

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

MINUTES OF THE FACILITIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 1, 2025, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. Committee members present were Chair Jennifer Perez, Albert Benejan Grajales, and Andre Woodson*. Board members Joseph Sokolovic, Robert Traber*, and Maritza Estremera Jimenez* were present. Board member Willie Medina* joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

*remote participation

Interim Supt. Royce Avery was present.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of March 5, 2025. The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and unanimously approved.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of March 10, 2025. The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the facilities master plan.

Jorge Garcia, chief operations manager, said a

presentation was made to the City Council last week on the plan. Last night was the first community meeting, with only a handful attending. There will be two more community meetings.

Mr. Sokolovic said he heard at the meeting that we're going out this for bonding. Mr. Garcia that was potentially; the City Council has upcoming hearings. Mr. Sokolovic said when we voted to merge Bassick and BMA, we were locked in and could not change it. He said he was worried about tying the board's hands. He said the way BMA is set up, it's a backdoor way of closing the school. He noted the board has not approved the facilities master plan. He said he was not saying we don't need to contract, but an approved plan was needed.

Mr. Sokolovic discussed the designation of classes, including K-8, in some schools. Peter Karaffa, chief information officer, said the grade levels listed for some schools are incorrect in the report. He said the pre-K classes were included in the student count. Mr. Sokolovic requested the document be corrected before we begin debating it.

Mr. Karaffa said the ed spec determines the amount of money the state will provide when the building is opened. He said MP Planning calculated on the basis of class sizes of 24 for a full-sized classroom, which caused numbers to fluctuate. He said the state accepts projections from an outside source, not his

office. Mr. Sokolovic said we have found the Bassick-BMA merger was not working. Mr. Karaffa said we don't do projections for the school construction.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said the state brought in a company for enrollment projections for Harding High. Mr. Sokolovic said they missed the mark significantly, which is why it pays to question the professionals.

Mr. Traber said Supt. Vallas wanted Harding much smaller initially, and the plans had to be redone to make it bigger midstream for 1150 students.

Mr. Traber said he hoped word would get out about the next two community meetings. Mr. Karaffa said the companies would be available to answer questions at the community meetings. Dr. Avery said the meeting would be made more prominent on the website and material would be sent out to the campuses first thing in the morning.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he never agreed with putting BMA and Bassick together. Mr. Garcia said the recommendations in the master plan addressed BMA, and there are still conversations with the state on those things. He said things were fluid. Mr. Benejan Grajales said the Army, Navy, and the Coast Guard were trying to help BMA, but they will not do so if the schools are together.

Mr. Karaffa said there will be some busing costs when the new Bassick opens because it is 1.5 miles in another direction. He said we are working with Greater Bridgeport Transport to get more buses along that line. He said the state technical assistance team has been made aware of the situation.

In response to a question about redistricting, Mr. Karaffa said when it was proposed to close six schools, redistricting was done in order to possibly close them. He said the board is going to guide us on where we need to go, and we will support the board. He said to redistrict the whole city is not recommended by the groups we worked with. He said an initial look of what redistricting would look at what can be done. He said the board would have to think about transportation limitations, which are currently one mile. He said there would be savings from 1.25 or 1.5 miles. He noted the high transportation costs, including for charter and parochial students.

Dr. Avery said the board has recommended the superintendent's office to provide \$30 million of cuts, and we're working through that now. He said transportation will be part of the plan presented to the board. He said a redistricting plan by the two companies would cost extra. He said options will be brought back to the board.

Mr. Traber said he hoped the \$30 million in savings is presented to a Finance Committee meeting soon. Mr.

Karaffa said with guidance and working together, we may be able to solve some of this. He said we have to know what direction we're going in based on the board's decisions.

Mr. Sokolovic said it is not the board that is saying we need \$30 million; it's the law. He said the board does not want to make these cuts any more than the staff does. He said the city is paying for the facilities master plan, which included the directive not to have a disparate impact on one area or neighborhood. He said they came back with four schools closing in one area.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said the last time the school district was redistricted was a long time ago. Mr. Sokolovic said some schools are at 40 or 50 percent capacity, but we haven't even considered redistricting. Mr. Karaffa said controlled transfers and mobility have a large impact on this. He said some families don't want to go to certain schools.

Mr. Karaffa said every school should be one that every parent wants to go to.

Mr. Sokolovic said we're segregating in the East End quadrant by abandoning schools and increasing class sizes in that same area. He said we're only hitting one part of town, which is a plan he could never support. He said we have to spread the pain throughout. He said people in that area can't get out

to meetings like those in his side of town.

Mr. Woodson said you have to fix the most neglected places. He said there are two schools that have a combined age of 215 years. He said decisions should be based on the data, not personal feelings. He said he didn't hear Mr. Sokolovic when the other side of town got their school redone, so it goes both ways.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said when she read the plan it was very evident that one side of town was consistently neglected. She said the East Side of town needs to be addressed. She said those facilities are not suitable for children or teachers due to health and safety issues.

Mr. Traber said he agreed with Mr. Woodson and Ms. Estremera Jimenez. He said the 750-student, pre-K to 8 school will be built, yet the North End has Winthrop with 750 students and 1200 students in Blackham, which are both good schools. He said Winthrop was one of the gems of the white power structure in Bridgeport and remains so; it is being renovated for the second time.

Mr. Traber said we're going to replace the schools in the East End with a brand-new school, which is now a different plan. He said he was still waiting to hear from people on the plan, but some are saying a new school in the neighborhood is great. He said a 750-student-pre-K -to-8 is not a horrible thing. He said he agreed

the East End has been neglected for years. He said Bryant in the West End was renovated and it should be maintained.

Ms. Perez said the community forums would take place tomorrow and Thursday.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board can't give direction on this until there is an action item. He said we're just talking in circles until that happens.

The next agenda item was on the Bassick decommissioning update.

Mr. Garcia said several committees have been created to ensure a smooth transition into the building. He said there are signoffs at every level for activities to decommission the building. He said that he co-chairs a committee with Ms. McCarvill to ensure this doesn't turn into another Harding.

Jamie McCarvill, facilities finance manager, demonstrated the task list for closing schools and the various categories. She said each task has a department to perform the task, a coordinator, and a deadline. She said in the last four weeks there have been 25 truckloads of items moved from Bassick to be recycled or to other schools. She said items are identified, labeled, and designated with department heads at Bassick for where they are going next. She said the city has been notified about items that need

to be moved.

Ms. McCarvill described how the documents being created are living documents that can be edited easily. She said during April break, three forty-yard dumpsters will be brought in to purging the recyclable items.

Ms. McCarvill said one area of concern is the weight room, which will not be moved to the new Bassick because it will have new equipment. She said the garage area has items that will have to be moved, recycled or auctioned off.

Mr. Garcia said the issue of records will include digitizing. He said there was a lot of care in inventorying everything in every classroom.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said we want to make sure there is a return on investment for residents, and we want to make sure we capture historical things in Bassick.

Mike Zirkel said he will step in when most of this work is wrapped up, and that will involve shutting down equipment, draining boilers and plumbing systems, along with the city, so we turn it over in a condition that they want. Mr. Garcia said we want to leave the mechanical systems in the best condition possible. He said the goal is to turn the building over in the second half of September to get ahead of it in the

winter.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he was not happy about two schools being together, which has stressed him badly. He said everything we talk about is Bassick, but not BMA. He said staff and some principals would like Bassick and BMA the way they are supposed to be.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said Bassick has beautiful things, and he hoped we can take it to the new Bassick. Mr. Garcia said we will archive some of items because not every item can make it to the new facility because we understand the history of Bridgeport. He noted his department has the bell from Columbus School and many plaques in storage.

Mr. Woodson said he appreciated the hard work of the facilities department.

Mr. Sokolovic said he wanted to say the same thing. He said he was involved in starting the journey by creating a policy on decommissioning schools. Mr. Garcia said he believed a school closure policy was needed. He said the size of Bassick creates a lot of work, and he wants to do right by Bassick.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the telescope will be discussed in the future.

Mr. Sokolovic said whether to give the building back

to the city right away was a board-level decision. Mr. Garcia said a restrictive covenant on the deed could not be located restricting the site to educational purposes. He said he wanted to get out of the building because carrying costs are extravagant and our budget is not going to grow. He said the operational costs for the new Bassick are going to be more than the current Bassick due to intricate systems., including \$20,000 a month for central air.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had concerns about a charter school going in there and yanking the number of students from our ECS. Mr. Garcia said that is a conversation the board needs to have with the city.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said a closing ceremony or an event for alumni should be explored. Ms. McCarvill said she was told there was a going to be a walk-through of the new Bassick for alumni.

The next agenda item was the facilities monthly operational update.

Mr. Garcia said the agenda item resulted from requests by custodians. He said the department is starting to integrate more and more into a digital platform. He said there is data for about a year on vandalism on costs and man hours. He said about 1,584 hours have been put into vandalism at the cost of \$33,000 in materials. He said work orders are now being properly labeled as vandalism. He said

probably the number one example is damage to stall doors; bathrooms have a lot of vandalism. Mr. Zirkel said the hinge alone for a door is \$200.

Mr. Garcia said going forward he would provide the committee with a top five list, along with costs and time expended. He said a previous campaign addressed vandalism on the outside of buildings.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said in some cases the invoice for damages is passed along to students, but nine times out of ten monies cannot be collected. He said we're looking internally at our budget where dollars are being expended.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the camera system is utilized to identify who the culprit is. Mr. Woodson said the only way to keep it in check is to see somebody gets discipline for it. Mr. Garcia said we have just one custodian in almost every building, and this adds to their workload.

Mr. Garcia said with less staff on during days, there is more work on evenings, and there is a daily absence rate of about ten percent. He said there have been days in March when 28 percent or 30 percent of our staff have been out because they have burn their time in March. He said the board would hear more and more complaints because we can't keep up with day-to-day issues.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said some requests for leave are being denied based on the fact that we don't have enough people to operate the district. He said April would be an issue because people have new time to use.

Ms. Perez noted the top schools for vandalism were four elementary schools and Fairchild Wheeler. Mr. Garcia said there would be a conversation with principals in the new school year about this issue. He said last Dunbar had a big problem and there was work done with the administration to lock down bathrooms at specific times, which does make things a little more inconvenient, but there has been a large reduction.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said we have a lot of senior staff members that have more than ten years, so in some instances they receive four to six weeks of vacation. He said custodians have been encouraged to urge staff to take time throughout the year and not keep it all for one time.

Mr. Woodson said we have to do everything we can to save money. He said changes might have to be made to curb overtime.

Mr. Medina* joined the meeting.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said one issue with the bathroom is there is only one staff member in

a school in lot of instances and we don't have the staff to police bathrooms. Mr. Medina suggested the use of periodic checks on bathrooms to narrow down time frames.

Mr. Medina thanked Mr. Garcia and his department.

Ms. Perez said there may be an issue with members of other unions checking bathrooms. Mr. Traber described it as a never-ending battle. He described some of his past experiences.

Dr. Avery said it was a partnership with the campus principal and how they monitor their buildings. He said we're looking at other ways to support that, including something called a smart pass.

Mr. Garcia said this is something that custodians brought to us.

In response to a question, Mr. Zirkel said the hinges are 40-inch stainless steel, continuous hinges. Mr. Garcia said metal panels are no longer viable, so they are made of a composite.

Mr. Sokolovic said it was disturbing that children have come before us and said they have only one bathroom open that they have to walk to, which loses instruction time and puts restrictions on kids for the actions of a few.

Ms. Perez said when she taught her class went to the bathroom as a group, and it did not lose significant instructional time. Mr. Sokolovic said last year parents and students complained students were lined up waiting to go to the bathroom. He said high school students that report to the board have raised complaints.

Ms. Perez said she has worked directly with high school students, and some don't go to the bathroom the whole day because of things going on in bathrooms, and not just vandalism.

Mr. Sokolovic expressed concern about students limited to one restroom that have to take long trips to the only restroom open and was facing the threat of in-school suspension for not returning within ten minutes. He said the legal department should look at the legality of closing bathrooms.

Mr. Traber said it was common for elementary school teachers to have bathroom breaks for a class, and they are provided passes for other times.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he did not agree with closing bathrooms. He said students and staff have health issues.

The next agenda item was on the Raptor system.

Dr. Avery said this was on the alert system, which is

the only portion of the Raptor system to be discussed.

Jeff Postolowski, ITS director, said Raptor has a lot of different modules, but the alert module is being discussed tonight. He said it allows a staff member to report an emergency or have the ability to lock down. He said the app is very simple and designed to be available at a moment's notice and usable on a faculty device. He said it is available to be installed on personal phones.

Mr. Postolowski said the system will be able to integrate with Power School.

A video from Raptor was played giving an overview of the system.

Mr. Postolowski said the initial use would be for major, panic-button-type of use. Dr. Avery said the system can be customized for campuses and central office people. He said it can be linked to the police department and the 911 system.

Mr. Postolowski said the process started under the Dr. Levy-David. He said we were looking for software that would dovetail with Power School and Office 365, and the district's hardware. He said Raptor was acquired on state contracts, which purchases a service for a defined period of time.

Mr. Postolowski said it is a flexible process that allows

us to deploy it based on what we need.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski described the purchasing process used. He said the module cost approximately \$30,000 out of an ESSER grant. He said people need to understand the gravity of pushing a panic button and people will feel more comfortable knowing the panic button is available. He said done correctly and done well, it's a very positive thing. He said if the board doesn't choose to fund it at the time, they can make that choice.

Dr. Avery said it was all about safety and security. He noted an incident at Tisdale where a weapon was found. He said this is a way to share with the community that safety is important.

Mr. Karaffa said the system can be set to alert central office about incidents. Mr. Postolowski said the system creates logs of events to demonstrate compliance.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said the system is designed for K to 12 and to prevent children activating it.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said safety is one of the most important issues we have. Mr. Postolowski said there is a cancel feature in the software that can be implemented if needed. He said many other large urban districts have successfully used the system.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said there is a Raptor module that addresses the communication part with the parents that could be added. Mr. Karaffa said the system can be set up in a manner that you want. He described how its use can improve response times. Mr. Postolowski said the alerts are for major things like lockdowns and shelter in place; other features can be added later.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said she had heard quite a bit about the system from teachers and was excited to get it out to the schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said the purchase was scaled to what the district wanted at the time. He said additional fees would be needed to pay for added features. He said he can provide the cost figures through Dr. Avery's office. He said the software was very flexible, and additional features could be added in selected schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski described purchasing guidelines, including the RFP process and a purchase off an existing contract. He said the process used is best thought of as a massive RFP that gives better pricing than Bridgeport could do on its own. He said Raptor was purchased off of state contracts.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said if the

districts only use the software for the panic button, the funding will last longer. He described it as a spend, not a contract. He apologized for not having the financial information available. He said we're currently piloting use of the system.

Dr. Avery said the badge system with parent ID cards was being used, but it was paused after the safety meeting. He said the funding of that could be used to extend the alert system. He said when funding runs out, we're going to have come back to the board for extending services.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said the Raptor system was bought off an existing contract. He said the district could change allocations for different features of the system. Ms. Perez said Mr. Postolowski indicated the cost was \$30,000. Mr. Postolowski said he could provide the date of the purchase to the board.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said he can provide the license the district has with Raptor. He said some schools are using the hall pass system. He said a company called Hall Pass was acquired by Raptor.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said Raptor is used in schools in the Northeast and Arlington, Virginia, which has similar demographics to Bridgeport.

Mr. Medina said the committee should take into consideration the amount of hardware purchased.

Ms. Perez said the item was on the agenda for informational purposes only. She said the purchase has been committed and there is no contract involved with this.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said we did not have a commitment to purchase prior to 2022.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was a meeting of the minds to create a new relationship and a new contract under the law that was binding. Mr. Postolowski described the relationship with the vendor. He said it was decided to get this product to fulfill a purpose that was an operational goal.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said the commitment ends when the funds are expended. He noted that the industry has moved to software as a service.

Mr. Sokolovic requested all paperwork surrounding Raptor, including purchase orders, spending or agreements.

Mr. Sokolovic said all our buildings have cameras that are connected to a central location. Dr. Avery said he was not aware of that. Mr. Sokolovic said he was

referring to the police department. He said we pay one employee to watch the cameras, so we're already being monitored. He said the video played was misleading because it referenced a law that was not the law Connecticut and half the states in the country.

Mr. Sokolovic said there is a petition at Fairchild Wheeler against one of Raptor's products.

Dr. Avery said it was important to have some type of support for campuses. He said if something happens, we need to make sure that we have an opportunity to provide staff with another option and the staff needs to know that security is important to us. He said he was questioned on the stage about supporting security in buildings for students and teachers. He said he respected the questioning that has occurred in the meeting.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said the funding came from ESSER and the product was purchased as a module, and it was not used; now we're looking to use it to extend the life of the module. He said it was an attempt to be forward thinking about access to buildings and safety in buildings. He said the money has been spent and we're either going to use it or lose it.

Mr. Woodson said when Dr. Levy-David's name is mentioned people go into a frenzy, but she did do good things for the district.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said to be clear the item was not going to the full board because it has already been purchased.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said she visited the Fusion Center, which was purchased in 2018 using in federal grants, and she is completely in support of what we're trying to do tonight. She said the Fusion Center does not include cameras inside the schools.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez said a number of teachers came to her to emphasize the importance of this. She read a letter on safety issues in schools and calling for the use of technology to save lives. The letter pointed out the lack of double doors, ID requirements for people entering, and monitoring of people walking in buildings. The letter said we can implement the Raptor system, and it is unthinkable that the district is choosing not to use it. The letter said school shootings are very real.

Ms. Estremera Jimenez read two other letters pointing to safety risks and teachers feeling vulnerable. One letter pointed out the use of the Raptor system in Norwalk.

Mr. Medina said he knows for a fact that the Fusion Center has cameras that see inside schools.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said he did not

think there was a time frame by when the money has to be used, but he would provide that information to the board.

Mr. Medina suggested the board visit the Fusion Center to see the use of the cameras. Dr. Avery said he can probably get a demo for the board on the alert system.

Mr. Traber said there is only aspect of the system we are talking about, not three or four, which is the panic button. He said the question is how long we can stretch it out to implement it at all the schools. He said we were getting lost in the weeds with all the other discussions. He said the main question is if we want to start using the system this year or next year.

Ms. Perez requested Dr. Avery's team get the information on the finance to us.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on May 7, 2025