

SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

PORTSMOUTH, NH

DATE: TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2008

TIME: 7:30PM [or thereafter]

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Chair Mitchell Shuldman, Vice Chair Sheri Ham Garrity, Mr. Kent LaPage, Ms. Rebecca Emerson, Ms. Leslie Stevens, Ms. Lisa Sweet, Ms. Linda Briolat, Mr. Stephen Bartlett, Superintendent Robert Lister and Assistant Superintendent Stephen Bartlett

Absent: Mr. Dexter Legg, Ms. Ann Mayer, Ms. Ann Walker and Ms. Abigail Rockefeller

III. INVOCATION

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Shuldman led in the pledge of allegiance.

V. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

1. November 17, 2008 Work Session. Mr. LaPage motioned. Vice-Chair Garrity seconds. Unanimously approved.
2. November 18, 2008 regular School Board meeting. Ms. Lisa Sweet motioned, Vice-Chair Garrity seconds. Unanimously approved.

VI. COMMUNICATIONS

1. Letter to the City Clerk – regarding vacant school board seat. Superintendent Lister assured the board that this subject is being addressed and that a new member would be nominated at the first meeting in January.
2. Letter to Mr. Jeff Collins, principal of Portsmouth High School. Letter contains information on accreditation of the school and is helpful information for students that will be applying for colleges.
3. Donderiffic Newsletter – Newsletter created by Dondero Elementary. Superintendent Lister stated that administration is working to create a consistency in the way information is communicated to parents at each level.
4. Photo of the School Board to be taken, January 6, 2009. Mr. John Stokel has a long time tradition of taking the photo.
5. Other – Vice Chair Garrity motioned to move to the public commentary.

VII. RECOGNITION OF STAFF AND STUDENTS

1. Chair Shuldman recognized Ms. Sheri Ham-Garrity as the new Vice Chair of the school board and stated that he was looking forward to her serving in her new capacity.
2. Excellence in Educations Grants – Superintendent Lister stated that in the past, money was set aside through the foundation for teachers to write competitive grants on issues that affect school initiatives. A list of grants was provided to board members and Dr. Lister stated he was extremely pleased with the amount of proposals and the way teachers are looking to supplement their classrooms. All grant money awarded will go directly to students and classrooms. No funds will be used as stipends or salaries. Decisions on who will receive funds will be made by December 19, 2008 and recipients will be able to spend the money until May of 2009. Dr. Lister and Mr. Zadravec will be looking at how awarded funds impact students and monitoring the growth of different programs. Mr. Zadravec commented on the quality proposals submitted and publicly recognized Dr Lister’s vast amount of practical experience and how he utilized this experience to put together a quality RFP seminar with the understanding that a training section for teachers would increase our capacity to gain funds through grants. Teachers that do not receive funds from the Excellence in Education Grant will still have a viable proposal to submit to other organizations. Ms. Sweet noticed that grants were awarded in 2001 and 2005 and inquired as to what and who decides when to award another round of grants. Superintendent Lister stated that he allows the fund to accumulate to at least \$35,000.00 before drawing off the interest of the fund.
3. Mr. Zadravec also gave a brief update on PLP’s and how they related to the new teachers contract. Teachers will be able to receive college level credits without taking a course at the graduate level. A committee looked at proposals and discussed how to ensure that applications received are the rigor and standard the district expects. The New Franklin committee is working together on reading comprehension and looking at effective strategies. This group will be collaborating on-line; something the district has not had a lot of experience with. Mr. Zadravec hopes to have more to share on PLP’s at a meeting soon.

VIII. FINANCIAL

1. Documentation was provided indicating that the Portsmouth School District is bringing 403B activity up to current regulations to include IRS changes in terms of limits and assurances. The money of retirees will be kept safe. With the help of Dianne Fogarty, the district has agreements with TSA vendors. Mr. Bartlett explained that the first requirement is for the School Board to adopt the plan. After the plan is adopted, it will be added to the appendix, which can be changed. Mr. LaPage moved to approve. Vice Chair Garrity seconds. Roll Call Vote. Unanimously approved.
2. November Financials – Mr. Bartlett stated that purchasing patterns are not the same every year and provided spreadsheets represent the average. Maintenance issues are further ahead of where Mr. Bartlett prefers but must be addressed.

Chair Shuldman asked Mr. Bartlett to describe briefly the YTD plan.

Mr. Bartlett stated it is based on contractual obligations and how payroll is spread out through the year. Operating costs are based on a five-year rolling history. Freezes change the plan as well as weather.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENTARY

Mr. A. Nelson – 225 Marcy Street. Mr. Nelson believes that 40 million is too expensive and the value for the taxpayer's dollar is not there and also believes that the plan is too expensive for what the city of Portsmouth cites in its master plan. He encouraged the board to look at the Sagamore option before making the final decision.

Mr. C. Diemer – 227 Aldrich Road. Mr. Diemer thanked the board for their hard worked and requested the board not vote to accept the \$40 million proposal to renovate the middle school on Parrott Avenue. Mr. Diemer believes the entire process has become more political than practical.

Mr. J. Stone – 579 Sagamore Ave. Mr. Stone thanked the board for all their hard work and stated he believes Portsmouth citizens have a responsibility to be good examples to their children and renovate the historic building. He also believes the city has a responsibility to maintain green space and the Sagamore area should be left alone.

Mr. Frank Cook – 465 F. W. Hartford Drive. Every time Mr. Cook hears the board talk about the Parrott Avenue site, he feel like the board is trying to fit a size 20 foot into a size 9 shoe.

X. AGENDA

1. Chair Shuldman believes the board to be on a tight schedule in order to put Portsmouth in line for state aid and announced that the board would proceed with scheduled voting with three members not in attendance.

Ms. Emerson made the following motion: I would like to make a motion that this board forward to the city council our decision to renovate and expand the Portsmouth Middle School on the site of Parrott Avenue, that being the current school property along with the adjacent deed restricted land and with a size of no more than 129,765 square feet and at a cost of no greater than 40.8 million dollars. In addition, I would add that if the cost of lifting the deed restriction were less than the \$2 million line item included in the budget, that the actual bond reflects that decrease. Vice Chair Garrity seconds.

Mr. LaPage opposes stating he is deeply concerned that three board members are absent and feels the community does not support the price tag of 40 million. Mr. John Stokel has worked extremely hard on providing the board and the architects with all information necessary and Mr. LaPage greatly appreciates their hard work. However, Mr. LaPage believes the construction costs to be much higher to other construction that has been recently completed in the state. Mr. LaPage is also concerned that the parking issue has not been adequately addressed and that a major portion of sports field will be lost with the loss of the Peirce property. He also raised concerns for young athletes accessing a remote field and the dangers that could arise. Mr. LaPage does not believe that five years will go by before we see a disservice to students and fears that the school district will face another problem like Little Harbour is facing with proper air flow problems due to conceptual design. Mr. LaPage stated he truly believed if the board was to move forward on a new site; students would be in the building in the fall of 2010 without displacing students or disrupting educational time.

Ms. Emerson stated she believed that most of the board has found the best balance between students' needs and taxpayers' burdens. PMS continues to support a large level of courses. The board has looked into flexible spaces and shared spaces, compressed to a size that allows room for future growth but provides space for current programs, created a building that secures the Parrot Avenue and is the ultimate recycling program.

Chair Shuldman read a letter from Mr. Legg stating his desire for the school board to vote for the middle school to stay on Parrott Avenue. Please see letter attached to end of minutes.

Vice Chair Garrity stated that the school is needed now and that she agrees with site and size. She believes the cost to be high and wishes the board would have evaluated two parallel avenues all along, but it was time to move forward.

Ms. Sweet stated she would be voting to support the proposal as prepared and read by Ms. Emerson. No site is perfect. The size Ms. Sweet absolutely supports. A couple spaces were brought up as perhaps not being essential, but Ms. Sweet believes they are absolutely essential in preparing our students for the 21st century. Ms. Sweet does not believe that a new school can be built at another site for less and asked the board and community to come together and support this effort. We are all advocating for students and community.

Ms. Stevens raised concern with the wording of the motion stating the board would ask for “no more than...”

Chair Shuldman stated the board would be directing the architects to build a building based on the designated amount of square footage and the maximum-motioed amount of money is the maximum the board will expect to pay. If eminent domain comes in too expensive, the board will need to revisit.

Ms. Emerson believes the board needs to put forward a good faith effort for the taxpayers and believe in the architects to complete the job for the amount stated in their proposal.

Ms. Emerson again made the following motion: I would like to make a motion that this board forward to the city council our decision to renovate and expand the Portsmouth Middle School on the site of Parrott Avenue, that being the current school property along with the adjacent deed restricted land and with a size of no more than 129,765 square feet and at a cost of no greater than 40.8 million dollars. In addition, I would add that if the cost of lifting the deed restriction were less than the \$2 million line item included in the budget, that the actual bond reflects that decrease. Vice Chair Garrity seconds.

Roll Call Vote – Stevens – yes, Sweet – yes, Emerson yes, LaPage – no, Garrity – yes, Shuldman – yes. Motion passes five to one.

2. Mr. Kent LaPage motioned to form an ad-hoc committee to investigate the addition of an educational channel for the city. This would provide Portsmouth with three channels: a public access channel, a government channel and a new educational channel. Ms. Emerson seconds. Approved unanimously. Chair Shuldman will clarify the January 15, 2009 date in the letter to see if the cable company needs a decision by then. Mr. LaPage recommended that Mr. Brady and Mr. Wellington be involved in the committee as well.
3. Superintendent Lister once again reminded the board that the NHSBA conference is coming up and asked if anyone is planning on attending. Mr. LaPage has represented the board for 13 years and believes it important that board members attend. Building aide will be a major topic this year. A quorum is needed and Mr. LaPage believes that the board’s attendance shows both a level of respect and allows all educational processes to be reported back on.

4. Superintendent Lister reported that the City of Portsmouth and School Department have a grant opportunity to assist in dealing with underage drinking, much like the grant awarded to the city of Dover. A community coalition coordinator job description was provided and read for community members to understand the duties and responsibilities of this created position. Awarded money would be geared to hire somebody to work with youth, provide workshops for parents and actively participate in the greater Portsmouth Safe Schools Team. Ms. Emerson inquired if this position would also work in conjunction with the school resource officer and if all towns would need to apply for the grant. Superintendent Lister stated this one grant would apply to SAU 50 and SAU 52. Mr. LaPage asked what the difference between the old Dare program is and other grants that have been approved in the past and years later, the budget burden has come back to the school system. In letters of support, Dr. Lister has made it very clear that the burden of funding will not to be assumed by the school system's budget at any time in the future.

XI. COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. The Superintendent Search Committee received 19 applications for superintendent of schools. The screening committee reduced the nineteen applications down to seven, interviewing six. Early in January, members of the search committee will do site visits of the finalists and a small sub committee is working on logistics for candidates to visit the schools and speak to the community on Jan. 21 and 22nd, 2009. Staff members and community members will be filling out feedback forms and returning to committee members. Mr. LaPage requested that full packets be provided to the board and, when the committee is ready, that the board has a chance to meet them. Chair Shuldman assured the board that packets would be provided as soon as the committee can go public with the candidate's names.
2. Policy Committee–Vice Chair Garrity stated the committee met on Dec. 01, 2008 and began drafting an attendance policy. The purpose of this policy will to assure that elementary schools, the middle school and high school all are on common ground and following consistent procedures district-wide. The committee has asked principals to provide a list of current procedures. Next meeting is January 13, 2009.
3. Curriculum Committee- The November meeting continued to address the two board goals. Develop ideas around the notion of a quality education index and curriculum revision plans, which are coming to an end. A finalized draft will be presented to the board in the first part of 2009. Chair Shuldman asked Mr. Zadavec to discuss assessment development soon with the board.
4. Other – Holiday Express. Dr. Lister reminded the board of the upcoming event and encouraged the community to attend.
5. Dr. Lister wished the board a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and stated that he looks forward to working with them in 2009.

XII. NEXT AGENDA ITEMS (January 6, 2009 Council Chambers, City Hall)

1. Survey update and presentation by Ms. Abigail Rockefeller
2. Voting to fill school board seat

XIII. ADJOURNMENT 9:30 pm

Respectfully submitted by:



Dr. Robert J. Lister
Superintendent of Schools