

Tuesday, January 16, 2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held January 16, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice President Hernan Illingworth, Secretary Jessica Martinez, Ben Walker, Joseph Sokolovic, Maria Pereira and Sybil Allen. Chris Taylor arrived subsequently as noted.

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

The first item was the approval of the Alliance/Priority Grant application for 2017-18.

Ms. Pereira moved "*to approve the Alliance/Priority Grant.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker

Nadira Clarke, director of grants, noted some of the highlights of the documents provided to the board.

Ms. Clarke said although this is described as a grant the district really uses some of the funds as operating money according to the terms of the Alliance Grant, including professional development, Common Core-aligned curriculum, SRBI, alternative transition programs, culture and climate priorities, attendance and chronic absenteeism, family engagement, dropout prevention, technology integration, school operations, budgeting and financial management.

Ms. Clarke said the total Alliance Grant is \$16.9 million and the Priority Grant is \$4.8 million. She said the application is due on Friday.

Ms. Pereira noted that this grant was only for the thirty most impoverished school districts that have two or more subgroups that are underperforming.

Dr. Johnson said i-Ready needed to be substituted for Dibels in the document.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said we would always exhaust the monies in the areas that they're in. She said the budget is built by Ms. Siegel really tight and it has to be used the ways in which they are indicated.

In response to a question about benefits in the documents, Ms. Clarke noted that the amounts indicated for employees are very high.

Ms. Clarke agreed with a statement that the total amounts are really reflective of what the state has already told us we're going to get. Mr. Walker described it as a justification for the money the state will provide.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was the 2018-19 facilities capital plan.

Alan Wallack said this is done every year and then submitted to the city for capital funding. He added usually we get little, if any, of the projects. In the past five years the district received about \$5 to \$7 million from the Alliance Grant to take things off our capital plan. He said a \$2 million grant was just received for HVAC work at the JFK Campus.

Mr. Wallack said the priorities are determined by the board. Number one is Bassick High; he said hopefully the RFP for an architect will be publicized in February. The number two priority is the Marin roof. Next is the Curiale roof and the Catholic Center acquisition.

Mr. Wallack said no cost was listed for the Catholic Center. There have been appraisals, but an architectural firm would be needed to determine the renovation costs. Right now, the state allocates \$450 a square foot to renovate as new.

Mr. Illingworth said he was reluctant to approve an item like the Catholic Center without a cost attached to it. Mr. Wallack said the

capital items were the responsibility of the city, with not one penny of outlay from the board.

Ms. Pereira said Supt. Rabinowitz toured the Catholic Center site with Mayor Ganim and John Ricci, and everyone was on board with it, but there was a lot of misinformation put out about eminent domain that led to it being killed. She said the site would not just be for Classical Studies, but there was going to be a special education program so we could bring out-of-district students, which are extremely expensive, back to the district.

Mr. Wallack said Mr. Ricci has offered that the city will front the cost for an architectural study.

Mr. Wallack said approval by the Common Council was needed. He said he would submit three resolutions – to hire an architect, apply for the grant and do schematic design – at the proper time.

Mr. Walker said have we looked around the city for a site. He said the Salvation Army building on the Bridgeport-Stratford line was investigated, which was cost prohibitive. He said a lot of the sites may have contamination. He said the Catholic Center was best site and the diocese was willing to work with the board to get it through.

Mr. Walker said his fear was if we don't move in there, there will be a charter school or a private school on the site. Ms. Pereira said it was already zoned for a school. Mr. Walker noted the capital budget request was basically a wishlist. He said acquisition of the site should be a priority for the board. He said millions could be saved by reducing the number of out-of-district placements.

Mr. Illingworth said, as a former Classical Studies parent, he did not want to wait three or four years to get it done. He said he believed there are other possibilities to move some things around so Classical Studies could have its own campus in a year. He noted a new high school is opening next year, which will free up a building. Ms. Pereira said the Catholic Center site used to have 1500 high school students, so she didn't see why 500 elementary students would be a problem.

Ms. Pereira said she knew what Mr. Illingworth was talking about, but it would be temporary because when Bassick is renovated it will need the former Harding building as swing space. She said a permanent home was needed for Classical Studies.

Mr. Weldon said he didn't think we should get locked into any one facility for Classical Studies.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said he walked through the Salvation Army building with a realtor and there were structural issues according to the realtor, including roof problems, and contamination.

Mr. Wallack noted the Catholic Center parcel is over five acres and said it would be a game-changer for the district, especially for special education students. He said the site contained five clean acres with room for play areas.

Mr. Weldon said a greater effort should be put into a broad search. He said the way he is used to seeing it done in the public sector is you put the proposed facility out to bid and you see what comes in, as opposed to trying figuring out at the staff level what might or might not work.

Mr. Wallack said when we renovate a school we get about 80 percent reimbursement back; if we build a new school, we only get 60 percent back.

Mr. Weldon said he would be comfortable with having the objective of a new school for Classical Studies, whether built new, acquired or renovated. He said by throwing the net out there we may find something better.

Mr. Taylor arrived at the meeting.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said the process to acquire the Catholic Center would involve getting the grant, hiring managers, and the actual renovation would probably be 18 months.

Mr. Wallack said he had been through the building a couple of times and it includes a gym and an auditorium.

Ms. Pereira said the eventual goal of the special education program would be to drive revenue because other districts would send students to our program.

Mr. Taylor left the meeting.

Mr. Wallack said the Catholic Center is in a good location. Mr. Weldon said if we select something it should be the most suitable for our needs. He said he would like to see the market formally tested, rather than limiting it to just the Catholic Center.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said elementary schools in Bridgeport are built for 500 students because the state will not fund a smaller building. Claytor Magnet has about 500 students.

Dr. Johnson said the original concept was a regional program for special education students.

Mr. Wallack said board members could contact him and he would escort them through the site.

Ms. Martinez said as a parent the location was important to her with its trees, sunlight and vibrancy in the area. Mr. Wallack said one of the reasons Discovery Magnet was successful was because of its location in the city.

Mr. Weldon said he did not believe in locking the board into one location in a capital plan.

Mr. Sokolovic said you can't just stick a school anywhere. He said he toured a school recently that's next to a highway. He said a lot of the large sites in Bridgeport are contaminated by factories. He said if we wait too long, the Catholic Center might be gone.

Ms. Pereira said we need to move on this. She said she believed we had garnered significant support in the City Council. She added that starting up a new school is a time-consuming process and the longer

we wait the greater chance we would not get it. She noted it was in a great residential neighborhood.

Ms. Pereira “*moved to approve to the 2018-19 capital plan.*” She said the Catholic Center should be referenced in the document because it includes the special education component. She added because there are other things underway with Classical Studies it should be designated as the Catholic Center because it is generic.

Mr. Walker seconded the motion.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said the district became aware of the site when the diocese approached the board. He said there had been a longer discussion about the need to put Classical Studies in a quality facility under one roof.

Ms. Martinez said she learned from the Classical Studies parents, including Ms. Spell, that’s there a direct need today. She wondered if the parents would be okay with a three-to-five-year time frame.

Ms. Allen suggesting removing the Catholic Center description because we are nonsectarian.

Mr. Walker said after discussions with Mr. Wallack and Mr. DiDonato we zeroed in on this property and he was totally in favor of moving forward. He said he believed the facilities department had looked at all feasible properties. He noted the school was in a neighborhood, but Jewett Avenue was the main cut-through from Madison Avenue to Main Street.

Ms. Pereira amended her motion “*to approve the capital plan for 2018-19, which includes an edit of changing the Catholic Center to ‘Jewett Avenue property or any other suitable location.’*” The amendment was seconded by Mr. Walker

Mr. Weldon said that means staff will keep its eyes open for other things. Mr. Wallack said every time this is in newspaper usually someone calls his office saying they have a great building available.

The amendment was unanimously approved.

The main motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Wallack then presented the five-year capital plan for 2018-22. He said it is created in conjunction with his department, the tradesmen, the managers and the principals. He added usually the only way it changes is if there are Alliance Grants for large expenditures. To be a capital project the item has to be at least \$25,000 and have a shelf life of five years.

Mr. Walker moved *"to approve the five-year capital plan as presented."* Mr. Sokolovic seconded the motion.

In response to a question, Mr. Hammond said the district has about 17 cargo vans. He said the fleet, with the exception of four bought six years ago, are all ten to twelve years old. He said most have 125,000 miles on them and have high maintenance costs.

Ms. Pereira said we rarely get any funding for any of this. She noted it was required to be presented to the City Council, but we're not getting operating funds, so we're not getting capital funds.

Mr. Illingworth suggested listing the Catholic Center as the Jewett Avenue property or any other suitable property.

In response to a question about the Nutrition Center roof, Mr. Wallack said the city side has looked at it and determined it's a drainage issue, not the roof. He said the district's roofer also evaluated it. He added that it's on the city's radar, but it's a question of whether the city will put up the bonding because we can't afford to do it.

Mr. Wallack said the district is due for a facilities master plan, which hasn't been done in fifteen years. Ms. Pereira said its Policy 7100 calls for the board to develop a facilities master plan. She said that's how we got Batalla School and Geraldine Johnson School. It was suggested the issue be brought to the Facilities Committee.

Ms. Allen noted there are only two swimming pools in district schools and our children can't participate in aquatic sports. She noted the new Harding will not have a pool.

Mr. Wallack said the state does not reimburse for swimming pools. He said pools are probably the most expensive thing to run in any of our buildings. He said Alliance Grant money of \$600,000 was used to fix the Blackham and JFK pools. Without the grant, both pools would have to have been closed. He noted Trumbull voted down a pool when they renovated their high school. He added if the Harding wishes to have a swim team, they can use the pool at JFK.

Mr. Walker moved to amend the motion "*to change the title on item 35 to Jewett Avenue property and other locations.*" The amendment was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Ms. Allen said she believed there was a pool at Batalla School. Mr. Wallack and several board members said that was not the case.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Illingworth moved "*to approve the revision of the school facilities use policy.*" He said they were very reasonable fees that needed to go up. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker.

Ms. Pereira noted this was a policy change, so the rules would have to be suspended to only do a first read. She noted the fees do not start until 2018-19.

Mr. Illingworth moved "*to the suspend the rules to not read the item per the rules and regulation.*" Mr. Weldon said it could be placed on the district's website. Supt. Johnson noted it was effective August 1, 2018

Ms. Pereira noted what appeared to be a typographical error on the fees. Mr. Hammond said it could be revised and brought back to the board.

Following a question about the base fee, the 4-hour minimum, Mr. Walker said he believed the board wanted to see an additional asterisk indicating all the base fees cover a four-hour time period.

Mr. Illingworth moved "*to rescind his motion to approve his motion.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously approved.



Mr. Weldon suggested Mr. Hammond bring the revised document to the next regular board meeting for a first read.

Ms. Pereira moved to postpone the item to the next regular Meeting, January 22nd. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod