

**Portsmouth School Board
Portsmouth, New Hampshire**

Minutes of the February 13, 2007 Meeting

A meeting of the Portsmouth School Board was held on Tuesday, February 13, 2007 in Council Chambers at Portsmouth City Hall.

Attendance

PRESENT: Mr. Kent F. LaPage (Chair), Mrs. Nancy Novelline Clayburgh (Vice-Chair), Ms. Sheri Ham Garrity, Mr. Clay Hayward, Mr. John Lyons, Jr., Mr. Brendan Ristaino, Dr. Mitchell Shuldman, Mr. Carson Smith, Mrs. Ann Walker

PARTICIPATING: Dr. Robert J. Lister (Superintendent of Schools), Mr. Steve Zadavec (Assistant Superintendent), Mr. Stephen T. Bartlett (Business Administrator), Mrs. Linda Briolat (Employee Representative), Ms. Elisa Loeser (Student Representative), and Mrs. Ann Mayer (SAU 50 Representative)

Call to Order

Chair LaPage called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. He called for a moment of silent reflection and asked everyone to remember those who serve us both at home and abroad, the children that we care for on a daily basis, and the families of Portsmouth and the Seacoast community. The “Cat in the Hat” (Kelly Pilgrim, Elementary School Librarian) led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair LaPage revealed a piece of history that Dr. Lister had given to him earlier; the first public school opened on this day in 1635 less than 50 miles from Portsmouth. The Chair said the Boston Latin School opened its doors on this date to serve the greater Boston area.

SECRETARY’S REPORT

Minutes Approved

The Chair called for approval of the January 23, 2007 minutes. Mr. Hayward moved, seconded by Ms. Garrity, the minutes be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

The Chair called for approval of the January 30, 2007 minutes. Mr. Hayward moved, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the minutes be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

Correspondence

Letter Rending End of Services

The Chair read a letter from Joanne Grasso and himself, Co-Chairs of the High School Joint Building Committee for the High School Renovations/Construction Project, stating the Committee held its final meeting on October 18, 2006. At that meeting the Committee unanimously voted to dissolve and render the end of services to the School Board and City Council. He said the project was finished on time and within the budget. (Mrs. Clayburgh arrived at the meeting at this time – 7:08 p.m.) Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the letter be accepted and placed on file. In a roll call vote, the motion was unanimously approved. Chair LaPage acknowledged School Board members and former members who served on the Joint Building Committee since its inception (Nancy Novelline Clayburgh, Ann Walker, John Lyons, Carvel Tefft). He said the high school students have a beautiful building, and members of other school boards have toured the building to see what was done in Portsmouth.

District In Need of Improvement (DINI) Plan

The Board received a summary of the DINI (District In Need of Improvement) Plan. Mr. Zdravec reported that he, along with Dr. Lister and Mrs. Simons (Title 1/Reading Director) visited with the staff of each school over the last few weeks and discussed the impact this plan will have on each school.

Donations from Crime Stoppers, Inc.

Dr. Lister announced that a \$15,000 grant was received from Crime Stoppers, Inc. for the purpose of installing a camera and buzzer system outside of each elementary school, the Portsmouth Alternative Secondary School (PASS), and the Middle School. (He said there is no need for this equipment at the High School, as that was installed when the building was constructed.) Mr. Lyons said the Middle School, because of its current state, was impossible to make sure that it was secure. He said there was no money in the Board's budget to secure the school buildings, so the administration reached out to the community and received a \$15,000 contribution from Crime Stoppers. Mr. Lyons said the installation of this security equipment will be done at no cost to the taxpayers. Mr. Lyons reminded the Board that Rus Wilson, Athletic Director, told them that booster clubs provide 40% of the costs for the various athletic teams, and without their support, programs would be eliminated. He said comments like these are not threats, they are reality. Mr. Lyons said the School Board works together and looks forward to working together with other elected officials, taxpayers, students, and teachers.

PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION

The Chair explained that anyone wishing to address the Board on topics other than the budget should have signed up to speak during the Public Commentary Session. He said, however, he would allow people to speak without having signed up in case they were confused. He said people wishing to speak on the budget may do so during the Public Hearing.

Comments About Middle School

Mr. Carvel Tefft, Portsmouth resident, said he appreciates the comments by Mr. Lyons, particularly when it comes to the students' safety. Mr. Tefft said it appears that those who served on the Joint School Advisory Board for the Middle School had predisposed views and came out with those same views after all was said and done. He said the idea of renovating a school building for the same use rarely works, but renovations do work if done for a different use because you fit the building to the use rather than the use to the building. He said there is not a single school building in town that has been renovated for use as a new school; the old schools are now condominiums or apartment buildings. Mr. Tefft said new construction will cost less than renovating the present building and would be less disruptive to the students and their education. Mr. Tefft also said City residents should be concerned about green space in the City and how the City treats its green spaces. He said downtown green space is a valuable community asset and a measure of quality of life in an urban area. In closing, Mr. Tefft said building a middle school from the ground up seems the logical solution.

The Chair asked if there were other speakers for the public commentary session. Seeing there were no other speakers, he declared the public session closed.

RECOGNITION OF STAFF/STUDENTS

Some of the students scheduled to perform before the Board had not yet arrived, so the Chair moved some agenda items.

Request for Black Student Union to Travel to New York City

Dr. Arthur Hilson, social studies teacher at Portsmouth High School and faculty advisor of the Black Student Union, was present along with Judee Utoh, a junior at Portsmouth High School and President of the Black Student Union, to request permission for the student organization to travel to New York City on April 27 – 29, 2007 (during spring recess). Dr. Hilson said last year's trip was very successful. Mr. Lyons asked what fundraising events will take place. Dr. Hilson said he has applied for a grant, has received donations

NYC Trip Approved

from members of the Church and businesses. He expects 35 students will want to participate, and said there will be enough parent chaperones. He said the trip is open to all students. Mr. Lyons moved the Board approve the Black Student Union's trip to New York City; Ms. Garrity seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

PERSONNEL

Professional Nominations

The Chair asked Mr. Zdravec to present the personnel issues at this time. Mr. Zdravec presented the nomination of July Ullman to the position of reading specialist at Portsmouth High School effective February 13, 2007. Mrs. Walker stated this is not a new position; it was approved during last year's budget process. Mr. Zdravec said a half-time reading specialist position was approved for this year's budget and, because of difficulties at the beginning of the year in finding a qualified candidate, the decision was made to wait until mid-year and then advertise a full-time position for a half-year. Mr. Lyons said he is pleased that Ms. Ullman is a Portsmouth resident. He said the School Department has made great efforts over the last five years to hire as many qualified Portsmouth residents as possible. He said there are three great things about that: they are the best candidates, they are members of the community, and they are also taxpayers. Mr. Lyons moved the nomination be approved; Mr. Ristaino seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Zdravec presented a request from Tamara Carrigan, art teacher at Portsmouth High School, for a maternity leave of absence for first quarter of the 2007-2008 school year. Mr. Hayward moved, seconded by Dr. Shuldman, the request be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

Performance by Little Harbour School Students for "Read Across America"

The Chair announced the students from Little Harbour School were ready to perform; he invited them to come to the front of the room, but first asked the Board to be properly attired: Board members donned "Cat in the Hat" hats!

Mrs. Marconi thanked the Board for changing the agenda to accommodate the students. She said the students' basketball game went into overtime, and she was delighted to say the students won the game.

Ms. Gina Connolly, music teacher at Little Harbour School, also thanked the Board for adjusting its agenda and reviewed the words

the students would be singing. The students sang a song commemorating “Read Across America Day that will be held on February 23rd. Mrs. Marconi reviewed the events that will take place and said it is not too late for people to sign up to read. The Chair thanked the students and their teachers for coming this evening.

PUBLIC HEARING ON 2007-2008 BUDGET

Public Hearing on 2007-2008 Budget

The Chair said the budget process is extremely different this year due to the budget being due 30 days earlier. He said the Board normally has until March 15th to submit its budget to the City Manager. The deadline was moved up this year in hopes that the budget would be approved by the City Council earlier, thereby allowing the Board to issue teacher contracts that may be held. He said the Board will hold a budget work session immediately after tonight’s meeting and will hold another work session on Thursday evening. He said the Board has a number of decisions to make.

Chair LaPage declared the public hearing on the 2007-2008 budget open at 7:41 p.m.

Mr. Bill St. Laurent said he is speaking on behalf of the Association of Portsmouth Taxpayers. Mr. St. Laurent said that, in the past, members of the Association have spent many hours going over City budgets to make suggestions on ways to reduce, and many of the suggestions in the past fell on deaf ears. Mr. St. Laurent said he hopes that many of the Board members will review the budget and not just take the recommendations of the Superintendent. He said the taxpayers have received the impression over the last few years that the whims and desires of the students, parents and employees are the priority. He said many taxpayers have expressed to them their concern that the School Board is only concerned about spending at election time. Mr. St. Laurent said he is concerned that families will not be able to afford to live here and the schools will become empty. He said the average taxpayers cannot afford to keep up with the everyday cost of living increases. He said the Board built a new high school, and is now looking to build a new middle school, and the impression is that the Board wants it now. He urged the Board to pull back on the reigns and to consider the point of view of people who live in the City and not just the students. Mr. St. Laurent said the full-day kindergarten proposal seems to be more of a babysitting service at the expense of the taxpayers. He asked how the Board can have all-day kindergarten when the Superintendent has said the budget does not contain new hires. He also mentioned the cost of health insurance, and suggested the School Board demand the State

**Public Hearing on
2007-2008 Budget
(cont.)**

Legislators pass legislation to correct this. He also asked, if students are not reading at grade level, what are the teachers doing? Referring to the problem of maintaining the athletic fields, Mr. St. Laurent said if more fields are built, how would the Board maintain those fields? Mr. St. Laurent said he has never come before a School Board for a budget; he usually comes in for the City Council's public hearing. He said he felt it was only fair to the Board that he attend tonight as President of the Taxpayers' Association.

Ms. Mary Morin, 238 Melbourne Street, Portsmouth, spoke in support of the full-day kindergarten proposal and said it is in the best interest of kids and has nothing to do with babysitting. Ms. Morton said that in her professional position working with children, she sees that cramming everything into a half-day is a lot to expect of the students.

Mr. Martin Cameron, 469 Ocean Road, Portsmouth, addressed his concern that the budget for the Maintenance Department has not increased and asked if there is a schedule of repairs and appropriate funds budgeted for those repairs. Mr. Cameron also spoke about the increased costs the City has incurred for the employees' State retirement fund. He also suggested the Board, during the next round of negotiations, set the employees' rate of contribution for health insurance at 20%.

Mr. Mark Brighton, 285 Union Street, Portsmouth, said last month's inflation rate was about two and one-half percent, yet the figure requested by the School Department is between six and six and one-half percent. He said that fixed costs can be dealt with this year, and that he does not see how folks in Portsmouth can absorb these types of things in the budget. Mr. Brighton said that if the Board feels they can have all-day kindergarten, then they can certainly find a way to fund the Middle School.

Ms. Mary Beth Savage, 10 Vine Street, Portsmouth, spoke in support of full-day kindergarten. Ms. Savage said that, as a professional working with children, she disagrees with an earlier comment that it would be a babysitting service. She said there is much research and information to support full-day kindergarten, and she asked the Board to consider last spring's presentation by the Superintendent and kindergarten teachers about full-day kindergarten when voting.

Ms. Eric Anderson, 38 Georges Terrace, Portsmouth, apologized for not reviewing the budget figures in advance and asked what the percentage increase will be for next year's budget. The Chair and Superintendent stated the budget has not been finalized as the Board

has to hear from two more budgetmakers this evening and will hold a work session on Thursday night to deliberate. The Superintendent told Mr. Anderson where copies of the budget are available, and also offered to give him a copy. Mr. Anderson said he read with interest the article in the newspaper about the advocacy seminar recently held and statements made that the demographics are changing; only one household out of five in Portsmouth has school-age children. He said the article also stated the student enrollment is going down and in ten to 15 years there will be less than 100 children in each elementary school. He said the Board should begin planning for that now and asked if they are considering this information as they go through their budget process. Mr. Anderson also cited competition from private schools and asked what would happen if costs became so high that the surrounding towns pull their students and build their own high school.

The Chair stated that last year's budget was approved at \$32,472,916 and this year's proposal, pending final approval by the Board, is presently \$34,233,309 (representing at 5.42% increase). He said no new programs are included in this budget.

***Public Hearing
Closed***

There were no other speakers for the public hearing. The Chair called three times for speakers, being none he declared the public hearing on the 2007-2008 budget closed at 8:14 p.m.

NEXT AGENDA

***Next Meeting
Agenda Items***

Chair LaPage said a number of agenda items had been moved around and, therefore, already discussed. He said the next meeting of the School Board will be held on Tuesday, March 13, 2007 in Council Chambers. Captain Janet Champlin of the Portsmouth Police Department will give a presentation on Internet safety, and the administration will report on High School Redesign. The Board will also meet the students who recently traveled to Washington, D.C. Mr. Ristaino requested he be allowed to report briefly on athletic fields. The Chair reported a report from the Rental Committee regarding the request of the Portsmouth Music and Arts Center to rent space at the Wentworth School has been moved to the second meeting in March.

***Adjournment of
Regular Meeting***

The Chair stated the Board will meet in a budget work session following tonight's meeting. Mr. Lyons moved the Board adjourn its public meeting; Mr. Smith seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. The regular meeting of the School Board was adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

| (Approved by the Portsmouth School Board, March 13, 2007)

***Budget Work
Session***

The Board went into a budget work session at 8:16 p.m. and reviewed the technology and elementary library accounts. Mrs. Susan Birrell, Technology Director, and Mr. Thomas Lotz, Network Administrator, reviewed the technology requests and accounts with the Board and answered questions. Ms. Kelly Pilgrim, Elementary Schools' Librarian, reviewed her requests and answered questions from the Board. The work session was adjourned at 9:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Robert J. Lister
Executive Secretary