

**PORTSMOUTH SCHOOL BOARD PUBLIC HEARING/BOARD MINUTES FOR FEBRUARY 9, 2010**

COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

PORTSMOUTH, NH

DATE: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2010

TIME: 7:00PM [or thereafter]

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**I. CALL TO ORDER**

**II. ROLL CALL**

Present: MITCH SHULDMAN (CHAIR), ANN WALKER (VICE CHAIR), LISA SWEET, LESLIE STEVENS, KENT LAPAGE, REBECCA EMERSON, TOM MARTIN, CAROL CHELLMAN, ED MCDONOUGH, (SUPERINTENDENT), STEVE ZADRAVEC (ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT), STEPHEN BARTLETT (BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR), LINDA BRIOLAT (EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVE) PHIL BOYNTON (STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE) AND ANN MAYER (SAU 50 REPRESENTATIVE)

Absent: DEXTER LEGG

**III. INVOCATION**

**IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chair Shuldman opened the meeting with the following statement taken from School board minutes from the 1930's:

“This is a trying time for schools. Organized groups, some heavily financed are using all their power to spread a false sense of social and economic values. The terms “taxpayer” and “economy” have assumed distorted meaning to a hysterical public. Schools are being attacked, not because they deserve it, but because they are the easiest things to attack. They spend a third of the municipal budget. To people without understanding and without vision the easiest way to save money is to cut the schools. But such views, I believe, are temporary and as unwise as they are harmful.

Tax reduction is altogether desirable and necessary where waste, stupidity and graft have prevailed, but I venture to say that the tax dollar wisely spent brings greater returns than many dollars spend for other purposes. The widespread attempt to convince the public that money spent in taxes is without return indicates the level of thinking employed by those who would benefit personally by tax reduction.

We must understand the truth and think straight. Financial reports indicate money enough in this country and to spare to finance adequately all necessary community activities without undue burden. Expenditures for schools are not excessive, especially in comparison with money spent for other and less essential purposes. The total is large but so is that for waste, war and pleasure, and the potential purchasing power developed by wise education would justify even larger and wider expense. The business of the future depends on enlightenment of those who buy as well as the vision of those who sell.

It is in times of stress and crisis that human worth asserts itself best, and these present days are no exception. In spite of depression education, the greatest obligation falling upon any generation will continue to improve as it continues. The American people, vitally dependent upon an enlightened citizenship, will not be lead astray.”

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Chair Shuldman encouraged board members and community members to stay focused on education and the importance of being the voice of students and their right to an adequate education.

## V. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

### a. JANUARY 21, 2010 PUBLIC HEARING/WORK SESSION –

**MOTION:** Motion to accept the minutes of January 21, 2010 by Mr. LaPage

**SECOND:** Ms. Emerson

**DISCUSSION:**

**VOTE:** Unanimous

### b. JANUARY 26, 2010 BUDGET WORK SESSION –

**MOTION:** Motion to accept the minutes of January 26, 2010 by Ms. Emerson

**SECOND:** Ms. Walker

**DISCUSSION:**

**VOTE:** Unanimous

## VI. PUBLIC HEARING

Robin Normandeau – 15 Pickering Avenue – Ms. Normandeau recently attended a Parent Advisory Council meeting at Portsmouth High School. Ms. Normandeau encouraged School Board members to look closely at line items within the budget that could be removed or lowered from last year.

Jack Thorsen – 136 Cabot Street – Mr. Thorsen stated that people were concerned about services being cut and encouraged Board members to scour line items that could possibly be cut. A lot of mandates and directives come from federal. Where is the linkage to other sources of constraint? What is Governor Lynch doing about the amount of federal and state mandates and lack of funding to back up these mandates? Federal level is under a lot of pressure to cost shift. Where is our linkage to those groups to give them feedback on making the right decisions that wont come back and harm us locally?

Beth Brown – 288 Washington Road in Rye – Ms. Brown understands that the Board has an extremely difficult task to scrutinize the budget before cutting personnel. Parents where Ms. Brown lives have concerns about sending their students to a school that will be affected by deeper cuts and are now beginning to discuss sending their children to private schools. At risk student may now slip through the cracks.

Sebastian Logue – 10 Newcastle Avenue – Technology is very important and computer class should be kept. Skills received in computer class are important.

Valeria Fagin – 75 Bates Street – Ms. Fagin read a note from a friend unable to attend urging the Board to find cuts that would not affect student learning.

Scott McKee – 151 Lafayette Road – Technology instruction for students is imperative, as is any other part of curriculum. It should be enhanced and supplemented instead of cut. Computer teachers are vital to every part of the classroom.

Emily Schiller – 113 Wentworth Road – Ms. Schiller has had a fantastic experience at PHS and is going to John Hopkins University in the fall. Ms. Schiller can personally attest that the smaller the class, the better kids do. Crossing guard ladies cannot be cut. PHS is a mess at beginning and dismissal.

Bob McDowell – Newcastle Avenue – Small class size is not sustainable any more. Mr. McDowell was amazed that no one knew class size recommendations and did not feel that a 1 to 18 ratio was sustainable. Mr. McDowell also felt that class size was also a bit of a shell game, stating that he found no published data linking class size to standardized testing. He raised the possibility of charging fees for extra curricular activities.

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Peter Breciano – 101 O’Leary Place – Mr. Breciano read an article from Seacoast Sounding, written by Senator Judd Gregg in October of 1999. Today, federal funding is up to 17.5%, a far cry from the promised 40%. As a Special Education Director from another district, Mr. Breciano sends a letter every year to congress and for the past two and a half years has been waiting to hear from Carol Shea Porter. He hasn’t heard from her. How long can districts sustain 0 increases? What happens to Special Ed student that comes into the district in the future? How are we going to support them? We will need to take from other programs to fund for that child. Don’t give in.... hold the line. We need educated students. Grandchildren are going to have to pay bills down the road. If they are going to pay bills, they better be educated.

Amy Schwartz – Sunset Road – Please keep the PMS intervention coordinator. Mike Winters has worked hard to keep Portsmouth students safe. The Police Dept is cutting the RSO. What is an acceptable level of risk for students?

Christine Bastinelli – 230 Cass Street - works at New Franklin School. Ms. Bastinelli thanked Board Members for their effort made so far trying to minimize the impact on classrooms. When seemingly small cuts are made, it begins to impact education by changing the climate of the classroom. Taking away support teachers needed for at risk students increases the stress level on the entire classroom and its teacher. NECAP scores will fall. Expecting teachers to teach, “one size fits all” in unreasonable.

Andrea Ardito and Isabelle – Park Street – Ms. Ardito is disheartened over what is being asked of the School Board. She reminded Board members how Ted Kennedy kept education close to his heart.

Mark Brighton – Union Street – Terrifying and doomsday are what just happened in Haiti, not adding 3 to 5 students to a classroom. Presenting a budget with 2.8% increase seems like a waste of council time. 2.8% increase is not a budget cut.

Stephanie Simpson – 303 McKinley Road – Technology, SRO... would you feel competent sending your children to a school without these supports? Is this the best we can do? Is this the legacy that we want to leave? Less education, less support and fewer skills for them to grow up to succeed? Will you campaign on your losses and cuts? This is very short sighted to think that cutting these services will save us in the long run.

Melanie Burger – Ms. Burger has a son in Portsmouth Middle School – Portsmouth is a wonderful place to send her son, but she is concerned about cuts that will be made. At least try to tell City Council to hold the line.

Patrick Ellis – 235 McKinley Road – Last year the School Board polled City Council and found that the fat was gone. City Council was told that there wasn’t any room left. Mr. Ellis stated that the district is no longer talking about shaving money; we are talking about lay offs. As for technology, the district was fortunate to receive grant funding through stimulus funds but we are still taking a step back at the elementary levels. Mr. Ellis wishes we could have used those funds to get ahead for once. Exposure at the elementary level to technology is extremely limited. Class size has been identified for several years as a priority, yet class sizes are going up in order to satisfy City Council’s demand for a “reasonable budget”.

Stephen Adler – 49 Orchard Street – Mr. Adler believes that the quality of schools is a reflection of its community. The “quality” of Portsmouth will be affected if we sacrifice the quality of education for our children.

John Shea – 34 Ridges Court – Mr. Shea believes that the educational system is the singular most important thing in a community. A community’s commitment to education is clear not from what they do when times are good, but what they do when times are difficult. Rochester passed a tax cap last year. The newly elected mayor said education is important and he will stick with school administration to

make education a priority. Mr. Shea believes that is what is missing in Portsmouth and expects this from City Council. There seems to be no sense in this community that education is truly an important focus in this process from City Council. Mr. Shea hopes that there is a bigger dialogue in the future to make sure Portsmouth keeps what is most important.

Robert Yeaton– 135 F. W. Hartford Drive - Mr. Yeaton works in Boston but lives here due to the lifestyle. One of the reasons he brought his family to the area was the quality of the schools. The quality of education has an effect on the tax base you attract here. If the quality of education drops, so will the tax base that is attracted as well. Mr. Yeaton stated that the number in benefits seemed incredibly high compared to other private sectors. Are there some cost savings we can realize by being creative?

Anna Leighon Ruth – 147 Bartlett Street – Ms. Leighon Ruth urged School Board members to take a good look at the budget and is very concerned about the technology integrator being kept at the elementary school. If students are not prepared technology wise, they will not be prepared to compete in a global market. By not providing computer time at school, we are going to create a bigger divide between the haves and have-nots. Ms. Ruth already sees a huge divide between students in the lab. How is that going to translate into preparing students through high school and college?

Lauren Clark –325 Little Harbour Road – Ms. Clark has a son who is a freshman at PHS. Education is the most important thing in the world.

Corinne Norris – 89 Cliff Road – Ms. Norris wishes to thank the teachers and staff at Little Harbour. Society is only going to become more and more technology driven. How can we think of scaling back on technology? And how can we think of eliminating crossing guards, no matter whose budget they come from?

Isaac Brake – 322 Kearsarge Way – Mr. Brake believes it be a mistake to cut technology. Mr. Brake’s business is greatly impacted by technology. Turning to a global economy, we don’t want to handicap our students. Mr. Brake urged City Council members present to “please listen to us as parents”. Mr. Brake urged Board members not to cut the budget, be strong and present the budget needed to educate children properly. It is what attracts businesses and families to a community. Mr. Brake is also speaking to other parents to encourage City Council to find other ways to cut the budget.

Darcy Davidson –60 T.J. Gamester Avenue – Ms. Davidson has a junior at Portsmouth High School and thanked the Board for presenting a budget that is creative in sustaining programs and extracurricular activities. Engaged students reach their potential. Ms. Davidson asked if the Board had looked at perhaps exploring cost savings by centralizing janitorial services, maintenance and equipment? How could we synergies?

## Round Two

Jack Thorsen –136 Cabot Street – A while ago, language programs were cut from grade school. Why did we do that? What we have in school system may be protected, but let’s be creative in finding ways to cut costs even in the light of it. If there is cash at City Hall, how come they haven’t told us about it? Go back and tell them it is raining badly and if there is a rainy day fund, we need it now.

Bob Rickard – 65 Gamester Avenue – Mr. Rickard’s job has him in meetings all over New England. When stating where he lives, people always comment, I “love Portsmouth”. Mr. Richard is very proud as a parent that his daughters are going to call Portsmouth their hometown. But for the first time, he is thinking about leaving Portsmouth. Dondero teachers are incredible but Mr. Rickard has polled his friends from neighboring towns and they are not cutting these programs in their school districts. Mr. Rickard would much rather raise taxes before cutting such important programs for his daughters. He would rather bring his own trash to the dump or pay for services. Could bus routes be consolidated?

Patrick Ellis – Mr. Ellis is very appreciative that Councilors Coviello, Hejtmanek and Clayburgh are present. The manner in which benefits are funded is not reasonable. The 1996 sick time buy back will take time to play out, but will save us money in the end. Times are tough. Modest tax increases are going to have a dramatic impact on the population of Portsmouth but 20% will suffer if taxes are not raised.

Round Three

Mark Brighton – Union Street – Mr. Brighton insists that he does know the value of an education, but believes that the public safety of police and fire are at the head of the city's needs/ If there IS a pot of cash somewhere in city hall, please lets tap into it. This still will not address the systemic problem.

Isaac Brake – 322 Kearsarge Way – Many city council members started at the School Board level before becoming City Council members. Would they have been asking what they are asking now if running for School Board or representing the school still? Mr. Brake thinks not. We the parents of Portsmouth are behind you and are working to organize the parents citywide. We will support you at City Council.

**MOTION:** Motion to consolidate the agenda and move Committee Reports to next regularly scheduled board meeting by Mr. LaPage

**SECOND:** Ms. Stevens

**DISCUSSION:**

**VOTE:** Unanimous

## **VII. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

### a. ITEMS OF INFORMATION

- i. NH RACE TO THE TOP APPLICATION – First round is scheduled for April 1st.
- ii. COMPLIANT BOOSTER GROUPS LIST
- iii. TEACHER EVALUATION STATUS – Mr. McDonough will follow up in March on the status of evaluations.

### b. CORRESPONDENCE

- i. MEMO FROM MAYOR FERRINI – Mr. McDonough has not heard back from the Mayor regarding any questions that City Councilors may have for administration.

### c. DISTRICT REPORTS

- i. STEVE BARTLETT – JANUARY REPORT –

Last month, main areas of concern were the extra retirement expense and the substitute line. Administration is identifying expenses that could be delayed or possibly dispensed with this year. While putting this plan into action, it has reinforced the fact that the last few budget cycles have resulted in leaner operating budgets. The District has set aside approximately \$ 160,000 of expense budget as a hedge against the extra expenses.

In January, the actual figure for salaries and benefits exceeded the plan slightly as expected. However the overall operating budget reflects the positive result of the soft freeze, and several of the overspent accounts has also narrowed the gap from plan, such as maintenance and CIP. The freeze has had the effect however of speeding up the expenditure of the money not set aside, as would also be an expected. Good examples are New Franklin, PMS and PHS at the bottom of page 1. One good note is that we are on the positive side regarding energy to date.

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Cost center 207 expenses show the addition of a psychologist position, which the district will be covered by fund balance as planned. Additional tuition revenue has been identified that will be applied against the cat aide shortage.

### **VIII. OLD BUSINESS**

#### **a. CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF THE FOLLOWING POLICIES:**

- i. IHBI, ALTERNATIVE-LEARNING PLANS
- ii. IK, EARNING OF CREDIT
- iii. ICAA, INTERDISCIPLINARY CREDIT
- iv. IKB, HOMEWORK
- v. IHCD, ADVANCED COURSE WORK/ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES
- vi. INAA, EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
- vii. IFA, INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT TALENTS
- viii. GCQC, RESIGNATION OF A STAFF MEMBER
- ix. BEA, SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS
- x. BEDH, PUBLIC COMMENTARY PROCEDURE
- xi. EH, ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS

**MOTION:** Motion to approve the above policies as a block by Mr. LaPage

**SECOND:** Ms. Emerson

**DISCUSSION:**

**VOTE:** Unanimous

### **IX. NEW BUSINESS**

#### **a. CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF PHS LACROSSE BOOSTERS REQUEST –**

**MOTION:** Motion to approve PHS Lacrosse Booster Request by Ms. Emerson

**SECOND:** Ms. Stevens

**DISCUSSION:**

**VOTE:** Unanimous

#### **b. CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF NFS STAFF MEMBER REQUEST –**

**MOTION:** Motion to approve NFS Staff Member Request by Mr. LaPage

**SECOND:** Ms. Emerson

**DISCUSSION:**

**VOTE:** Unanimous

#### **c. ESTABLISH MARCH RETREAT DATE –** March 6<sup>th</sup> was suggested. After further discussion, new dates will be chosen and presented at the next board meeting. Evening dates will be looked at as well.

#### **d. Ms. Stevens requested that the board devise a plan on how to approach PTA groups and talk about budget impacts. Board members are all having different conversations, responding differently and being asked to speak at different schools. Mr. McDonough will arrange for meeting dates in all the schools for Board members to meet with parents and PTA leaders. Dates will be published on the All School Activities Calendar.**

**X. COMMITTEE UPDATES**

- a. BEC
- b. BOOSTER CLUBS
- c. POLICY
- d. JBC
- e. TECHNOLOGY
- f. ATHLETICS/EXTRA CURRICULAR
- g. FACILITIES

**XI. ADJOURNMENT** - Motion to adjourn by Mr. LaPage and seconded by Ms. Emerson at 9:30 p.m. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ed. McDonough".

Ed McDonough  
Superintendent of Schools