

Monday, February 25, 2019

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 25,
2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport,
Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Hernan Illingworth,
Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Ben Walker, Sybil Allen and
Maria Pereira.

Supt. Aresta L. Johnson, Ed.D, was present.

Ms. Pereira said Mr. Weldon cancelled a Regular Meeting of
the board asserting there was nothing that the public wanted
to hear about and it was replaced by this Special Meeting.

The first agenda item was discussion and possible action on
a possible timeline and process to fill the board membership
vacancy created by the February 15, 2019, resignation of
Dennis Bradley.

Mr. Weldon asked for comments on the proposed timeline
and process in the board packets.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was additional information that
needed to be added to the qualifications listed in the
document. He said a statement should be added that
persons who are currently Democrats cannot change to a
minority party and satisfy the minority party statutes, or
change to an unaffiliated voter. He said we need to make

sure that anyone who applies did not switch just to skirt the minority party representation rules. He suggested that the notice make clear applicants have not been an unaffiliated voter or transferred from the Democratic party within the last 90 days.

Mr. Weldon suggested adding such affiliation being effective for the previously 90 days. He said he didn't believe the board should be interpreting law, but it should be referred to its counsel, and if the counsel agrees it should be added to the notification issued.

Ms. Pereira said the board had already received legal opinions after the resignations of John Bagley and the appointment of Kate Rivera to the board.

Mr. Weldon said Mr. Sokolovic had forwarded the material to the board's attorney already. Mr. Sokolovic said he had further material to send to the attorney; Mr. Weldon said that was fine.

There was a discussion of the timeline for filing the vacancy. Ms. Pereira objected to holding interviews on Saturday, March 9, which would discriminate against some religions.

Mr. Walker and Mr. Illingworth indicated they went through the process of being interviewed for a board vacancy. Mr. Weldon said he was interviewed as well.

Ms. Pereira said the most persons who were ever interviewed for a vacant position was five.

Mr. Walker suggested handling the interviews at a special meeting on March 11th, prior to the board's regular meeting.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson said only she and her office would have access to the e-mail address set up for applicants.

Ms. Pereira said it was important that there was proof from the registrar's office that applicants have been in the party they are applying from for a minimum of 90 days, unless they were new voters and had never been registered in the state before. She said the Connecticut Voter Registration record should be checked.

Mr. Weldon agreed with Ms. Pereira's point that each board member should ask the same question of all applicants. Ms. Pereira objected to the suggestion that deliberations be done in executive session. She added there board would be unable to get a two-thirds vote to go into executive session.

There was a discussion of when the oath of office would be administered to the person selected. Mr. Weldon said as a J.P. he could swear in the candidate on the evening of selection. Atty. Mark Anastasi of the city attorney's office said the statute was clear as to who can administer the oath.

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said the proposed ad would cost about \$700 to run in the *Connecticut Post*.

Ms Pereira said the ad should indicate the term expires on November 30th, not December 2nd. She said the duties of a board member are spelled out in C.G.S. in Chapter 170, and it was not necessary to list them in detail in the ad. Mr. Weldon said he would change the ad to indicate the new member will serve on two committees, without designating the committees.

In response to a question, Dr. Johnson suggested the ad

indicate that those submitting applications in hard copy should direct it to Alice Ortiz.

It was decided the cutoff for applications would be March 7th, Thursday, at 4:00 o'clock.

Mr. Weldon recapped that the superintendent's office would schedule the interviews for March 11th at 4:00 p.m. The superintendent's office would verify affiliation in writing and provide that with the resume. Ms. Pereira said she wanted to see written proof of voter registration. Mr. Weldon said the resumes should be sent to board members as soon as they are submitted.

Atty. Anastasi read the minority representation statute, 9-167a, subsection g, and indicated the applicant can't be someone who dropped their Democrat affiliation less than 90 days ago, although it could be an unaffiliated voter.

He said he conferred with Atty. Dugas on this subject and they concurred.

Mr. Weldon said he would submit the ad to the *Connecticut Post*, the board's website and the city's website. Ms. Pereira suggested sending it to the Only in Bridgeport website.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to approve the proposed timeline and process to fill Bridgeport Board of Education vacancy created by the February 15th, 2019, resignation of Dennis Bradley, with the edits and changes discussed at tonight's meeting."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira asked that Mr. Weldon send the edited document to the board members first.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on a contract with We Transport for the period 2019-2022.

Mr. Walker moved “*to approve the contract for We Transport, 2019-2022.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira.

Mr. Weldon said issues related to the city using the board’s bus rate, but not at the board’s expense, had been inserted.

In response to a question about a provision describing litigious persons, Atty. Anastasi said people have the right to exercise constitutional and statutory rights, but there are people who are overly litigious.

Ms. Pereira said language described in the prior meeting about the expulsion RFP prohibits the hiring anyone who has committed a violent crime, a crime of a sexual nature or the distribution of illicit substances. She noted Mr. Sokolovic had found a statute that covered bus drivers in a similar fashion. She added that she did not care about mechanics hired by the company, but bus drivers are different because they are alone with children.

In response to a question, Atty. Anastasi said C.G.S. 46a-79 and 46a-80 allows the board to apply individual assessments of applicants, and to add absolute bars to employment.

Ms. Pereira said the provision about litigation was put in by the city attorney’s office, not the board.

Atty. Anastasi said Atty. Pacacha indicated the language is designed to charge We Transport to be careful to ferret out individuals whose behavior, whether having civil or criminal

culpability, indicate a lack of moral character, a lack of responsibility, a lack of judgment, or personality flaws or mental disturbances.

Ms. Pereira urged a specific prohibition against anyone convicted of a violent offense, DUI, sexual crimes and distribution of illicit drugs driving for the board.

Mr. Weldon said the board could vote to approve subject to incorporation of the recommendations made by counsel.

Andrew Ifill of We Transport said the State of Connecticut will not license drivers who have such convictions. He said in Connecticut it takes about three to four months for an individual to become licensed due to the length of the criminal background check. He said the state will not allow drivers convicted of DUI, DWI or any violent crime. He said the company does not hire convicted felons or people convicted of misdemeanors. He added the insurance company does not allow hiring such persons.

In response to a question, Raul Laffitte, director of transportation, said he had never encountered a problem with bus drivers engaging in the behaviors described by Ms. Pereira.

Atty. Anastasi said We Transport's hiring standards could be appended to the contract. Mr. Ifill said he could provide the written document on the company's standards subsequently.

Mr. Weldon suggested referencing the licensing statute in the contract.

Mr. Ifill said the director of transportation has the final review of the use of the company's employees.

Ms. Pereira moved *“to amend the main motion to approve the school transportation services agreement with We Transport, with the caveat that the statutes referencing school bus drivers for Connecticut be referenced, that the statutes referencing individual assessments specifically around moral character or litigious behavior be referenced and that We Transport provide an addendum laying out their criteria in regards to not hiring employees who have committed misdemeanors or felonies.”* Atty. Anastasi said there would be a provision stating, notwithstanding anything else to the contrary, they will adhere to their own standards. Ms. Pereira continued the motion: *“individualized assessment regarding those who might be characterized as litigious or questionable moral behavior, and that We Transport will provide an addendum regarding the hiring policies which they must adhere to during the length of the contract.”*

The amendment was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.

The amended motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. Allen moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod