exemptions. The City will not have a good estimate on that number until April or May; he will get that to Superintendent Forsten and Mr. Dunn when available but does not anticipate it to be much different. In Tax Year 2016, the value on the Steeplegate dropped from \$85 million to \$18 million, and it recently sold for \$10 million.

Mr. Aspell noted a slightly increased demand for new residential building and noted both the renovated church and Remi's building downtown coming onto the tax rolls. The budget will need more residential building to offset the slower increase in commercial building.

City marketing

Mr. Aspell noted that the City Council recently re-created a city Economic Development Office, which has not been in place in 8-9 years. City administrators are currently searching for someone to hire, and have created an "economic development reserve" holding about \$500,000 to be used for marketing and programming. They will likely hire private consultants to "sell the City" to attract business. They are very much interested in schools and the quality of schools. This office will need good information on city schools to be used for marketing purposes, including new investments and other anticipated

investments and, in particular, metrics. The economic development director will perform heavy analysis of these numbers. The CEO and upper management of the anticipated businesses will likely live in this community and are hoped to become community leaders.

Superintendent Forsten noted that the district has created a brochure for the CRTC, and has had conversations within the management team about what to highlight in the schools. She asked if the new City position might be able to offer support to the District to pull this information together. She noted that the district has not been marketing to the community how great it is.

Ms. Redmond-Scura commented that the schools have done a great job integrating children arriving as part of the refugee resettlement program into the community, pointing out that the CHS social worker, Anna-Marie DiPasquale, recently traveled to Estonia at that government's request, to teach them our model. She said that community members are not aware of the quality and variety of programs in our schools.

Mr. Croteau noted that when the early childhood study was completed, he found out for the first time how many programs the District actually offers. He suggested better communication, and inviting the community to take advantage of these programs.

Mayor Bouley noted that he had spoken with Steve Duprey, who commented that Nick Reid's article did not reflect what he actually said. He asked Mr. Duprey to write a "My Turn" piece to correct the record. Mayor Bouley sits on the State Workforce Board and noted that, particularly around manufacturing, many businesses are not aware of how nimble the District can be to offer educational or training programs for particular purposes. He said that, while businesses report having trouble finding qualified employees, when they find out about training programs they are surprised. In addition, he said that there is a new effort to reach out to refugees who, while they have great business ideas, have no way to capitalize them. There is an effort in Concord to partner with this community. A marketing piece on the District will go a long way to reach these partners and manufacturers.

Mr. Aspell commented that, with proper resources in place to support new initiatives, the District can play a significant role in marketing efforts. Mayor Bouley recounted a recent article about a high school graduate who completed a program of this type, received three job offers, and will start at \$20/hour.

Opioid crisis

Mr. Aspell noted that the number of overdose responses have dropped from 151 to 107. Alcohol abuse responses have gone down 32%; alcohol is much bigger problem than opioids. Narcan administrations are down 3% since last year, and psychiatric calls are down 18% this year. Between 2011 and 2016, there has been an increase from 381 to 588 drug incidents.

Mr. Aspell reported on a new program that creates a relationship between Riverbend and Concord Hospital by way of a mobile station that provides triage (instead of everyone going to the hospital ER) when the patient's issue is related more to mental health than a

medical issue. The program helps the patients, the hospital, and Riverbend, and provides training to City to develop skill sets for people with mental health issues.

Mr. Aspell noted that the new women's prison, which will be completed in September, will open with 200 women inmates; it is anticipated that some of their families will move to Concord.

Mr. Cogswell suggested that Concord Police officers communicate and interact with school guidance counselors in an effort to help students by communicating the background stories of given incidents, within privacy constraints. Mr. Aspell responded that he will talk to the Chief of Police about this idea. Superintendent Forsten noted that she has talked with Chief Osgood about a training program called "In the Presence of a Child," which will help police officers be mindful of a child's needs when they are focused on the adult in crisis. She said the District would like to make these interactions as simple as possible for police officers.

Fred Keach noted some of the City's effort to get funds from the PUC to help pay for the steam to natural gas conversion, as he feels the PUC bears responsibility for much of this problem. He said the \$1.9 million was essentially a bailout, and he hopes taxpayers understand the real impact of Concord Steam closing in the way it has, as they examine their monthly bills.

Mayor Bouley noted that he received a report from the City solicitor about an effort to create a fund to assist non-profits and churches with the cost of steam conversion. With no assistance, the required conversion will put some nonprofits out of business.

Future meetings

It was determined that, when the new economic development staff member has been hired, another meeting between the School Board and City Councilors will be scheduled.

Ms. Redmond-Scura noted there she has heard innuendo that "new businesses require full-day kindergarten" but that this has never been explicitly reported. She said that the School Board is looking for input, as there have been unsubstantiated comments both from parents of preschoolers and taxpayers.

Mayor Bouley noted that the biggest barrier to businesses relocating to Concord is the toll at Hooksett. New businesses typically have a younger, highly-talented workforce, who would be, for example, strong advocates for projects like the new Main Street, good schools, library, etc., but no one has specifically specified full-day kindergarten as a requirement. Mr. Aspell reiterated that no business has specified full-day kindergarten as a relocation requirement. He noted that, if people are moving from Colorado to Concord, for example, and want full-day kindergarten, they would move to Bow, or pay for it. Everyone in New Hampshire understands that each school district is unique.

The meeting adjourned at 8:47 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Superintendent Forsten and Linden Jackett, *Recorders*