

TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDED MINUTES

OF

THE METHUEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

WORKSHOP SESSION

OF

June 7, 2016

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
WORKSHOP SESSION
June 7, 2016

This Workshop of the Methuen School Committee was held at the Central Administration Building, Superintendent's Office and was posted for 6:30 PM.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mayor Stephen Zanni, Chairperson Present (P)
Ms. Lynne Hajjar Kumm, Vice Chairperson (P)
Mr. Robert F. Vogler, Secretary (P)
Mr. Dennis D.J. Deeb (P)
Ms. Jana DiNatale (P)
Ms. Joyce C. Campagnone (P)
Mr. Nicholas DiZoglio (P)

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs. Judith Scannell, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Brandi Kwong, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Ian Gosselin, Business Administrator
Ms. Gina Bozek, Student Services Director
Ms. Martha Sirois, Public Recorder

CALL TO ORDER AND ATTENDANCE:

Mayor Stephen Zanni, Chairperson called this Workshop to order at 6:30 p.m. with a quorum of members in attendance, and listed above.

Infinite Campus Contract

Superintendent-Mr. Lussier is here this evening to show you a copy of the Infinite Campus contract that the Committee will vote on at our next Business Meeting.

Mr. Lussier-The dollar amounts are listed in the contract. These are the annual prices for 2 modules. We will be receiving a discount the first 2 years of the contract and this number will start year 3. Because of the timing, the initial year is 13 months. The initial year cost is \$75,616.83. Year 2 goes up about \$1,000.00. Year 3 will be at their typical rate that they charge. We were looking at an additional 3 month contract in the beginning but he is doing everything with Infinite Campus on spreadsheets so he only has to pay for 1 month of service not 3 months. There are a few modules that were removed and will be added in as we continue the year.

Mr. DiZoglio-Point of Interest; He stepped away from the last discussion when the Bid was voted on because of the company he works for. He will also not be able to vote on the contract. He feels this is a good thing for Methuen Public Schools.

Ms. DiNatale-How long is the contract?

Mr. Lussier-It is a 3 year contract with 2 optional years.

Ms. DiNatale-Can we negotiate after the 3 years?

Mr. Lussier-Yes

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-On page 3 there is a 12 month product fee. Was this in the original Bid?
Mr. Lussier-Yes. It is part of Human Resource (H.R.). The parent portal will be up and running for the beginning of the school year. He has had many teachers come to him and ask if the system is available to use. They are excited about the new system. We have just created a training plan.

Mayor-When we vote on Monday what is the amount we will be voting on?

Mr. Lussier-Page 3 Initial year, \$75,516.83. He will clean up the contract and get the Committee a clean figure for the vote. It will be the \$75,516.83 plus H.R. and implementation costs.

Superintendent-Please call Ed if you have any further questions.

Mr. Lussier-Our attorneys have also reviewed the contract.

Budget

Superintendent-Ms. Bozek has a breakdown of the Medicaid Revenue which was requested by Mr. Vogler.

Ms. Bozek-This is a 10 year overview which goes back to 2005. The bottom line is the total Medicaid Revenue each year. FY 2008 was over 1 Million Dollars. That is when we had the stimulus funds.

Mr. Vogler-When was the agreement finalized with Mayor Manzi and Superintendent Whitten?
Superintendent - 2008 or 2009.

Mr. Vogler-The agreement was that the school would receive anything over \$500,000.00. Last year did we receive the \$395,000.00 from the City?

Ms. Bozek-No

Mr. Vogler-We have not received any money from that agreement. There is a shortfall of \$395,000.00 from last year, 2015. There is no agreement in writing however the agreement was through 2017. He is concerned there was an agreement and it has not been honored. Do you have the 2016 figures?

Ms. Bozek-Not yet but it will be over \$500,000.00.

Mr. Vogler-In the past year we have given $\frac{3}{4}$ of a Million Dollars to the City and we have not received any money. The agreement was not validated and lived up to. This is important when we go before City Council with our School Budget.

Ms. Campagnone-Mayor have you seen this agreement?

Mayor-There is nothing in writing. The agreement was prior to him becoming Mayor.

Ms. Campagnone-Did we search the City Council Meeting Minutes?

Superintendent-We have looked there is nothing. It was a verbal agreement.

Mr. Vogler-Did you search the School Committee Minutes?

Superintendent-Yes

Mayor-In 2006 the City Council was looking for money for the new high school. This was a verbal agreement to help with building the new high school. He is projecting that the School Department will receive $\frac{1}{2}$ Million Dollars this year. He will sign an agreement with this Committee for anything over \$500,000.00.

Superintendent-She and Mr. Gosselin are in the process of writing an agreement.

Mr. Vogler-His concern is FY15. There was \$395,000.00 that the School Department did not receive. The City accountants should have informed the Mayor what was above the \$500,000.00.

Mayor-That money had to do with the snow and ice.

Mr. Vogler-In 2017 we are finished paying for the Elementary School Bond. In theory, this agreement should be changed.

Mr. DiZoglio-What is the amount owed the City owes to us through Medicaid?

Mr. Vogler-The agreement was anything over \$500,000.00.

Mr. Gosselin-He suggests that they move forward from here.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-We receive the Medicaid money for the students we service. Why is the money going to the City?

Mayor-The history is that 4 City Council members went to see Mayor Manzi to say they would not vote yes for a new high school unless the School Department pays for some of the building. The Superintendent at the time agreed to give \$500,000.00 per year of the Medicaid funds to the City and the School Department would receive the remainder.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-In 2006 did the City Council know about this agreement?

Mayor-Yes

Mr. DiZoglio-As Chairman of the City Council at the time did you know about this agreement?

Mayor-I was not at the table. It was a verbal agreement.

Ms. DiNatale-Was the City receiving Medicaid funds before this agreement?

Mayor-He does not know.

Ms. DiNatale-Why are we still give the money to the City? She feels this is unethical.

Mayor-There are minutes on the City side that this was passed on the Council Floor. The agreement was until the elementary schools are done and that is next year. There is a lot of work involved with getting this Medicaid money. If you want everything over ½ Million Dollars going forward to go to the school that is fine. There is no actual signed agreement.

Ms. DiNatale-She is bothered by the City Council wanting to benefit themselves and not the School Department.

Mayor-The City Council votes on the tax rate and the City would not vote for a tax increase so they came up with this idea. He doesn't remember anything over ½ Million Dollars going back to the School Department.

Mr. Vogler-Is this a bad way to do business? Yes. Did we get a new high school? Yes. Going forward we need to look at this issue. He would like it put in the agreement that this money comes back to us as a charge back credit. Our attorneys will have to sort this out. The other option is give the City nothing. There are no requirements for us to give the City any money.

Mayor-Please be careful what is being said here.

New Budget Book

Superintendent-She has handed out to the Committee a new Budget Book. At the last meeting they discussed 1 Million Dollars in cuts. The Committee did not want any further cuts from the Budget. This Budget Book is based on \$73,796,158.00. We started the process of the Budget with the amount of \$74,796,183.00. She asked Mr. Gosselin to walk the Committee through the new Budget.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-What is the percent increase?

Mr. Gosselin-3.4 percent.

Mr. DiZoglio-Is the MHS theater teacher in this Budget?

Mr. Gosselin-Yes

Mr. DiZoglio-Is Infinite Campus included in the Budget?

Mr. Gosselin-Yes

Ms. DiNatale-Although there is an increase in the Budget salaries have decreased, correct?

Mr. Gosselin-Yes. He has also made additional cuts to plowing and supplies.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-Why have the facilities increased 9.6 percent?

Mr. Gosselin-Increases in utilities. The utilities are included in the facilities budget.

Mr. Gosselin presented a power point with the Budget breakdown which is included in the new Budget Book.

Mr. Gosselin-The Mayor brought him some new information. He will get it to the School Committee tomorrow.

Mr. DiZoglio-Is it the City Budget?

Mr. Gosselin-Yes

Mayor-He can't agree with the School Committee Budget. Any amount over the 71 Million Dollars will require a tax override. We have hit the tax levy limit. He does not want to touch the stabilization fund. He was just told the ice rink roof is full of asbestos and will cost much more than he originally thought. If you move forward with the Budget amount you want, there will have to be a tax override.

Mr. Deeb-He will never support a tax override. City department budgets are being increased but you are asking the schools to make cuts. The police already have new vehicles. The City spends more than they should.

Mayor-In 2009-2010 the City side took a pay cut and layoffs and the schools took an increase. Your percentage of the Medicaid money should be \$500,000.00. His is concerned with the amount we are paying for transportation. He wonders if we are paying too much. He followed a CGS bus and could not believe how many stops the bus made. He is still waiting for the balances in the revolving accounts that he requested. Are there anymore cuts we can make to the School Budget?

Superintendent-She has a list of more cuts but they will be staff layoffs.

Mr. Vogler-Before you hand out that list, he would like to see the Medicaid information. He addressed the Mayor about the revolving accounts. He told him that if he touches the money in the revolving accounts he is taking away from the students as well as the ice rink repairs. He asked the Mayor what the City Budget increase was for this year.

Mayor-3%.

Mr. Vogler-We are proposing a 3.4% increase but you do not want that. We have a 1.9 Million Dollar increase in Collaborative Tuitions. Theoretically, we are looking at a 2 Million Dollar cut. He thinks we would have to lay off 40+ staff members. Should we charge a \$2,000.00 Kindergarten fee? Should we cut coaches or charge a user fee? He does not like user fees. June 14th is the last day to send out layoff notices. We will not be able to hire any new teachers.

Mayor-Why would you hand out layoff notices before the City Council votes?

Mr. Vogler-The City Council meeting is on June 16th. It is after the last date for layoff notices to be handed out.

Mayor-School Committee votes on Monday on your Budget. Let's see what happens with the override.

Mr. Vogler-If we wait beyond the June 14th date the teachers must come back in September and work for 30 days. If the City is going up 3% then the schools should go up 3%. We should all take budget cuts.

Mr. DiZoglio-He will never support user fees or bus fees. We do not have a lot of sidewalks. The buses are stopping where they are because of safety concerns. He will not support layoff. He will not support layoffs of extracurricular teachers. Our teachers do not have the opportunity to make overtime money like the City Employees.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-At a bare bones minimum budget of \$68,000.00 you cannot guarantee that taxes will not go up. We were given data and now you say the increase for the City Budget is 3%. The City pay cuts from 2009-2010 had been made up in comp time. The School Department's last 2 contract rounds have been very conservative. She wanted to see the City increases and has not yet received that information.

Mayor-You are comparing apples to oranges. Call you City Councilor and ask them to go over the City Budget with you.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-If we had the City figures they would have empowered the School Committee to the City Council for increases. The City Council was so happy at graduation celebrating the success of our students. What City funds at Net Spending?

Mayor-You are looking at a tax increase. For a Budget of \$71,330,000.00 you are looking at a tax increase of \$120.00. Adding in an additional 2 Million Dollars you are looking at an increase of almost \$300.00. Your teachers also have step increases. The City does not have those.

Mr. DiZoglio-Are you making more cuts to the City Budget?

Mayor-The Police Dept. and the Fire Dept. Budgets have both increased. Every other department is either level funded or their budget has decreased. He understands the school increases but he has met with the City Council and they only want to fund a 69 Million Dollar School Budget.

Mr. Vogler-Where are we going to get the money? He agrees with Mr. DiZoglio but he is realistic in that we cannot spend money we do not have. These are tough decisions. He would like to see the City and School Budgets increase the same percentage. He and Mr. DiZoglio have reviewed the Charge Backs. They are questioning why 37% of the entire Auditor and Tax Collectors Office are charged to the School Department. We do not approve of the Charge Back list and would like to ask the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to come in and look at the list. 12 hours a week these departments are working on our budget? He wants a letter sent to each of the department heads for a detailed explanation as to how they are spending these 12 hours a week out of 37 hours working for the school department.

Mayor-He has not problem with contacting DESE.

Mr. Vogler-The sooner the better. He would like the City department heads and DESE contacted.

Mayor-The School Committee can send a letter to DESE and ask for an audit of the Charge Backs.

Mr. Vogler-Plan A is to submit the 73 Million Dollar Budget. Do we have a plan B? Will we charge for services? We need to have a plan B.

Ms. Campagnone-Why are we being charged by the City departments? We are one community. Why do we pay the City Human Resource salaries? What do they do for the School Department?

Mayor-3 years ago the Superintendent and I met with Tom Kelly and Glenn Fratto. We asked the school to come up with an agreement for Charge Backs. The charges are based on that agreement.

Ms. Campagnone-She wants to know what they do for the school side. We get charged for the school officers. Why doesn't the City pay for them?

Mayor-The School Committee made the decision to have an officer in every school.

Mr. Vogler-The original deal with the safety officers was to have 40%-50% paid by the school side.

Ms. Campagnone-Why do we have to have sergeants and captains on the school side? That needs to change. She thinks the Committee should revisit that agreement.

Mr. Vogler-He would like to put on Monday's agenda a vote to have DESE come in and do an audit of the Charge Backs.

Ms. DiNatale-Before she votes on a 73 Million Dollar Budget she needs to understand everything. If we go to the City Council and ask for a tax increase and it does not go through, what additional cuts are we looking at?

Superintendent-We will be at bare bones with our coaching staff. There is no fluff with the coaches. The next round of cuts will be staff. She would need to cut \$1,299,000.00 in staff. Everyone is forgetting that the 3 Million Dollar increase is tuitions.

Ms. DiNatale-If we implement fees we will not even come close to helping with the Budget. Would Kindergarten fees help out? We need to figure out a plan B. We should not implement teacher's cuts. We should implement Kindergarten fees.

Superintendent-Most Cities and Towns charge \$5,000.00-\$8,000.00 fees. It would be a tax on the parents.

Mayor-If you did the fee you would pay for your budget increase.

Superintendent-We have 30 Kindergarten classrooms with 20 students in each class. That fee would pay for the teachers.

Dr. Kwong-The State is trying to do away with Kindergarten fees. If you go with fees for Kindergarten a lot of our students will stay in private schools for Kindergarten.

Mayor-What if we did a half day Kindergarten and charged for the second half.

Dr. Kwong-The State wants full day Kindergarten. North Andover charges \$6,600.00 for full day Kindergarten. They are looking for sustainability for the program. They will get less money from the State if they continue to charge for Kindergarten and cuts if they continue with the half day.

Ms. DiNatale-She is not in favor of fees but we have to have a plan B to explain to the parents why we need the tax increase. What about Athletic fees?

Superintendent-That would be minimal money. She needs to stress this is a bare bones budget.

Mayor-He is looking at the deans and the money they make. He thinks the teachers are more important than the deans.

Superintendent-The deans are worth their weight in gold. People have flown in from across the Country to see our program.

Dr. Kwong-She understands people look at administrators. Her experience in this district is that we add positions because we need them. We are moving forward with our social emotional programs. We are putting Methuen on the map. If we remove the deans, those programs will be gone. Without the deans the principals and the associate principals will only deal with discipline and not be in the classrooms. If we want to move this district forward, we cannot do this by cutting administrators. It would be a step back in our system.

Superintendent-She was supervising principal in 2 buildings for 2 years because the City underfunded the School Budget. It was horrendous. The deans have brought the teachers forward. We are not administrative heavy in this district.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-She fought hiring the deans but then the Teacher Evaluation came along and the Bullying Laws.

Superintendent-The Teacher Evaluations go directly to the DESE.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-If you want to get rid of deans let's talk about the City side. Is there any more room in the City Budget to make cuts? The Community will come out and not be happy with cuts.

Mayor-He brought the City Budget tonight and gave it to Mr. Gosselin. He will make more cuts but then the school will be level funded.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-She has asked for the increases to the City Budget by department but the City will not give them to her.

Mr. DiZoglio-We cannot say as a Committee that we support a tax override. We still need to negotiate more. We support this Budget. We need as a Committee to go into these schools and walk in the shoes of the employees. We will never be able to get parents to pay fees.

Mayor-He will take this budget number and the number from the City and see what an increase in taxes would be.

Superintendent-She has met with some of the City Councilors and will meet with the rest of them by the end of the week. Ms. DiNatale asked a great question about fees but they will only be a drop in the bucket.

Ms. DiNatale-She would like a list of cuts so she can explain them to the parents.

Mayor-He is still working numbers.

Ms. DiNatale-If we want parents to support us we need to explain to them what could happen. She will never support teacher cuts. She sees things in the City Budget that could be cut to save a teacher. We can't avoid these teacher costs. She still questions the amount of administration in each school. She thinks we really need the deans for the discipline issues. Teachers cannot educate the students if they are dealing with discipline issues.

Superintendent-The deans are right there to help with the discipline issues. Cutting administrators is tough. They are needed in the buildings.

Mayor-Monday's School Committee Meeting will have a public hearing at 6:00PM. June 16th the Superintendent goes before the City Council.

Mr. Deeb-When we vote a budget we have nothing to do with a tax override. The School and City should share the burden. He agrees we have a bare bones budget. We have a lot of guidance councilors we could maybe cut in that department.

Mayor-The Superintendent and I will work together to get to a number. It will be difficult for both sides to make any additional cuts. We have a large city population and over 7000 students. This City has grown and we have to look at both sides, City and School. If we can get to a number and find the money he will agree to the Budget. There is money coming to the School Department from Medicaid. He may be able to take some money from the Stabilization fund. There is a mental health issue in this City and he now understands the importance of the deans. He appreciates this Committees effort to have a good School Budget.

Dr. Kwong-We want people to move into this district for the schools. The schools will sell this Community. She wishes City Council would understand that.

Mayor-If we can get to the numbers this year we will be all set and in a good place next year. We have many new homes so we will have a tax increase in the City Budget. He has made cuts to the Police and other departments. He will not cut Police Officers or Fire Fighters. We have a heroin problem in the Merrimack Valley but not in Methuen. Police, Fire and Department of Public Works (DPW) are so important to the safety of our Community. He would never take the Police out of the schools.

Superintendent-She told the Committee they will all hear from her before Monday.

Mr. Gosselin-The Student Activity Accounts are audited every 3 years. The other 2 years we are required to have an internal audit. He would like the internal audit to be completed by Frank Antonelli at \$85.00 per hour. He will bring this to the Committee on Monday for a vote. He also wanted to update the Committee on the cooling tower at the Tenney. It has a leak and they received a quote of \$19,000.00 to repair the tower. He has a 1 year Capital Improvement Plan that he would like to submit with the Budget. We have not had a Capital Improvement Plan for many years.

Superintendent-She just received the Cape Cod November conference information and it is all on mental health if anyone is interested. Boston Magazine is doing an article on our Guidance Department Chair John Crocker about our Guidance programs in the Methuen Public Schools.

***ADJOURNMENT:**

With no further business to discuss at this Workshop Session, Mayor Zanni entertained a motion to conclude the Workshop Session for the evening at 9:07PM.

MOTION: Mr. Deeb moved to adjourn the Workshop at 9:07PM.
Ms. Campagnone seconded.

VOTE: 7-0-0 UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED

Respectfully submitted,
Martha Sirois, Public Recorder
Methuen Public Schools