

Wednesday, January 15, 2020

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 15, 2020, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 p.m. when a quorum was achieved. Committee members present were Chair Jessica Martinez, Bobbi Brown, and John Weldon. Board members Albert Benejan and Hernan Illingworth were in attendance.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said curriculum renewal consisted of more than just the item listed in operating expenses of \$200,000, but is also funded by various grants.

Ms. Siegel said there was a minimal reserve factor or about \$300,000. She said current projections include turnover savings of \$1.5 million.

She said the budget increase request of \$14.5 million is reasonable, equating to 5.76 percent. She noted over the last five years average growth has been only 1 percent.

Ms. Siegel said the request for increased revenue from the city was \$7 million, consisting of \$1.4 million to maintain the transportation limit and a \$5.6 million contribution to non-discretionary costs, including salary increases and health insurance.

Ms. Siegel described the steps that would be taken to close the budget gap. The request from the state for additional funding is \$7.5 million, although the tentative state budget includes an increase of \$3 million. She said advocacy was needed to increase this amount.

Ms. Siegel said she would not present a specific budget gap plan yet, but the strategies to be incorporated were listed in the document presented to the committee. She described some of the them, indicating they would not have major impacts on school operations.

Ms. Siegel said the streamlined structure of the district office was included in the document. She said there are currently 93 full-time employees, which she described as quite low compared to information available about peer districts.

Ms. Siegel noted the figures which indicate about 80 percent of the budget is spent directly on student services. Indirect services such as transportation, building maintenance and security that are provided are essential to the school district.

Ms. Siegel said there were a few factors that were impacting the 2020-21 budget, including Claytor School adding an 8th grade classroom; two PDG pre-K classes with potential excess costs over the state grant; and the Connecticut Avenue lease

Ms. Siegel said the Connecticut Avenue lease expires on December 31, 2020. She said she understands the board will not renew the lease and the city will have to consider the relocation of the staff at the site or determine to fund the lease. Ms. Siegel said in our budget we have included the costs of the lease from July to December only.

Ms. Siegel said the core curriculum renewal is included in the document to illustrate the cost of keeping curriculum up to date.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani described the use of sub security guards and the policy where the sub guards can be considered for fulltime jobs.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said \$9,000 is allocated from Title I for the parent convention.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said legislation is being introduced again in this legislative session about helping districts with special education costs, but many districts are fighting against it.

Mr. Testani said Mr. Arnold and special education coordinators were evaluating all the programs and will make recommendations for the future, with the emphasis on keeping students in district. He said he will try to provide the board with a count of the number of ELL students in special education.

In response to a question, Ms Siegel said step movement in the first year of the new BEA contract would not take place in order to try to reduce the monetary need for 2020-21. The following years will include step increases.

Ms. Siegel said the board is required to approve the budget request with the understanding that it may be necessary to implement the budget gap plan.

She added the budget for food and nutrition services, which is fully funded by state and federal funds, was shared with the board. She said the district spends up to the revenue

obtained in the nutrition budget.

Mr. Weldon moved *“to push to the full board the food and nutrition services budget as well as the 2020-21 budget request.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

Ms. Brown moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of October 18, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Weldon and approved by a 1-0 vote.

Voting in favor was Ms. Martinez. Mr. Weldon and Ms. Brown abstained.

The next agenda item was on the nutrition center's truck bid result.

John Gerrity, director of food and nutrition services, said the bid was for a refrigerated truck. The purchasing department sent the bid to over 700 registered addresses and only one dealer bid.

Mr. Gerrity said the vehicle has to be constructed and built with three components by the dealer. The total cost is \$113,037.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said the department's fleet of vehicles was aging. He noted it would take six months to build the vehicle to have it delivered by the end of the fiscal year. He said the funding for the vehicle is in the nutrition budget for this fiscal year. He said the decommissioned vehicles typically end up with the city public works department.

Mr. Weldon moved *“to refer this to the full board at its next*

*regular meeting for their consideration to approve an award to Gabrielli Isuzu Truck.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the RFP for nutrition POS software. Mr. Gerrity said this item relates to point of sale software, which is currently used in the high schools. The proposal is to switch to another company for annual maintenance. Several vendors have already been interviewed as part of an informal process. Mr. Weldon cautioned against biasing the RFP toward a particular supplier.

Mr. Testani suggested the RFP be brought back to the committee prior to issuing it. Ms. Martinez said the next committee meeting would be on February 12th. Mr. Weldon said the committee needed to see the scope of work, not necessarily the whole RFP. Mr. Illingworth suggested the RFP go to the city attorney before it comes back to the committee.

The next agenda item was the nutrition department's supper program summer expansion. Mr. Gerrity said the current summer program offered to Lighthouse sites would be expanded to community nonprofit sites. He said it would provide meals to hungry kids and bring revenue into the program at minimal expense because the community sites provide the staffing.

Nichola Hall of the nutrition department said she takes great pride in the proposal. She said this will help with hunger in the city, something she has observed from her work as a basketball coach. Hall Neighborhood, Sheehan Center and Marina Village are a few of the organizations that will be partnered with.

Ms. Hall said the supper program has been recently expanded to Harding and will be in other high schools in the future.

Mr. Testani said some high school kids eat lunch as early as 10:45, so they are often hungry in the afternoon, particularly participants in sports. Mr. Gerrity said the menu will be similar to what is served at lunch, with emphasis on favorites to draw students in.

Ms. Martinez described the proposals as a no-brainer. Ms. Hall said her team helped her execute the plan.

Ms. Brown moved *“to push this to the board for full approval.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Weldon and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod