

**CITY COUNCIL STANDING COMMITTEE
JOINT MEETING OF BUDGET & FINANCE
AND
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**Informational Meeting on
North Shore Vocational School Regionalization**

Tuesday, October 13, 2009 – 7:00 p.m.

City Council Conference Room

Present for B&F Committee: Councilor Jason Grow Co-Chairman of the Joint Meeting, Chairperson; Councilor Joe Ciolino, Vice Chair and Councilor Steve Curcuru

Present for School Committee: Amy Beth Healey Co-Chairman of the Joint Meeting, Greg Verga, Melissa Teixeira, Nancy Harrison, Michelle Sweet, Valerie Gilman

Also Present: Mayor Carolyn Kirk, Superintendent of Schools, Christopher Farmer, Assistant Superintendent, Brian Tarr, Councilor Sefatia Romeo-Theken, Wayne Marquis, Town Manager of Danvers, MA, Roger Bourgeois, Superintendent, Essex Agricultural Technical High School, Councilor Jackie Hardy, Dr. William Goodwin, Principal of Gloucester High School, Marsha McGinnis, City Auditor, Joseph Parisi, Vice Chairman of the Regional Committee for the North Shore Vocational School

Members of the public in attendance: Robert F. Parson, Sr., David Anderson, Steven Alan, Ed Collard, Dana Griffin, Roger Hussey, Bill Johnson, Herb Wostrel, Steve Asaro

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Councilor Grow noted there was a quorum of the City Council.

School Committee Chairman Verga declared an interest and indicated that he would not be participating in the discussion but was available to answer questions if needed.”

Councilor Jason Grow and **Ms. Amy Beth Healey** of the School Committee will be Co-Chairing and moderating the meeting.

Superintendent Christopher Farmer introduced those seated at the table and other dignitaries in the room.

Councilor Grow reiterated this was not a public hearing, that this is an opportunity to have a discussion to find a clearer path to where this situation is going, and to have questions answered and explore what the City’s options are. This is a sub-committee meeting, a public hearing will be held on the 20th of October.

Councilor Grow asked Superintendent Farmer to speak to the options and issues presented.

Superintendent Farmer stated that one of the issues faced are areas of uncertainty. He then presented his credentials. He passed out a packet of information outlining the options proposed for the City, a copy of which is attached to these minutes.

He stated that areas of uncertainty such as the size of the final vocational program and of the size of the membership. With regard to the question of enrollment, estimates have been made of 210 students. In the 4th year it would amount to 300 students. Debt service liabilities will be established in 2012 enrollment in North Shore Technical High School and Essex Aggie with still some estimates for Peabody. There are still uncertainties of what the cost of tuition fees will be post-merger and cost of savings through the merger, and Essex Aggie’s tuition is lower than North Shore. Unknown are the terms of any expansion at Gloucester High School, what the costs will be and whether more or less students would be attracted to Danvers.

Amongst the certainties you face, the by-laws will not be determined until a new body is in existence. Such by-laws would impact how a district can withdraw from and be admitted to the new regional technical high school district. Again, it appears it will be decided beyond the point of a commitment to join. Differential costs are known to exist (see attached). Vocational education is more expensive than general education; more expensive in materials and equipment.

Mr. Farmer continued that the City has an obligation to provide a free and appropriate education to all students, and not all are engaged by the same form of education. You increase the opportunities for vocational education appropriately and more students are more likely to stay in school and there is international research to show this. There is a big difference between resident and non-resident tuition rates.

Councilor Grow asked how many children are in the North Shore Vocational program which was noted to be handful of students, and it was noted by **Mr. Parisi** that he is Vice Chairman of the Oversight Committee.

Mr. Farmer reviewed the submitted document which is attached. He made clear that this document did not make any recommendations that this was for the purpose of information sharing. Mr. Farmer enumerated the four options laid out in this document in general.

Option A. This is for a new facility. If there isn't sufficient support for the facility, will the program be reduced? This would likely be the case. This cost is controlled by school choice, meaning students and families making the choice which school to attend. \$2.6 million in cost \$233,000 is initial revenue. The students will have a wider range of courses, adding new programs such HVAC, and plumbing.

The question will be what can be offered at the Gloucester Vocational Program and will be palatable to the students to choose Gloucester's program over Danvers. We do not know the fee level yet. Essex Aggie is under \$11,000, and North Shore Technical High School fees are about \$19,000.

Peabody is thinking 210 in the first year and that may rise to 300 in year four. Debt service will go up and down based on enrollment. It is expected that any increases will be offset by the merger efficiencies. Gloucester students will have preference (if we are members). It is a lower tuition rate if you take current levels. There are no transport costs. Gloucester would also have a seat on the Committee. The by-laws of the new district would not be developed until after the new body is instituted which is not yet formed. How do you get out and how do you get in will be made by a body that is not yet in existence.

Costs depend on enrollment and how many Gloucester students are there. If Gloucester students remained in proportion to the number of students we have now, 8% is possible. Peabody is looking to close their courses now being held in their basement of their school. 53 students are at North Shore Technical and a good handful at the Aggie. While your liability for the debt service is recalibrated every year at the end of the day you're not guaranteed places.

Superintendent Farmer stated that one of the issues the liability for the debt service is recalibrated every year and you're not guaranteed places every year.

Councilor Curcuru asked what is spent per student at GHS.

The best estimate is \$11,700 for vocational students. With an increase of 25 students, another \$10,000 per student.

Councilor Grow noted that the debt service would be reducing to \$233,000 over the years.

Councilor Romeo-Theken asked if they students with Individual Educational Plans (IEP). **Mr. Farmer** stated yes they do. There are additional costs associated with these students.

Mr. Parisi stated that there are 25 to 35 special educational students currently.

Councilor Grow asked how is the non-member tuition formulated?

Mr. Bourgeois stated that it's done annually based on the costs of the year before by the Commissioner of Education of the State of Massachusetts. The difference is \$18,722 and \$17,542.

Councilor Grow asked what the criteria to gain entrance into the program are.

Mr. Bourgeois stated every school provides an admissions plan based on a set of guidelines for the 7th and 8th grade such as attendance record, their functionality, discipline record, academic record, an interview with a committee. All points are added up (highest 100), and are placed on an acceptance list based on the openings. 520 applications were received last year for 130 spots. The first student through the number of openings are taken, and then those without openings are placed on a wait list. Back fill takes place during freshman year when they're still offered spots as there are openings from the wait list. It stops in sophomore year.

Mr. Parisi stated that there are 120 at North Shore Tech.

Councilor Ciolino asked if the City joins then do we get a certain amount of students and a percentage get in? If you get a community where students don't fit the criteria even if the town is a member they don't get in?

Mr. Parisi stated that there is no guarantee. There is a minimum of 5 students per year for which they have to pay a debt service for. Agricultural students accepted are on a state wide basis. They would be paying a non-resident rate. The priority is to district residents. Currently 400 students, 110 from districts within the residential area of Essex County and all others are from the rest of the state.

Councilor Curcuru asked is there a cap per community for sending children?

Mr. Parisi stated that for instance Rockport has fluctuated from one year to the next.

Councilor Grow asked what the attrition rate is for students.

Mr. Bourgeois stated that in response to Mr. Grow's question of drop out rate, there is about a half dozen students that dropped out, maybe 15 students dropped out but these move away not "drop out" over the four years or so out of 130. **Mr. Parisi** responded as well.

Councilor Grow asked for Option B.

Mr. Farmer stated this is where if the City opts not to join and maintain the current program. (See attachment). There are no capital costs, no liability for the debt service. There is limited access to a wider range of courses. If some districts don't join, then the school size and range of program will be affected. Tuition costs would increase. Gloucester students have no priority over other students. That priority may be impacted if Peabody decides to close some or all of their courses. And if our students are not going to the new institution, they will attend Gloucester HS. We now have about 16 students per grade attending North Shore and Essex Aggie We will have to make appropriate provision for these students and would have to absorb the Essex Aggie students now going there and to the North Shore Consortium. There's no influence over the new body.

Mr. Farmer continued that one of the benefits of our current program is that periodically our students are able to undertake projects for the City and the school at no labor cost. Clearly if we had students involved in HVAC and plumbing, etc., they may be able to participate. It is anticipated for a \$300,000 to \$1 million in increased costs. This will depend on the number of students who enroll in the new school

Councilor Grow asked if Gloucester or another community didn't join there'd be a scaling back of the project. It seems you have more than an ample supply of students, why would you scale back.

Mr. Marquis stated if other communities dropped out that Peabody was the linchpin of that discussion.

Mr. Bourgeois stated MSBA is the state agency responsible to putting in \$77.5 million in funding. 1,440 is the projected enrollment. Feasibility is based on the 1,440. MSBA was on board with a lower projection. Peabody was presented last Thursday. Peabody will do their due diligence, but they are struggling with the same issues. The superintendent of Peabody wants it not to be an all or nothing situation to have something within their system as well as the regional option.

Mr. Farmer stated that the facilities in Peabody are under pressure to improve as they are not in good condition.

Mr. Parsons stated that the City takes advantage of these vocational students. Danvers also takes advantage of using their vocational students.

Amy Beth Healey stated that there is projected debt service with certain enrollment with certain communities. If Salem doesn't participate what happens with the debt service for everyone else who participates? The response was that the project would have to be scaled back. What happens to the debt service if Gloucester doesn't participate if the school can't be scaled back?

Ms. Healey didn't see any figures before if 16 communities participate showing what happens to each community's the debt service. I assume it goes up. These are all hypothetical numbers.

Councilor Curcuru asked if Salem is considering closing their vocational program. **Mr. Marquis** stated that Salem's intent would maintain an offering of vocational courses within their school system. Given their enrollment profile there is a need to maintain both. Salem currently has 4 courses and Peabody has 7. It appears that Peabody will cut 3 programs.

Valerie Gilman asked about capital costs to Mr. Farmer. If we were to do a non-membership and maintain our program we would need to expand our current facility? **Councilor Grow** responded that that is explained in Option D.

Councilor Grow stated that if we don't join in FY2013 students would be charged non-resident rate.

Mr. Parisi stated Gloucester students would be treated the same until the day it is switched to the new regional vocational school, only if the new school is approved by 75%. If Gloucester and Salem said no they would still continue to be a member under the old vocational school district system.

Councilor Curcuru asked that if we are not a part of the vocational school group that the current students would be allowed to finish out their education there for clarification. Future years would be treated differently.

Councilor Grow stated that if we did not join the Regional option then we would need to expand our program at Gloucester High School in order to maintain the range of children in our schools.

Mr. Farmer stated that all you can do is make a good faith effort. Some courses could be added such as Graphic Design. The new school would have 16 programs. A study would need to be done to be able to prove what the market can bear. How little provision can you make while being seen making a good faith effort would need a legal opinion, especially if the students cannot get into the new Regional Vocational School.

Councilor Grow asked how broad a range must be provided to give an appropriate range of courses.

Mr. Farmer stated it would be a mistake to assume anything.

Councilor Grow asked what about the children who don't get into the North Shore Vocational. It seems very selective

Mr. Farmer stated it is a real problem, that there is a real shortage of vocational opportunities.

Councilor Ciolino asked what if we don't join the new regional vocational school district will female students have less opportunity than male students.

Mr. Farmer stated that he is suggesting that there may be some courses offered by the regional school that would be more palatable to female students and that would be something to be studied.

Councilor Grow briefly summarized Option B and then asked Mr. Farmer to look at Option C.

Mr. Farmer stated this is not a good option, the closing of Gloucester's vocational program. We have specialized facilities that are hard to convert. Chapter 74 reimbursement would drop to Chapter 70 rates. Drop out rates would increase; the reimbursement would decrease from the state. If students drop out there is no reimbursement. There are 190 youngsters in our program at North Shore Tech and at Essex Aggie. If you divide that by 4 we could squeeze people in, but there would be students not motivated by other programs of the current offerings. These are students motivated by hands-on learning. There are marginal savings. Youngsters who choice into Gloucester because we have vocational programs come from Rockport and Manchester; and we would lose that school choice revenue. The school choice rate is higher for vocational education.

Mr. Parisi stated programs have worked side by side, and after working on the Gloucester program for decades, in his opinion, it would not be a good thing to close it.

Mr. Goodwin stated that many of the students will not go elsewhere, that they'll choose to stay in Gloucester. They want to be in their community. 137 children are participating in the Chapter 74 programs and another 200 plus children involved in taking vocational course work which leads to the consideration of expanding these programs. Looking at the culinary program, 138 students are involved. That is certainly a Chapter 74 program. Most of these students are going to stay in Gloucester, working in some capacity here.

Ed Collins asked how many of our students are on the waiting list.

Roger Hussey asked if there is a provision in the new by-laws that there can't be any duplication of courses with the new vocational school.

Councilor Grow stated there is no by-law regarding a no-compete clause.

Mr. Parisi said there is an October 4th cut off, so that if a student is not working out/stay they an opt out.

Mr. Farmer stated there are on average 21 students on the waiting list per year.

Melissa Teixeira talked about the numbers in the Gloucester program that these students clearly want to stay in Gloucester in the culinary arts department and at the Tech we have only 5 students in their culinary arts program which makes a case for their staying here.

Mr. Farmer stated that Option D shows possible program development and what the costs are (see attached document). These programs are very desirable and that they produce students who are highly employable in the community. Culinary arts are already in place and teachers as well. Cosmetology would be an option. It engages and motivates the students. They do develop a lot of skills. Graphic Arts would be a possibility. Being on the coast there might be the option to bring in Marine Sciences such as boat building. These points are illustrative. These are some areas we might start. One of the problems is space. Rate of occupation is at 96%. Many teachers don't have their own work space.

Mr. Goodwin stated a grant was not received so that a program of Young Families that would have moved out of the high school now must stay.

Mr. Farmer stated a program director would have to be appointed due to the expansion of the program. The School Committee has advocated for years to strengthen the leadership of the high school. Where we would put programs would be a problem. Costs are based on modular classrooms expanding on the current site. Costs are less but some of the costs are increasing the physical space for the culinary arts program and more equipment. But because a teacher is in place those costs are limited. Chapter 74 reimbursements would be higher. It is difficult to know what the impact of school choice into Gloucester would be. A copy of this documentation went to the City Treasurer to examine the costs. The ultimate savings appears to be about break even. This would be a break even position, but this needs further examination. This is our best estimate, of \$160 per square foot for modulars, which is typically \$200 per square foot. This expansion might be, at the end of the day, be self funding. More work would be needed to be done to make these determinations.

Councilor Grow asked if this precludes joining the Regional Vocational school.

Mr. Farmer stated it is assumed less students would be less likely to get into North Shore.

David Anderson stated he has been following this situation, and as a taxpayer, that the dollar factor is a “no-brainer”. There will be 20-30% increased enrollment if it is opened with the advent of new programs. The issue is that we can’t afford not to join the North Shore Regional District.

Melissa Teixeira asked what the build out time table is.

Mr. Farmer and **Mr. Goodwin** answered that this is talking about existing programs. Option D is upgrading the facilities for all vocational programs but these illustrated in Option D do not show all programs but it is about upgrading all existing programs and adding to it. **Councilor Curcuru** pinpointed that the machine shop really needs to update its equipment.

Ms. Healey stated that our current vocational programs if we continue and not expand the programs will still need to be upgraded. If the program is kept as is this is something we will have to do anyway.

Councilor Grow stated that the question is if we are thinking about expanding our existing programs where are the funds to come from? If we were to opt out of the regional vocational school agreement in 2013 and existing children would be in a four year phase-out, are we really going to have the money to expand the programs in the years between now and the phase out?

Mayor Kirk was recognized by Councilor Grow whom she thanked and stated she is representing the administration. Mayor Kirk stated she appreciates the difficulty of the decision. It is not surprising that school superintendents want both programs, but is unrealistic. How do we carry the expense but we get the revenue, we carry the expense which far exceeds the revenue. The City carries the expense for the vocational school and doesn’t keep the revenue. The fairest way would be to transfer the expense of the vocational program that the city pays out (almost \$1 million) and have the revenue travel to the schools. Bundling the two together puts the onus on the School Committee to manage the cost increases of \$1 million and transfer the revenue (out of the city budget) and transfer the costs. It becomes a wash.

The new revenue available in any given year 2.5% of the revenue, \$1.8 million is in new money, split \$900,000 to the schools and \$900,000 to the City. The increase is in tuition and debt service. You could be in a situation where you are prioritizing program expenditures. Do you cut teachers at the middle school, close a school? After the budget is set then the cuts come after the “Voke” sends their tuition increase. The cut is not sent on to the School Committee. The cut is made up on the City side. It gives the School Committee full tools to manage it on their side.

Councilor Grow asked if there is anything statutory to this arrangement.

Mr. Farmer stated debt service typically comes on the City side.

Mr. Parisi stated that the number comes in to the City in February. Enrollment is October 4th the previous year.

Mayor Kirk stated that two years ago we had an increase of \$200,000 late in the budget season. We have to talk mechanically as to how this can work.

Councilor Grow asked what would be the Administration's commitment to not joining the Regional Vocational school and increasing the programs now existing, are you saying "you manage it"?

Mayor Kirk stated his option gives the option to the School Committee – it would require the City Council to vote down or delay the joining of the regional option.

Ms. Teixeira asked school choice and money goes to the City?

Mr. Farmer stated it comes into the school.

Ms. Teixeira stated if other communities send their students to us if we make these changes will these funds come to us via revenue but the City gets the costs?

Marcia McInnis stated that she can't be certain that the school choice money goes into a revolving account.

Mr. Markham stated it comes into the municipality and then they send it to the schools for their use.

Councilor Grow stated that the Regional Vocational school can change their rates.

Ms. Teixeira said that Section 4 of the legislation states specifically states that it is up until the July 1st to make this decision which at that time allows us to not have to make our choice until the opening of the school.

Mr. Parisi stated that if they don't get 75% by December 1st, then the new school won't be built but you can still opt in to join.

Mr. Marquis stated along with **Mr. Bourgeois** stated that you may be opting into a smaller school.

Councilor Romero-Theken stated that just changed the whole scenario and she was concerned that no child left is behind. There are then more options. If we give them \$1 million, what guarantee do we have that it is going to be spent directly to the vocational programs if we don't go to the regional vocational school. We want to be sure these children get their vocational education.

Councilor Grow asked that you might have other programs that would benefit from that income.

Mr. Parisi stated the culinary arts are going to be much higher. The costs are much higher, which are known from what their estimates are showing us. If you run the programs according to Chapter 74 standards it's like night and day. We say we want this expansion, and we have an opportunity to keep our students in Gloucester.

It was noted that Essex, Hamilton, Middleton and Lynnfield, and Salem are to vote in November with an expectation of Peabody voting in November. Beverly hasn't scheduled a vote yet.

Councilor Romero-Theken stated she doesn't understand how we are going transfer and to give control to the School Committee. All the numbers aren't known. How long will the expansion take; what will it cost? She questioned why numbers aren't known. What is the cost for special education students? She stated she felt she can't make a decision with so many unanswered questions. Now that we have until the last minute why can't we do more research on this.

Councilor Ciolino asked of Mr. Parisi if old equipment would go to the new vocational school and **Mr. Parisi** responded that yes, some would but most of it is state-of-the-art because of outside providers.

Councilor Grow asked of what the time frame is on expansion of our programs from Mr. Farmer.

Mr. Farmer stated they would need to have an architect to give estimates and have design work done, and then have staffing estimates made, etc. More could be done on costing a four year build out. More data would be needed.

Mayor Kirk stated another point regarding Chapter 74 funding, on Maritime jobs dovetails well with Gloucester 20/20, and the reports state that the maritime future is bright and that there are job opportunities in that sector and that this would be great opportunity for the Gloucester community and tie in vocational opportunities with this.

Mr. Farmer spoke of the Marine Engineering programming and **Mr. Goodwin** stated he did not believe it was a Chapter 74 reimbursement program which is for vocational education and there are specific parameters vs. Chapter 70 is for regular education reimbursement.

Bill Johnson asked if the Gloucester High School vocational programs are all certificate programs?

Mr. Farmer stated that graduates of GHS programs receive certificates as well.

Mr. Verga asked for clarification on the non-compete clause.

Mr. Parisi amended his statements that the final say is with the new regional board. We would not be able to help to write the agreement with this new board if you join late. The new district will have a new school board and will write the new district agreement and that is what you will not have an influence in if you do not vote into the plan before mid-December.

Mr. Farmer said that the Commission would consult on how the new school would have authority to write regulation for the new regional school.

David Anderson stated 4 years ago that the City needed \$15 million to upgrade and maintain our existing facilities. With the current state of finances where is the money to come from?

Mr. Farmer stated he was asked to create an issues paper not to comment on this subject at this time.

Mayor Kirk reiterated her ideas put forth earlier in the meeting.

Councilor Grow stated one has to look at all costs that the school department carries, for instance, health insurance moved elsewhere within the City and asked would the Mayor contemplate shifting non-educational expenses?

Mayor Kirk said this was possible to look at that but it is clean cut when there is a line item of this expense.

Councilor Grow stated that cost consolidation would make sense.

Ms. Healey asked that the \$500,000 increase is the first \$200,000 for debt service.

Mayor Kirk responded yes with a brief explanation.

Councilor Romeo-Theken stated that if the money doesn't go to the vocational school, how can you justify keeping the money for it if it's not being used. She said that Mr. Anderson made a good point regarding the cost of repairing facilities.

Mr. Anderson said you still have to factor in 80 or 90 school choice students possibly.

Councilor Romeo-Theken stated that in the 4 years this program is going to expand, or we will lose students to school choice.

Councilor Grow asked the Mayor if her administration is willing to commit to the expansion of the existing program.

The **Mayor** stated if there was a positive vote by the City Council to join the regional vocational school, then there would not be an ability to support the home grown vocational program. There

would be some hard choices to make. There needs to be a check and a balance on the escalating costs that this school represents.

Mr. Collins asked if money was given to the regional vocational school would GHS programs be an inferior vocational program.

Councilor Grow stated we are spending approximately \$20,000 per student. A position can be taken that we are paying for the gold standard. If that is so then you'd need to spread the equity within the whole school district for our children.

Councilor Grow stated that we are trying to clarify these points about equitable and fair standards of education at the possible expense of others.

Mr. Farmer stated that from the General Fund costs are at a pretty good fix on what vocational and special education costs are per student.

Valerie Gilman asked for the percentage of students from the North Shore Voke and Essex Aggie who go to college and to see the numbers and those who do not and who end up in their vocational choice in the market. Ms. Gilman asked to see these numbers compared to gain an understanding of value.

Mr. Farmer said 62% go to college from North Shore vocational school and approximately 86% from the Essex Aggie.

Councilor Hardy asked what are the numbers of employment in Gloucester of these students and how are we going to afford the increase here and how are we going to be able to know what the benefit is to us. Does this come home to benefit our community?

Mr. Farmer stated the discussion is on vocational education; and if we are going to spend \$2.6 million then where are we going to spend it? School choice can't be controlled. These decisions are market driven.

Councilor Hardy asked if we don't join the Voke and go to choice, \$18,722 and 17,542

And if you amortize the debt it's much more than that.

Councilor Grow noted that there now there was no longer quorum of the City Council.
(Councilor Ciolino left the meeting)

Mr. Parisi said that if we are not in the program we will have children at a deficit competing in the job market on the North Shore, and the new Regional school will be graduating students who will be providing students that are more competitive.

Ms. Healey asked if this included the debt service that would be taken on for the Voke and **Councilor Hardy** stated that this is what she was asking.

Mr. Marquis responded \$133 million to cost of school, for a total of subsidies of \$98.6 million from the State. The existing building of the NS vocational school would be sold to also help fund the new school.

Mr. Parisi stated there are opportunities with corporate partners for grant monies to fund equipment and portions of programs. This would help a great deal to underwrite costs.

Ms. Teixeira asked if this would reduce the cost of the building to which **Mr. Parisi** responded it would reduce the cost of what would be spent on the equipment. The general trend has been years where tuition actually gone down. Community assessments fluctuate with student enrollment. North Shore regional vocational is the lowest cost regional school in the whole area.

At this time **Mayor Kirk** excused herself from the meeting.

Mr. Farmer stated the last published data showed Minuteman is the highest in the state and North Shore was third.

Mr. Parisi stated that some years the budget has been reduced.

Suzanne Altenberger asked if there could be a focus on a Marine vocational program. She presented a paper to the group regarding possible Marine Industrial programs for the City (Copy in file).

Mr. Farmer stated that there has been a very tight time line and that more in-depth information has not been able to be developed because of it.

Councilor Grow stated that in order to ramp up programs we need money. The Mayor seems to lead us to believe the money is not now available. How are we going to ramp up these programs when there is no money?

Mr. Farmer stated that it would be a possible for a wash of funds. Is this the most important thing to spend capital funds on such things as a vocational program when physical plant issues such as leaking roofs are a serious issue as an example?

Mr. Parsons asked of Mr. Farmer that if you expand the vocational program and still send students to the regional vocational school that if we don't have a program that our students want then the law says we have to send our students to the nearest vocational program that they do want?

Mr. Farmer stated that if we are not a member of the new Vocational district then we do still have to transport students to other district schools, and then we have to pay for their transportation costs.

Ms. Healey asked that if we are a member of the regional vocational school, would they be stopped from going to another district's program, like to Salem or Minuteman.

Councilor Grow said perhaps we need to consider the next steps – is the School Committee going to issue a recommendation?

Mr. Verga reiterated **Ms. Healey's** statement that the School Committee would not make a recommendation until after the public hearing.

Councilor Grow said there would be a public hearing with the City Council. The School Committee doesn't have one. We are dealing with two issues whether or not we go to the building program, and if the answer is no then if they get their 75% then do we then join at a later date.

Councilor Grow asked are other communities equally conflicted as ours?

Mr. Marquis said no. Danvers doesn't have a vocational program and the new school is going to be there. Rockport voted unanimously as did Manchester, and they too also don't have vocational programs. However, Salem is probably the closest to Gloucester in conflict.

Mr. Farmer asked does MSBA and the State have any vote in the money in escrow against a better day.

Mr. Bourgeois stated that they have an extension to December 15th, for a vote, so they would not be getting another extension from the State for a decision. This extension was allowed due to the fact that this is the first project that had a creation of a new school district.

The calendar was examined to find when the Budget and Finance Committee would make a recommendation to the City Council. A recommendation by the School Committee is not binding and expected by the next B&F meeting on the 29th of October. A full recommendation could be given to the City Council by November 17th, the next City Council meeting.

Councilor Grow would like to see the administration's fiscal scenarios on the Mayor's statements to the B&F Committee today. His concern is that that Mayor stated it's a one or the other situation; and if it's not the Vocational school then are we committing to the expansion of the current high school programs. And do we have the funds to move forward

Mr. Farmer said that until the Charter School issue outcome is known, to decide to spend on other things down the road we need to understand what we are facing financially to expand, for instance.

Ms. Gilman asked to have a better idea of how many students are anticipated to be on the waiting list. If this is a possible school choice option, what are we going to have in actual students who can get accepted along with a waiting list of students qualified to attend the school. How did the 130 students get on the list?

Mr. Bourgeois stated 95% of the students who apply get in freshman year. The total is 453 at North Shore Vocational and Essex Aggie is 442. Peabody potentially has 300 more students, and that brings us to 1,200. Around 240 additional seats spread out for new students with the new regional school. Each year it will ramp up from the 1,200 to the 1,440 students which is the basis of all the estimates. MSBA would not have agreed if they weren't able to document this aspect.

Mr. Parisi stated it's hard to predict depending on what the new programs would bring to the table.

Ms. Gilman stated that some communities are leaning to both the Regional district and maintaining their own programs.

Mr. Bourgeois said that communities are deciding what the hybrid programs will look at once the regional district is open.

Ms. Healey said that if we take Option C, our kids aren't all going to get into the North Shore regional school.

Mr. Parisi invited the members of the Gloucester School Committee and City Council to come to his campus to visit his school.

Councilor Grow thanked the guests for their participation in this evening's meeting.

It was moved, seconded, and voted UNANIMOUSLY to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana C. Jorgenson

Clerk of the Committees