

Wednesday, February 13, 2019 [Corrected]

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 13, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m. Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Jessica Martinez, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Ben Walker, Hernan Illingworth, Chris Taylor and Maria Pereira. Dennis Bradley arrived subsequently as noted.

Mr. Weldon say the city attorney and the board's private counsel, including Durant, Nichols and Shipman & Goodwin, have expressed the need to replace the board's current bylaws. He said each law firm provided the board with model bylaws, but we have been unable to move forward on them.

Mr. Bradley arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Weldon said much of the good that the board tried to do is hampered by polices that are far out of the norm, many put in place to allow board members to micromanage the district.

Mr. Weldon said the status quo allowed certain board members to manipulate district staff and board processes, including adding multiple items to meeting agendas with little to no background information provided and no positive motive behind it.

Mr. Bradley left the meeting.

Mr. Weldon said the dysfunctional board members will continue to cause havoc until our bylaws are replaced. He said none of their antics have improved education opportunities for Bridgeport's children.

Mr. Illingworth moved "*to suspend bylaw number 9310.1 and 9312, pursuant to bylaw 9314, for the purpose of adopting revised, amended and/or new bylaws in substitution for current bylaws, to be effective immediately upon adoption; such suspension to be for the duration of this special meeting.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen.

The motion was approved by a voice vote. Members Pereira, Sokolovic and Walker verbalized no votes. The motion was approved by a voice vote.

Ms. Pereira said the motion needed a two-thirds majority and noted Mr. Bradley was not in the room. Mr. Weldon said a simple majority was adequate because it was noticed ahead of time.

Mr. Bradley returned to the meeting.

Ms. Allen moved to "*adopt revised, amended and/or new bylaws in substitution for current bylaws, to be effective immediately upon adoption; such bylaws being presented tonight as draft dated February 6th, 2019.*"

Ms. Pereira said the motion was improper because Ms. Allen could not simply state "so moved."

Mr. Bradley seconded the motion. He said the procedure where the chair states the motion which is made was proper.

Ms. Pereira said democracy in darkness is not democracy; the purpose of Robert's Rules is allow the majority to govern and the minority to be heard. She said the attempted coup by Mr. Weldon is based on an inability to tolerate a different point of view.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Weldon is the chair of the Governance Committee, but had only held two meetings in the course of about eleven possible months. She said Mr. Weldon chose a path of secrecy instead of discussing policies in publicly noticed meetings.

Ms. Pereira said Ms. Allen told her she had been in consultation with her colleagues without having a meeting, which is illegal.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Weldon and the majority attempted to pass new bylaws on February 6th, but the meeting had to be cancelled because it was not noticed on the board's website in violation of the Freedom of Information Act.

Ms. Pereira said the existing bylaws are 55 pages, totaling 44 bylaws; the proposed bylaws total 31 pages and 26 bylaws. She said, contrary to usual practice, intentionally and purposefully a document had not been provided to compare deleted, revised or new language.

Ms. Pereira said her examination of the policies revealed changes to Policy 9010, which she said Mr. Weldon loathed, which prohibits a board member from committing the district to any policy, act or expenditure.

Ms. Pereira said there is significant language inserted to prohibit individual school board members from fulfilling their statutory responsibilities, such as requiring the

superintendent's approval for obtaining information from staff members. She said the board was the employer and the superintendent was the employee, and should not be able to deny an employer the opportunity to speak with an employee.

Ms. Pereira objected to a policy allowing the superintendent to prohibit a board member from visiting a school, even after due notice. She said the buildings were public buildings, paid for by taxpayers.

Ms. Pereira said proposed Policy 9100 appeared to allow committee members to make decisions for the full board, in violation of state statute.

Ms. Pereira objected to a proposed bylaw that board members that fail to act in accordance with the policies can be censured or discipline. She said censure is already permitted under Robert's Rules and was previously used against board member Kenneth Moales. She cited examples of improper behavior by board members such as threatening staff members, sending sexist emails, and physically assaulting colleagues, which Mr. Weldon had done nothing to publicly admonish or rule out of order.

Ms. Pereira said any disciplinary action against a board member would deny the member their right to fulfill statutory responsibilities.

Ms. Pereira objected to new policies allowing press releases from the board only by the chair, the elimination of student representatives from reporting at regular meetings, limiting speakers to matters on the agenda, placing students and women speaking at risk by having to publicly announce their

addresses, and only allowing Bridgeport residents, parents, staff or organization to speak.

Ms. Pereira said the new policies called for regular meetings in July and August, which has never been done. She also objected to allowing for the filing of regular meeting agendas with as little as three days notice, not the current four days.

Ms. Pereira said a provision allowing any four members of the board to call a special meeting was in violation of C.G.S. 10-218, which provides for a three-member minimum.

Ms. Pereira said the annual organization meeting in December has been eliminated.

Ms. Pereira objected to a provision allowing the chair sole discretion as to whether an agenda item is included on the agenda, contrary to the practices of the City Council, state legislature and the U.S. Congress.

Ms. Pereira objected to the provision giving the chair sole discretion to cancel any posted or special meeting, including because of a potential lack of a quorum. She said the board members should attend the meetings.

Ms. Pereira objected to the order of business being changed to eliminate recognitions for students and staff, as well as the proposed delivery of board packets to members on Friday, instead of Thursday.

Mr. Taylor moved the question. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Ms. Pereira said the motion could not proceed because she had the floor.

The motion was approved by a voice vote. Mr. Walker and Mr. Sokolovic verbalized no votes.

The motion on the floor was approved by a voice vote. Mr. Walker and Mr. Sokolovic verbalized no votes.

Mr. Taylor moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was approved by a voice vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the board on March 11, 2019*