

Joint City Council and School Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 22, 2015
Gloucester High School Library
7:00 p.m.

School Committee Members Present

Jonathan Pope, Chairman
Kathy Clancy, Secretary (7:47 p.m.)
Michelle Sweet
Jack O'Maley
Mayor Sefatia Romeo Theken

City Council Members Present

Paul McGeary, Chairman
Robert Whynott
Greg Verga
Melissa Cox
Steven LeBlanc
Paul Lundberg
William Fonvielle
Robert Stewart
Joseph Ciolino

School Administration Present

Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent
Gregg Bach, Assistant Superintendent
Hans Baumhauer, Director of Finance
and Operations
Patricia Wegmann, Director of Special Education
Erik Anderson, GHS Principal
Dr. Telena Imel, West Parish Principal

City Administration Present

Jim Destino, Chief Administrative Officer

Recorded by Cape Ann TV

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chairman Pope called the meeting to order on behalf of the School Committee at 7:07 p.m. and stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools.
- II. **CALL TO ORDER** – President McGeary called the meeting to order on behalf of the City Council at 7:07 p.m.
- III. **SALUTE TO THE FLAG/MOMENT OF SILENCE**
- IV. **COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT** – Chairman Pope welcomed the City Council and stated that despite what was printed in the Gloucester Daily Times, tonight's meeting will not be a public hearing on the reorganization of the elementary schools. However, there will be many opportunities for public input in the future.

President McGeary stated that the City Council is here to learn from the School Committee what the issues are that will need to be dealt with over the next several years.

V. PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION

- A. Update on Progress of West Parish Elementary School** – Kevin Buckley of KBA Architects, the Owners Project Manager, introduced Brad Dore of Dore & Whittier, the designer, and Jonathan Rich of W.T. Rich, the construction manager, and reported that the project is on schedule and on budget. The three-story academic wing is now being wrapped, and the pouring of the floors in that wing and the framing of the exterior will begin in the next couple of weeks.

Mr. Buckley stated that the Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) was presented by W.T. Rich to the building committee. The overall budget for the project is approximately \$39 million but the building itself had to come in at \$29,995,000. He is very confident with the amount of progress that W.T. Rich has accomplished to date, and the project is on schedule to be substantially completed in July of 2016, with an opening date of September 2016.

President McGeary asked if there have been any surprises in the construction process to date, and Mr. Buckley discussed some minor issues with extra clay and ledge and poor soil quality. He also stated that the building is tracking to be LEED Gold certified.

- B. St. Ann's Transition** – Dr. Safier reported that the transition from West Parish to St. Ann's was a lengthy process that required a significant amount of planning. He stated that the move was extremely smooth and well organized.

Dr. Telena Imel reported that the transition went very smoothly and that the kids are enjoying their downtown space, specifically its proximity to Burnham's Field, the Sawyer Free Library and the Cape Ann Museum. The fifth grade is also doing well at O'Maley, and there have been several opportunities for the West Parish K-5 community to get together.

President McGeary asked about the traffic situation at St. Ann's, and Dr. Imel reported that she regularly sends out reminders to families to pick up their children at O'Maley. Councilor Ciolino asked about the furniture at St. Ann's, and Dr. Safier stated that the new West Parish School will have new furniture and the furniture now in use at St. Ann's will be distributed throughout the district.

Dr. Safier reported that there are almost 400 students and teachers at West Parish and they have tried to minimize their imprint on the neighborhood as much as possible. He thanked the neighborhood and Councilor Cox for welcoming them into the community.

- C. Presentation of Dore & Whittier's Study of Gloucester's Elementary Schools** – Michele Rogers and Brad Dore of Dore & Whittier presented a slide show on the Masterplan Study of four of the elementary schools, namely Beeman, East Gloucester, Plum Cove, and Veterans. The presentation included the tasks and goals of the study, visual inspections, space use analyses, review of enrollment projections,

facilities assessments, specific issues by school, and four options for addressing those issues:

- Option A Maintain all four buildings as they are with same number of classes per grade
- Option B Make additions and renovations at all four schools
- Option C Remove Plum Cove **or** Veterans and make additions and renovations at other three (2-3 classes per grade)
- Option D Remove Plum Cove **and** Veterans and make addition at Beeman (4 classes per grade), with 3 classes per grade at East Gloucester

Councilor Lundberg noted that many of the options provide the alternative of not having to find swing space for the existing students but using city-owned buildings as swing space. Ms. Rogers stated that that would be possible if a larger school was completed first and then the students from a smaller school could be moved into that building while theirs was being renovated or rebuilt.

Councilor LeBlanc asked which of the schools have space to build onsite without moving the students into a swing space. Ms. Rogers stated that there is space at Plum Cove and Beeman but that Veterans and East Gloucester are very tight sites. There was a discussion about the impact of construction on the students that remain onsite.

Councilor Ciolino asked whether MSBA prefers building new schools or remodeling old ones. Mr. Dore indicated that they are looking for the best solution for the community and, oftentimes, it is more cost effective to rebuild than to remodel an old school.

Mayor Theken stated that the City Council was told that if we did not build a new West Parish School, the city would not get the 50% reimbursement from MSBA, which was one of the reasons why Fuller was not considered. Mr. Dore clarified that the issue with Fuller was that only a portion of the building would be used as a school for 355 students; however, the whole building would have to be brought up to code, and MSBA would only pay for the portion of the building being used as a school.

President McGeary asked whether MSBA would require one of the existing schools to meet their standards if it was going to be used as swing space. Mr. Dore explained that swing space is not reimbursable and therefore does not need to meet MSBA standards.

Chairman Pope stated that the School Committee is committed to spending the next year exploring the options and collecting public input and stated that nothing will happen unless there is sizeable community support for it.

Councilor Cox asked if there is a plan for O'Maley, and Chairman Pope stated that the DPW has been working on O'Maley almost exclusively for the last 2-3 years, including upgrades to the HVAC and a new boiler. Chairman Pope noted that exterior renovations at O'Maley have been included on the School Department's capital plan for the last four years.

Councilor LeBlanc asked about the plan for the outdated heating systems in the elementary schools, as outlined in Dore & Whittier's report. Dr. Safier referred the answer to that question to the DPW and indicated that the reason why this masterplan is being proposed is to examine the needs of each school. Mayor Theken stated that one of the issues is funding and hopefully we can move forward with a plan.

- D. Future Location of Administration and Preschool** – Chairman Pope reported that the lease of the Blackburn Drive building expires next year and that the preschool has grown substantially (102 students) since moving to the current facility. Councilor Verga believes that the administration and preschool should move to city-owned space and suggested the possibility of the preschool occupying the fifth grade classrooms at O'Maley. Dr. Safier stated that the preschool would not be able to occupy the space that the fifth grade is currently occupying.

Chairman Pope stated that there has been a lot of talk recently about mandatory preschool and he is intrigued by the idea of integrating the preschool into the elementary schools. He cited the Mt. Vernon Report that was done 12 years ago, which recommended early learning centers. He noted that that recommendation was contested by the community at the time. However, things change and that may now be a viable option. Dr. Safier stated that administration would need to be centrally located and have a minimum of 10,000 square feet of space.

- E. Educational Update 2014-2015 School Year** – Dr. Safier updated the City Council on opportunities for students and initiatives taking place across the district, including AP courses at the high school, STEM Academy, dual enrollment at Salem State University, Endicott College credit program, drama program, Read First and Moose Youth Awareness programs, DECA club, vocational programs, computer science program, O'Maley Slime Lab, 3D printers, 1:1 technology initiative, Word Generation program, school gardens, after school programs and clubs, O'Maley SAILS program, visiting artist program, new elementary math initiative, standards-based report cards, co-teaching at Veterans, and the FLEX program.

Councilor Ciolino asked if the district received any equipment from the former North Shore Tech, and Mr. Anderson stated that the high school did receive a few items for its vocational programs but has not yet received any technology items. Dr. Safier reported that a lot of the technology was older than the district's infrastructure allows.

- F. FY15 School Budget/Unanticipated Expenses** – Mr. Baumhauer presented a slide show on the FY15 budget and unanticipated special education costs. Ms. Wegmann reported that beginning in July 2014, the district has had an unprecedented number of students with special needs move to Gloucester and be placed in collaborative programs. We also have students that DCF placed in programs outside of Gloucester, and since their parents' last known residence was in Gloucester, we are responsible for their tuition. Mr. Baumhauer noted that the out-of-district tuition costs for a full year for these students is over \$618,000.00.

Additionally, Ms. Wegmann reported that three students that were in the district's substantially separate programs were placed out-of-district because we could no longer meet their needs. Also, in order to keep students in a "least restrictive setting," the district needed to hire three more paraprofessionals. Mr. Baumhauer reported that a budget freeze was put in place back in November to help offset some of these unanticipated expenses.

Councilor Ciolino inquired about free cash, and Mayor Theken stated that she is looking at everything and working closely with the School Department. She noted that free cash was used last year to keep the fire stations open and that there are still city positions that need to be filled. She also stated that she was informed that GIC health insurance is going up 9.5%.

Mr. Destino stated that he is confident that the 2015 budget gap will be closed by using free cash. However, he noted that the city has been living on free cash for years (almost \$10 million in the last six years) and that funding by free cash is not sustainable. Therefore, tough choices will need to be made with respect to future budgets. He indicated that the city administration will work with the School Department to do the best it can.

G. FY16 School Budget Outlook – Dr. Safier indicated that the School Department is seeking a level service budget for FY16. He reviewed new staffing positions and programs and stated that the district will attempt to offset those costs within the budget through retirements, etc. He also mentioned a reduction in grants, COLA increases for staff, and a need for ELL teachers. President McGearry noted that the district would need \$1 million just to get to **level funding**.

H. Traffic Near Schools During Pick-Up and Drop-Off Locations – Councilor Cox reported that she has received several complaints about school bus stops not being located near crosswalks in the downtown area. She requested that the School Department work with the DPW to add crosswalks where necessary.

Chairman Pope noted that when a school bus stops and the lights are flashing, there is a "crosswalk" in front of the bus. Councilor Cox believes there may be some question about whether students have to be on the side of the street where the door opens when they are picked up in the morning. Councilor Ciolino suggested that a survey be done to see if the crosswalks correspond to where the bus stops are located.

Councilor LeBlanc reported that he has received complaints about students having to walk down Maplewood Avenue to Gloucester Avenue or Grove Street in order to cross the street. He has talked to Mike Hale about putting a crosswalk in front of Maplewood School. Mr. Hale informed him that they do not put crosswalks in the middle of streets. Councilor Cox stated that the bus stop at the corner of Maplewood Avenue and Cleveland Street is very dangerous because that is a blind corner.

Dr. Safier stated that the School Department will work with the DPW to have crosswalks placed in those areas that are the highest risk for students. He noted that, historically, bus stops are placed based on the concentration of students and how far they have to walk to get to the bus stop. He recommended reminding students to wait until the bus stops and the lights are flashing to cross the street to get on the bus.

Councilor Ciolino stated that he finds these joint meetings very helpful and hopes that the School Committee and City Council can meet more often this year. President McGeary thanked the School Committee for the information provided and stated that he is looking forward to working with the committee on a long-term strategic plan for the elementary schools.

VI. ADJOURNMENT – On a motion by Mr. O’Maley, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was unanimously

VOTED: 5 in favor zero opposed, to adjourn the Joint City Council and School Committee Meeting of January 22, 2015 at 9:20 p.m.

All reference documents and reports are filed in the Superintendent’s office.

*Maria Puglisi
School Committee Recording Secretary*