

Norwich City Council/Board of Education Ad Hoc Committee
Wednesday, April 21, 2021
6:30 PM
Virtual Meeting

Committee Members Present: Chair Alderman Joseph DeLucia, Vice Chair Alderwoman Stacy Gould, BOE Chair Heather Romanski, BOE Member Patricia Staley, BOE Member Swarnjit Singh Khalsa, BOE Member Carline Charmelus, BOE Member Christine DiStasio and Alderman Mark Bettencourt (joined at 6:49)

Ex-Officio Members Present: City Manager John Salomone and Comptroller Josh Pothier

Committee Members Absent: Mayor Peter Nystrom, NPS Superintendent Dr. Kristin Stringfellow and BOE Member Yvette Jacaruso

Administration and Staff Present: Assistant Superintendent Tamara Gloster, Director of Student Services Jamie Bender and Business Manager Robert Sirpenski

1. Call to Order and Determination of Quorum: Alderman Joe DeLucia called the meeting to order at 6:34 PM. It was determined that a quorum was present.

Chair Joseph DeLucia noted that the prior meeting minutes will be on the agenda and reviewed at the next meeting of the CC/BOE Ad Hoc Committee.

2. Review of Committee Scope and Purpose:

Alderman DeLucia briefly reviewed the scope and purpose of the CC/BOE Ad Hoc meeting to be: Promote transparency and collaboration on the school budget between the CC and the BOE with the purpose to make recommendations to the CC regarding BOE funding request for the next fiscal year.

3. Public Comment: None presented.

4. Old Business: None

5. New Business:

a. Discussion and Possible Action: City Manager's Proposed Budget for BOE

Alderman DeLucia introduced the agenda item and opened the floor to committee members. The proposed budget had been made available to all members prior to the meeting.

Business Manager Robert Sirpenski spoke to the budgeting process at Norwich Public Schools (NPS). As a new Business Manager at NPS, he reported learning about the elements that make up the budget and discovering ways he hopes to improve the process. He has found the current systems to be lacking in relation to the complexity of the budget. He would like to see a detailed budget for each school. He noted the heavy dependence on grants for core budget items. Vice Chair Gould thanked Mr. Sirpenski for his candid comments.

Discussion ensued on NPS' dependence on grant funding. Assistant Superintendent Tamara Gloster explained the Title 1, 2, 3 and 4 funding focus areas. The Alliance Grant is just under \$7 million of the budget and of that, \$5 million pays for staffing.

Discussion ensued on the education budget as an investment.

b. Discussion and Possible Action: BOE Capital Projects

Chair DeLucia introduced the agenda item and noted that he wanted to ask about a specific project. He wanted to also discuss the possibility of a non-lasting fund concept in relation to the relatively small projected surplus in this year's NPS budget.

Chair DeLucia asked about paying for Stanton's new boiler. Mr. Sirpenski addressed the Chair's concern. He reported that he brought in an engineering firm to assess the situation of Stanton's boiler. They discussed the possibility of a simple project to replace two boilers with a series of high efficiency gas boilers. The cost of such a project would be dependent on asbestos abatement and labor to dismantle what is in place. Mr. Sirpenski reported that the Superintendent set a follow-up meeting for the first week in May. After an RFP process, they will have a better idea of the cost of this type of system. As for a timeframe, there is the potential to get the project done during the late summer.

Discussion ensued on options to pay for new boilers.

The concept of a Non-lapsing Capital Fund was raised by Chair DeLucia. He asked committee members to speak on the concept. Mr. Sirpenski reviewed state statute relating to the option. Once established by the Norwich City Council (CC), up to 2% of the BOE budget could go into the fund at the discretion of the CC. Expending the funds would then need approval of the BOE. The funds could be used for educational expenses, including operating and capital expenses. Mr. Sirpenski read Sec 10 – 248a of the state statute to the committee.

Heather Romanski said she would support the creation of a Non-lapsing Capital Fund. Chair DeLucia noted next steps would include the City Manager and CC drafting language to be debated by CC.

Heather Romanski made a motion for the CC/BOE Ad Hoc Committee to recommend the creation of a BOE Non-lasting Capital Fund to the CC. The motion was seconded by Swarnjit Singh Bhatia and unanimously approved by roll call vote.

It was agreed upon for Chair DeLucia to craft a letter to have the committee's recommendation brought to the CC. Alderwoman Gould suggested the letter include the state statute and language. It was clarified and agreed upon that the intent was for the funds be devoid of restrictions and according to the language in the state statute.

6. Agenda Items for future meetings

Alderman DeLucia reminded the CC/BOE Ad Hoc committee members of the May 19, 2021 meeting. This meeting will be virtual at 6:30 PM.

Ms. Charmelus asked that an update on the Stanton boiler replacement be placed as an agenda item for the May meeting.

Vice Chair Gould asked for an agenda item on an update on the current year BOE budget.

Ms. Romanski suggested that Mr. Sirpenski report on progress with his work on future budgeting.

Chair DeLucia asked that members email him with any additional suggested agenda items.

7. Adjournment

On a motion by Carline Charmelus, seconded by Heather Romanski, the CC/BOE Ad Hoc committee meeting adjourned at 8:09 PM by unanimous roll call vote.