

Monday, March 2, 2020

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 2, 2020, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. Present were Chair Jessica Martinez, Vice Chair Hernan Illingworth, Secretary Bobbi Brown, John Weldon, Albert Benejan, Joseph Sokolovic, Joseph Lombard, Sybil Allen, and Chris Taylor.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

The agenda item was action to remove Ms. Martinez as chair.

Mr. Illingworth moved to go into executive session with all board members present. The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan.

It was noted that the superintendent was excused from the meeting.

Mr. Taylor said he believed the agenda item was to vote, not to have further discussion.

The motion was defeated by a 6-3 vote. Voting in opposition were members Allen, Lombard, Taylor, Sokolovic, Brown, and Weldon. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Martinez, and Benejan.

Ms. Martinez said she believed Ms. Lambeck wrote a wonderful article and took her side. She said she was born and raised in Bridgeport, and has been a Bridgeport parent for the last sixteen years, with her son now attending Bassick High School. She said her passion is education in Bridgeport and her constituents who are parents and children, not district leaders.

She said the agenda item last week was her performance as board chair, which she said had been stellar. She said as board finance chair she has been fighting for more funding. She said she has proudly served on the board and her focus was to unite the board for the betterment of children and repair relationships with the state and the city.

Ms. Martinez said it is unfortunate that her leadership as a bridge-builder and parent is not seen. She said it was unfortunate she was involved in an abusive relationship for two years. She said her personal life and abuse she suffered never took her away from her duties the board. She said her father's struggle from 2013 to 2020 with ALS Lou Gehrig's disease never affected her duties on the board.

Ms Martinez said she will continue to unite with those who want partner and she would not focus on the wrong things. She said the president of the NAACP said it well when he said the board was focused on the performance of the chair rather than the outcomes from children. She thanked the staff members and parents who supported her and said the results of her drug test would be provided to Ms. Lambeck.

Mr. Benejan said we're not here to judge people, but to work for the best things for parents and students. proof. He said he saw nothing in the bylaws about removing a chair. He said no one had black and white proof that Ms. Martinez was

doing what people were saying. He said it was very obvious people want to be the chair and do a lot of things with the city. He said he will be here for four years and would always support Ms. Martinez. He said people like to be puppets, and at the end of the show the puppets go into a box.

Mr. Illingworth said he supported Ms. Martinez because these are just allegations. He asked if anyone had proof of when the picture was taken or whether or not it was altered. He said if we're removing the chair we're accusing her of something big. He said he would hate for any board member to have to go through this. He said he would probably change his mind if anyone had any proof. He asked what if the picture was taken before Ms. Martinez even joined the board. He said allegations about things with Senator Bradley were also without proof.

Mr. Sokolovic said regretfully he moved *"to remove Jessica Martinez from the office of chair."*

Mr. Taylor said he supported Ms. Martinez and it was due to his advocacy and lobbying that she got her position. He said he and Mr. Illingworth concluded that if she did not take a follicle test, she had to go. He said he didn't question her faith in God or dedication to the students, but she was a victim of circumstances that he and his constituents were willing to overlook provided evidence was provided. He said he loved Ms. Martinez dearly, but a major concern with his constituents has surfaced where she went to the legislature and asked for only \$7 million for the students when the board had been shorted \$57 million. He said he supported Ms. Martinez as a board member.

Mr. Taylor seconded the motion.

Mr. Benejan said Mr. Taylor had to understand that they are not going to give the board more money. He said he personally asked for money and they said no. He said Ms. Martinez tried to do the best she can. He said it was very clear that people were working behind the scenes with the city and people like to be a puppet. He said he was here on behalf of parents, not because of the board members, the city or the mayor. He said he did not see boards from other towns having to go through this.

Mr. Taylor said it his intention to make Mr. Benejan the chair, so if it was thought to be political it would be mistaken. He said he did not question Mr. Benejan's or Ms. Martinez's integrity.

The motion was approved by a 6-3 vote. Voting in favors were members Allen, Lombard, Taylor, Sokolovic, Brown, and Weldon. Voting in opposition were members Illingworth, Martinez, and Benejan.

Mr. Illingworth moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved

The meeting was adjourned at 6:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod