

TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDED MINUTES

OF

THE METHUEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

SPECIAL MEETING

OF

JUNE 28, 2018

SUBMITTED FOR THE APPROVAL OF:

THE METHUEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

AND

THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

“AN OPEN MEETING ADVANTAGE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF METHUEN”

RECORDED BY:
MARTHA SIROIS, PUBLIC RECORDER

TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDED MINUTES
METHUEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
SPECIAL MEETING
JUNE 28, 2018

This Special Meeting of the Methuen School Committee was held at Methuen High School, Media Center, and was posted for 5:00PM

ROLL CALL

Mr. Robert F. Vogler (P)
Ms. Susan M. Nicholson (P)
Mr. Nicholas DiZoglio, Vice Chairperson (NP) Entered meeting @ 5:30PM
Ms. Jana DiNatale (P)
Mr. Dennis D.J. Deeb, Secretary (P)
Ms. Jana Zanni Pesce (P)
Mayor James P. Jajuga, Chairperson (P)

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. Robert F. Vogler (P)
Ms. Susan M. Nicholson (P)
Ms. Jana DiNatale (P)
Mr. Dennis D.J. Deeb, Secretary (P)
Ms. Jana Zanni Pesce (P)
Mayor James P. Jajuga, Chairperson (P)

MEMBERS NOT IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. Nicholas DiZoglio, Vice Chairperson (NP) Entered meeting @ 5:30PM

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs. Judith Scannell, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Brandi L. Kwong, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Ian Gosselin, Business Administrator
Ms. Colleen McCarthy, Human Resource Director
Mr. Edward Lussier, Technology Director
Ms. Martha Sirois, Public Recorder

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ATTENDANCE:

Mayor Jajuga called this Special Session to order at 5:00PM with a quorum of members in attendance, and listed above.

Flag Salute-Mayor Jajuga

Superintendent-There was a recessed meeting planned for last night. They were expecting a final Budget number and that did not happen so the meeting was cancelled. She checked with legal council and they said the meeting could be cancelled. She was told she would be presented with a Budget number this afternoon and that is why she scheduled this evening's meeting. The City Council decided last evening at their meeting that they would be doing a 1/12th Budget. The Business Administrator has been working on this all day. She attended the City Council Meeting

last night and was asked questions which she feels she answered fully and to the best of her knowledge. The Mayor then spoke to City Council about the many conversations he has had in person as well as over the telephone with many different people and departments present at those meetings. She was never alone in a meeting with the Mayor. These conversations were very difficult. After the last telephone call with the Department of Revenue (DOR), she and the Business Administrator sat down and talked about a lot of things. They came to the conclusion that at this point in time, the \$78 Million would be a good point to begin and start moving forward. Are we delighted with this amount, no we are not. The Mayor knows that and the School Committee knows that as well. They received \$2 Million Dollars more and it was a fight of many weeks back and forth and they finally came to this agreement. She will show the Committee what \$78 Million looks like for the School System. She wants this all to be public and does not want anyone to ever think that deals were made behind closed doors and she is offended if anyone would say anything like that. (A document was handed out to the School Committee)

Mayor-His Chief of Staff was also in every meeting.

Mr. Gosselin-He recreated the summary in the Budget Book with the \$78 Million Dollar number. Superintendent-She read the narrative at the bottom of the handout. It was unanimous by the School Committee that if they received additional money they wanted the classroom teachers that service our students called back from the layoff first.

Ms. McCarthy-Due to retirements and resignations they will be calling staff back by licensure and collective bargaining.

Superintendent-In regards to the remaining staff, there are collective bargaining pieces that she cannot speak about. There are also Grants coming in that may speak to these positions. There are also staff members that are considering retiring sooner than later. This process will continue all summer.

Mayor-The City has put \$6 Million Dollars into the Budget. Last year the schools were funded at \$72 Million Dollars. He achieved that by giving the schools all the money that was available to him. He spent over 15 hours in Budget negotiations with the City Council. They cut out over \$1 Million Dollars from the Municipal side of Government. They then rejected the Budget and returned it to him. He made changes to the City Council cuts and made addition cuts to the Budget. These changes allowed him to get to the \$2 Million Dollar figure. He is committed to the \$78 Million Dollars. He agreed to give back to the School Dept. from Chargebacks and Medicaid. He committed to a 4 year Medicaid agreement, 25% the first year, 50% the second year until it reaches 100%. The City also receives money from the cable companies. Mr. Lussier, Technology Director, is creating a plan to use that money for the School System. The money from these three pieces amounts to about \$500,000.00. This money is in addition to the Budget. The City needs to do better budget forecasting in the future and take a more professional approach. We also have to have a steady funding stream for the schools. He has used all of the Stabilization funds and given that to the schools with the exception of \$10,000.00. They are closing this fiscal year with a \$4 Million Dollar deficit. He is asking the State to borrow the money to close that out. He has been on the telephone with the Department of Finance and the Department of Revenue trying to resolve this favorably. He is in contact with the Legislature and asking them to fully fund Special Education and to increase Chapter 70 money.

Ms. DiNatale-With this money they are reinstating positions and those are listed in your handout. You also list advanced math, foreign language and four band/chorus teaching positions. Are those services going to stay the same as they are this year?

Superintendent-Yes they are.

Ms. DiNatale-Will there still be the competitive math program?

Superintendent-Yes

Ms. DiNatale-The same number of students will have access to the foreign language classes and the same number of students will be able to take band and chorus?

Superintendent-Yes

Ms. DiNatale-The Mayor said that they are gaining \$6 Million Dollars more than last year and yet she sees that there are still less jobs than last year. She would like to know the impact of the loss they are suffering and what these positions are. Who are the nine administrators being cut? Are these the Deans?

Superintendent-Some are Deans and some are SEAs.

Ms. DiNatale-These are positions that we previously valued.

Superintendent-Correct.

Ms. DiNatale-Those Deans handled the misbehavior in our schools. Every student is going to be affected by the loss of those Deans. Every classroom is going to be more disrupted as a result of not having them there. Is this a fair statement?

Superintendent-No, it is not. She does not believe that is a fair statement. She fought for 3 years to institute the Deans. She took great pride in the initiative and she was very upset that they had to be eliminated. They have not given up on the recall of the Deans. They will be working on this through the summer and into the fall. She has to start recalling and putting the District back together. It is not a fair statement to say students will be disrupting every classroom in the School District. That is not true.

Ms. DiNatale-When students were previously disruptive they were taken care of by the Deans.

Superintendent-Yes the Deans as well as the Associates.

Ms. DiNatale-And now those Deans are gone.

Superintendent-Yes they are. They have not given up on working on a recall of the Deans.

Ms. DiNatale-She is glad to hear that but the fact is there was an agreement stated last night at the City Council meeting that this School Committee never voted on, never discussed and was never given the opportunity to discuss despite her several requests to the Superintendent to have a Special Meeting, an emergency meeting to discuss it and to give the Committee information about it. Nothing was ever provided. An agreement was given last night at City Council and it is important to clarify. This Committee voted on a budget of \$82.5 Million Dollars that was in the best interest of students. On Monday night, you said \$82 Million Dollars was best for students. Last night the Mayor said that you two had an agreement of \$78 Million Dollars.

Superintendent-Yes

Ms. DiNatale-Her concerns now are what happened to all the things that they said were essential to student success. All of those things are being ignored and she feels City Council and the Public needs to be aware as to what is happening. She would like to go through a few things to make sure she understands. They had spoken about BCBA staff and their importance to helping minimize classroom distractions. They had planned to add those positions as essential to student success and they are now cut.

Superintendent-You are correct but they are cut out of the New FY'19 Budget. Right now her job is to recall the 85 Methuen Public School employees.

Ms. DiNatale-She understands that but what needs to be clear is there was a representation to City Council last night, who have been asking what the schools need and she has asked the Superintendent to answer that question with no response. When the Superintendent stood up at the City Council meeting last night and said \$78 Million Dollars, she now feels that they have the impression and took the vote that they did feeling they are meeting the needs of our students. She wants to be clear what \$78 Million Dollars is not meeting the needs of our students. She understands the difference between this year's budget and last year's budget but there are needs that are not being met. She spoke with the legal team today to clarify that when the Mayor makes a recommendation to the Budget to the Superintendent, it should be brought back to the School Committee.

Superintendent-She told City Council she would be speaking to the School Committee and she agreed with this last number along with the Mayor. Every meeting they have had at the table with DOR speaking to them about the finances of the City. At this point she has received \$2 Million

Dollars more over the last 3 weeks added to this Budget. She has not received a telephone call or an email from Ms. DiNatale asking those questions.

Ms. DiNatale-She had the email with her and she read the email dated June 19, 2018.

Superintendent-She said she would have meetings when she received solid numbers. Tonight speaks to the number she was given last night. There were School Committee members at the meeting and she told the City Council she would speak to the School Committee. This meeting tonight was set up to discuss the \$78 Million Dollars. She agrees with the \$78 Million Dollars. Her job is to bring back her employees. That is priority. She was told that this amount was it and that they could not fund another penny. She and the Business Administrator sat in on all those meeting and she looked at the numbers and she knows exactly where the City is.

Mr. Vogler-The Superintendent said she would bring this back to her School Committee and she brought it here tonight. He was at every meeting and he knows the City's financial situation.

Ms. DiNatale-The representation that was made to City Council by the Mayor and the Superintendent was that there was an agreement with the \$78 Million Dollars and that is what she takes issue with.

Mr. DiZoglio-He heard the Mayor say that \$78 Million Dollars was a firm number. The Superintendent, who represents the students and staff of this District, and her staff have been working for 4 months to get a Budget. The Superintendent was asked by City Council what number would bring back all of her staff and she said \$79.5 Million Dollars. There was a recessed meeting scheduled for last night that was cancelled and they are here tonight. This is the earliest opportunity they have had to meet.

Ms. DiNatale-She does not agree with \$78 Million Dollars. She does not think that number meets the needs of the students and she fully understands they need to bring the teachers back. They have to do more than that and meet the needs of the students. They discussed as a School Committee K-8 Academic specialists and tier II Intervention specialists that were necessary to the success of our students to increase productivity in the classrooms. Are they included in the \$78 Million Dollar number?

Superintendent-These are FY'19 Budget new initiative positions without a person in them. She presented this budget to move the District forward.

Mayor-He would like everyone to understand that when the City Council cut the Budget they said loud and clear they need more money for the School System and he agreed. He offered the School System \$76 Million Dollars and the City Council wanted to do more so they cut from the City Budget \$1.335 Million Dollars. He made additional cuts and emptied the Stabilization Fund to give the School Dept. more money. In the meetings with the Department of Revenue and the Department of Administration and Finance, they were very concerned about the fiscal stability of the City of Methuen. He went to Boston to meet with the Representatives about closing the Special Education \$4 Million Dollar gap. He explained to them this overrun of the Budget was no one's fault. It was an increase in the student enrollment. The only way the City Council can come up with another \$4 Million Dollars is to cut out entire departments on the Municipal side but that is not realistic and as Mayor, he would never do that. If anything improves during the he is committed to being the School Dept.'s strongest advocate to provide additional monies.

Ms. DiNatale-The reason she keeps mentioning City Council is they have another vote. Last night there was no public comments and she could not stand up and say \$78 Million Dollars in her opinion is not the right number for students. She is not asking the Mayor to shut down departments but she is going to say there is a reason they are in the situation they are in today. There are a lot of contracts that have been approved over the past few years that are not right for this City and leave our schools underfunded. She appreciates that there is \$6 Million Dollars more in this year's Budget but that does not change the fact that this number is not enough to properly educate our students. They are not getting the things that all of them agreed are important to the students education and they are not getting the education that Methuen families deserve to get. Mandates, transportation and Special Education services are going up and the

City cannot keep funding the School Dept. the same amount. They are losing important staff members even with the money the City is giving them. She is asking the Mayor and City Council to figure this out. The services to the students will be less than last year. Are the additional foreign language positions and social studies positions being filled this year?

Superintendent-No

Ms. DiNatale-Without those positions we will not be able to offer the courses they needed to offer for college prep and honors level.

Superintendent-Yes, they will offer those courses. They have worked it out.

Ms. DiNatale-She asked about the residency check and was told by the Superintendent it could not be done.

Superintendent-She does not have the staff to do this.

Ms. DiNatale-Will the failing bridge at the CGS be repaired in this \$78 Million Dollar Budget?

Mr. Gosselin-No

Ms. DiNatale-Will they be replacing playgrounds that they were previously told would not pass inspection in this \$78 Million Dollar Budget?

Mr. Gosselin-They are working on fixing the playground at the Timony. The other playground they will fix to pass inspection.

Ms. DiNatale-Is the sidewalk that was out of compliance with the ADA being repaired in this \$78 Million Dollar Budget?

Mr. Gosselin-At the high school, yes.

Ms. DiNatale-Are the Psychologist they spoke about hiring in this \$78 Million Dollar Budget?

Superintendent-No

Mayor-He has spoken with the Superintendent and the Business Administrator about collaborating on the playgrounds. He wants to be helpful. It is not about money it is about involving the DPW to collaborate with Bruce Stella.

Mr. Deeb-He feels the entire School Committee wants to continue to provide the best top quality programs and services for all of our students. The Mayor asked the School Dept. to come in with planning and items for their budget that they felt that they needed to run the School District in an ideal fashion. That is what they did. He voted against the \$82.5 Million Dollar Budget. He felt it was fiscally irresponsible and he still feels that way. They have hired the Superintendent and put their trust in her and year after year she receives glowing evaluations from this School Committee. She is a miracle worker. He has been on four different school boards and worked with many different Superintendents and they are very fortunate to have Superintendent Judy Scannell. She does a fantastic job advocating for the students. The City is cash strapped and he agrees with Ms. DiNatale that there are contracts that were approved that are outrageous and put the City in this situation. \$82.5 Million Dollars was too large. \$74-\$76 Million was not enough. \$78 Million Dollars puts them in a better position. This is not ideal but they also have a responsibility to the taxpayers. At one of the budget meetings they received from the administration an overview of what the budget numbers would have been for Methuen Public Schools had they received the same increases that all of the other major City Departments have received over the years. That is 3%. Back to 2016 that would put us at \$72 Million Dollars. For fiscal year 2019 that would put us at \$78.4 Million Dollars. We are almost there in terms of being comparable to the other departments. They need to be creative and in the Superintendents comments tonight she is prepared to do that. He would like to thank the Mayor and his Chief of Staff for their work on the Chargebacks and Medicaid agreements. Those alone bring in several hundred thousand dollars in additional each year to the School Dept. that they will be able to keep which should be used for the schools since it is money that is generated by and for the schools. He gives credit to the Mayor for recognizing that. As a District, they are not ideally, where they want to be. That will take some time and planning. He asked the Superintendent if she feels with this Budget being put before them tonight, that they will be doing less for students this coming year than what they did for students last year.

Superintendent-No. She does not feel they will do less for students. The impact is usually on the Administration. Everything will run smoothly. Her \$82.5 Million Dollar Budget was her vision for this School District moving forward.

Ms. Zanni Pesce-She was surprised a number was announced at the City Council meeting last night. She would have like to see the handout prior to this meeting tonight.

Mr. Gosselin-The handout was drafted at 4:45PM today.

Ms. Zanni Pesce-She received many calls today asking how the \$78 Million Dollars was going to work. She had no idea what it represented since they had not received anything before tonight's meeting. Is the Family Resource Center going to be eliminated?

Superintendent-No it is not. She made it clear to School Committee she would update them on Budget numbers when she received them. She set up a meeting at the last recessed School Committee meeting. She did not get a number so the meeting was cancelled. She was told she would be given a number at the City Council Meeting that was held last night. When that meeting was set she was told one thing and then things changed and everyone was told they were going to a 1/12th Budget. The Mayor committed to \$78 Million Dollars and would publicly state that. She said yes to the \$78 Million Dollars. There are many pieces involved with this and she told the School Committee she had 52 employees that were out there waiting to see if they would be recalled. This is a number they worked hard to get to. As the Superintendent of Schools, it is her job to work on staffing and make all of those decisions, which she has done. This is why this meeting was set up, so she could walk the School Committee through what the staffing is and how the recall happens. That is why they are here tonight.

Ms. DiNatale-Requested that the school attorney be in attendance. She would like Sarah Spatafore to step forward and state what the role of the School Committee is in allocating resources and the correct procedure when the Mayor gives a budget number to the Superintendent.

Ms. Spatafore-The appropriating body is not just the Mayor it is the City Council. The Mayor can come up with a number but it is the City Council that appropriates the money. The process is the School Committee submits their budget and the City Council votes on it. They can either fully fund it, fund it more than or fund it less than. They cannot make line item changes. The City Council did not fund the budget so they came back with a new number that is being presented to the School Committee tonight. It is on the School Department to take the number given by the City and come up with a budget that is then suggested to the School Committee and they can either accept the budget, make changes to the budget, or ask for a new budget. It is not the Mayor that is making the decision on the budget, it is the City Council that decides how much to fund the School Dept. The School Committee has full jurisdiction over the budget and where the money goes and which departments they go to and which areas are funded. The Superintendent, this is the fine line with the reform act, is tasked with staffing those areas. The staffing decisions are made by the Superintendent. The School Committee makes the funding decisions. What is being discussed tonight is to recall staff. The money has to go to certain places due to licensure issues. If they redistribute the money into an area that they did not have staff on recall or licensed, they would not be able to recall the staff. They would have to bring in different staff to fund that area. What is being presented tonight to bring back staff and where they would have to fund to recall the existing staff. This is fully in the purview of the School Committee to change the allocation of funding.

Ms. DiNatale-If the School Committee decided they wanted to bring back the Deans next year could they make the decision as to where to allocate resources?

Ms. Spatafore-Yes, if there is a line item that supports the Deans.

Ms. DiNatale-If they determined they wanted to cut line by line and fill a new position could they do that?

Ms. Spatafore-As long as there is no collective bargaining issue or statutory issue.

Ms. Nicholson-Did Ms. Spatafore respond in saying the School Committee could fill a new position?

Ms. Spatafore-Not new. It may be a different recall position.

Ms. Nicholson-Any of the new positions included in the \$82.5 Million Dollar Budget, there is no funding source for those so the School Committee could not move forward and fill those positions. Is that correct?

Ms. Spatafore-That is correct. You would need to fill the jobs that have been cut.

Ms. Zanni Pesce-The Superintendents concerns are the same as hers. They all justified the new positions. She understands that they are not in this Budget. She does need more clarification on the cut positions that will be coming back.

Mr. Gosselin-They try to not be too specific when speaking about positions until after the person has been called back.

Ms. Zanni Pesce-Are all the classroom teachers back with the \$78 Million Dollars?

Superintendent-Yes. All classroom teachers.

Ms. Zanni Pesce-The only ones remaining are the nine administrators, 4 secretaries and two unaffiliated?

Superintendent-Yes.

Ms. Zanni Pesce-Are any programs from last year on the chopping block for this budget?

Superintendent-No

Mr. DiZoglio-The FY'19 Budget is gone. It was rejected. They were given a number last night.

Mayor-He gave the Superintendent and the School Committee a number late yesterday which was the \$78 Million Dollars for the Budget and a separate amount of \$500,000.00.

Mr. DiZoglio-That is based on the agreement that was signed on Monday.

Mayor-Yes and he signed it.

Mr. DiZoglio-Last night City Council passed a 1/12th Budget which allocated \$6 Million Dollars to the School Department. That is our Budget now. He feels if the City Council had an additional \$4 Million Dollars to give the School Dept. they would have. People are losing their jobs and other departments are complaining about a contract. He feels they need to get back together as a team and stop pointing fingers about who didn't tell who about a number that they did not make up. It was given to them. The City Council gets it and to put blame on one person is not fair. No student is going to be affected by this budget. He regrets voting for the \$72 Million Dollar Budget last year. A majority of the School Committee voted for that as well. There are no raises this year and no new positions. The Superintendent has not taken a raise in 4 years. They are at a point where they need to work as a team and figure out how they are going to get through this.

Mr. Vogler-He has total faith in the Superintendent. They are lucky they have her. She does not do it for the money she does it for her passion of education. They are bringing back the 1st 2nd and 3rd year teachers. They are bringing back all the programs that could have possibly been cut. The Mayor and the Superintendent have worked together and they care. He is in support of this Budget. The administration team works very hard with only a few support staff. He made a mistake when he voted last year for the level funded Budget. This Budget isn't an ideal Budget but it maintains the system.

Ms. Nicholson-No one feels the Superintendents anguish more than her. She has been where the Superintendent is and it is not a good place to be. No one recognizes the intense work that you do behind the scenes alone, with your administrative team, the Mayor and the City Council. The most important thing, in her opinion, are to preserve your relationships with the people who have the power to vote funding for your students. She learned that lesson a long time ago. She wants to thank the Superintendent and commend her for fighting as hard as she did and effectively as she did to increase the Budget for the students and staff. She did hear the words tonight "fiscal stability" and they all need to be cognizant of that. Would she like to say they were fully funded at \$82.5 Million Dollars? Yes. The intent of that amount of money was to do more for the students. They will not be doing less for the students but they wanted to do more for

the students. She is hopeful with additional money and maybe additional retirements and resignations they will be able to bring back the administrators, secretaries and unaffiliated. She understands the challenges and complexity when you have to bring people back as soon as possible. It was sad that the last day of school for the students was very different due to the uncertainty of who would be the teacher in that classroom. She thanked the Superintendent for having the best last day of school for students that you could possibly work towards and for. She appreciates what her colleagues around the table have said this evening. She has confidence that they are now in a time where School Committee, City Council and the Mayor will continue to work towards additional funding for the schools. She feels very strongly that a commitment has been made tonight by the Mayor. She feels she heard that commitment from the City Council at the meetings she attended. She is hopeful they will have joint meetings over the next year so they have improved communication and collaboration. She thinks the \$78 Million Dollar Budget is one she can live with along with the additional \$500,000.00 and possibly more money coming forward. She does not envy the Superintendent and her team for the work that is about to begin as you look at licensure for the people that she would like to bring back and needs to bring back. They truly appreciate everything the Superintendent has done. She has answered all of their questions. Her and her team have provided every piece of information the School Committee has asked for. She feels they justified the need for every new position. They didn't get it, its okay they will move forward but they need to preserve their relationships with all of the people they work with so that it remains positive. She is committed to that and she know her colleagues are committed to that. She is very happy about the Chargeback information as well as the Medicaid. She appreciates the Mayors commitment to education and the students. She is in favor of supporting a \$78 Million Dollar Budget.

MOTION: Mr. Vogler moved to accept the \$78,000,000.00 Budget
Ms. Nicholson seconded the motion

DISCUSSION-

Ms. DiNatale-She will be voting no and she would like to give her reasons why. The students deserve an adequate education. What they are getting in this budget is not what they deserve. No cost of living increase for the teachers. This budget does not account for the Out of District tuition increases, school security issues and school psychologists. Her vote will be no.
Mayor -He will abstain from voting. It would be inappropriate and illegal for him to vote.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Robert F. Vogler- Yes
Ms. Susan M. Nicholson- Yes
Mr. Nicholas DiZoglio, Vice Chairperson- Yes
Ms. Jana DiNatale- No
Mr. Dennis D.J. Deeb, Secretary- Yes
Ms. Jana Zanni Pesce- No
Mayor James P. Jajuga, Chairperson- abstain

VOTE: 6-2-1

***ADJOURNMENT:**

With no further business to discuss at this Special Meeting, Mayor Jajuga entertained a motion to conclude the Special Meeting for the evening at 6:52 pm.

MOTION: Mr. DiZoglio moved to adjourn the Workshop Session at 6:52 pm.
Mr. Vogler seconded the motion

ROLL CALL

Mr. Robert F. Vogler- Yes
Ms. Susan M. Nicholson- Yes
Mr. Nicholas DiZoglio, Vice Chairperson- Yes
Ms. Jana DiNatale- Yes
Mr. Dennis D.J. Deeb, Secretary- Yes
Ms. Jana Zanni Pesce- Yes
Mayor James P. Jajuga, Chairperson- Yes

VOTE: 7-0-0 UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Sirois, Public Recorder

Methuen Public Schools