

**Portsmouth School Board  
Portsmouth, New Hampshire**

**Minutes of the June 26, 2007 Meeting**

A meeting of the Portsmouth School Board was held on Tuesday, June 26, 2007 in the Board Room at Little Harbour School.

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***Attendance***

**PRESENT:** Mr. Kent F. LaPage (Chair), Mrs. Nancy Novelline Clayburgh (Vice-Chair), Ms. Sheri Ham Garrity, Mr. Clay Hayward, Mr. John Lyons, Jr., Mr. Brendan Ristaino, Mr. Carson Smith, Mrs. Ann Walker

**ABSENT:** Dr. Mitchell Shuldman

**PARTICIPATING:** Dr. Robert J. Lister (Superintendent of Schools), Mr. Stephen Zadravec (Assistant Superintendent), Mr. Stephen T. Bartlett (Business Administrator), Mrs. Linda Briolat (Employee Representative), and Mrs. Ann Mayer (SAU 50 Representative)

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***Non-Public Session***

Prior to the regular meeting, the School Board met in non-public session at 6:45 p.m. in the Board Room at Little Harbour School. This non-public session was held in accordance with RSA 91-A: 3 II. (b), and was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

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***Call to Order***

Chair LaPage called the regular meeting of the Portsmouth School Board to order at 7:08 p.m. The Chair stated there have been a number of sad things that have occurred since the Board last met two weeks ago. He stated that Ed Lawrence, a Portsmouth resident who attended School Board and City Council meetings, passed away. The Chair said that Mr. Lawrence respected due process and the process of budget work sessions. The Chair said the school system also lost two former members: Jhaimie Dye, a Rye resident who graduated from Portsmouth High School two years ago died in a car accident this weekend; and Nick Greenberg, the son of former Superintendent Nate Greenberg and Nancy Greenberg, died last week. Chair LaPage said that Mr. Greenberg was his first superintendent as a school board member. He said the hearts of Board members go out to these families at this time of sorrow, and he asked the Board to keep them in their thoughts and prayers along with members of the Armed Forces who are protecting our Country. Mr. Hayward led the Pledge

***Moment of Silent  
Reflection –  
Remembrances***

of Allegiance.

### **Approval of Minutes**

***Minutes Amended  
and Approved***

The Chair called for approval of the June 12, 2007 minutes. Ms. Garrity moved, seconded by Mr. Ristaino, the minutes be approved. Mrs. Walker requested a correction on page three. She was not present at the meeting and, therefore, unable to make a motion. The minutes were unanimously approved as amended.

### **Correspondence**

***Thank You Notes  
Accepted and  
Placed on File***

The Board received thank you notes from Paula Bruno, retired English teacher at Portsmouth High School, and Pamela MacArtney, retired Career Technology Director at Portsmouth High School, thanking them for the retirement reception and for the plaques they received recognizing their service to the students and community. Ms. Garrity moved, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the correspondence be accepted and placed on file.

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### **AGENDA APPROVAL**

The Board did not add items to this agenda.

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### **PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION**

***Public Commentary  
Session***

Chair LaPage called the Public Commentary Session to order and stated there is a 30 minute time limit, and each speaker will be limited to three minutes. (Mr. Lyons arrived at this time – 7:12 p.m.)

Mrs. Lisa Sweet, 259 Miller Avenue, Portsmouth, told the Board she believes participants involved in the Study Circles from “Portsmouth Listens” did not reflect the entire community. She said the median income in Portsmouth is \$60,000, not \$106,000, and the three elementary schools qualify for Title 1 services and Free and Reduced lunches; meaning a family of four earns less than \$38,000. She said these families are the ones that most need the community to think beyond themselves as the parents work and cannot participate in events such as the study circles. Ms. Sweet said Parrott Avenue site is too small and does not make sense; the Sagamore site allows a greater educational impact and will cost less and take less time. She said to build on Parrott Avenue will not only disrupt the Middle School students, but High School students as well if the students are housed at the High School, and the site would not meet the educational narrative and there is not enough parking. Mrs. Sweet said the Sagamore Avenue site supports the educational narrative,

**Public Commentary Session (cont.)** would meet the standards set by the New Hampshire Department of Education, and is more responsible to the taxpayers.

Mr. Hank Sanders, 579 Sagamore Avenue, Portsmouth, suggested an opportunity be provided for the Parrott Avenue site to be reviewed by another architectural firm. He said this would be a positive step in the best interest of the City of Portsmouth.

Ms. Carolyn Chellman, 430 Richards Avenue, Portsmouth, handed printed documents to the Chair and offered to get individual copies for Board members if requested. She prefaced her remarks by asking the Board if they have considered offering child care during meetings so that parents may attend the meetings. Ms. Chellman said the writing is on the wall that the Parrott Avenue site is the site the School Board will be moving towards. She said the School Board should be incredibly happy that there is a public mandate to do something about the present Middle School building. She said the Board did not have the support for the Jones site, but does have it for Parrott Avenue. She said there are agencies that will assist the Board in advising them on sites for schools, and she believes it will all start to come together for Parrott Avenue.

Ms. Pat Gormley, 579 Sagamore Avenue, Portsmouth, said she served on one of the study circles and she was happy to have the opportunity to interact with her fellow citizens on this issue. Ms. Gormley said the green effect (environmental issues) are very important, and she hopes these issues are taken into consideration during construction or renovation. She said that as the Parrott Avenue site is taken into consideration, she hopes that historical preservation will be addressed and the Board will find a firm that will work with them to provide the proper space for scholastic academics and athletic provisions for the Middle School. She thanked the Board for the opportunity to participate in the study circles process.

Mrs. Sue Christmas, 87 Ridge Road, York, Maine, and guidance counselor at the Middle School, said she has just completed her 39<sup>th</sup> years as a public educator; 27 years at the middle school level as a teacher and a guidance counselor. Mrs. Christmas said she has witnessed the fragility of middle school students who look strong to the world but are really very vulnerable. She said she has spent a good deal of her time working with students who are working through problems. She said that she believes the new school should not be on Parrott Avenue because: she has heard to do so would require a waiver of the standards on class size, the site does not accommodate required parking, the school could not have an auditorium, and the standard for the playing field would also have to be waived. Mrs. Christmas said that many people are concerned about childhood obesity, and asked how a school could be built

**Public Commentary  
Session (cont.)**

without a playing field. As for being downtown, she said that she cannot find a middle school parent who wants their child on the downtown streets in the afternoon. She said the children need to be supervised and safe; they need to be in the Homework Club, in sports programs, at New Heights, or at home where they are safe and supervised. She thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak and presented the Chair with the signatures of 34 people who support a new middle school at the Jones Avenue site.

There were no other speakers to address the Board. The Chair declared the Public Commentary Session closed.

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**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

***National Night Out***

National Night Out – Board members agreed to participate again in National Night Out (Tuesday, August 7<sup>th</sup>) and to visit as many of the neighborhoods as possible.

***Middle School***

Portsmouth Middle School – Superintendent Lister said the topic of the Middle School was placed on the agenda this evening based on comments made at last week's work session. The Board was provided with a draft of a letter to be sent to the City Council, based on comments from that work session. The Chair gave a copy to Mrs. Mayer, who asked if Dr. Cushing (Superintendent of SAU 50) has seen it. Mr. Lyons agreed that Dr. Cushing should see a copy of the letter, and added that Helen Maldini, a member of the Newington School Board, was in attendance at last week's work session.

Mr. Lyons requested to talk to the subject rather than to the letter at this time. He said he considers Lisa Sweet to be one of the educational leaders in this community and said that he has a tremendous amount of respect for Sue Christmas and has a very nice professional relationship with her husband; however, he will disagree with them. Mr. Lyons said he believes the study circle participants were an accurate reflection of the community and the people who want the Parrott Avenue site are overwhelming. He said that if the Board can make the Parrott Avenue site work, it will get a middle school building. He said that the City Council did not take a vote last night for good reason; the School Board has not indicated to them what it wants. He said it is time for the Board to declare what it wants. Mr. Lyons said he believes the Board can declare that it wants the Parrott Avenue site with conditions. He said the only way the Board will get the Sagamore Avenue site is if Parrott Avenue doesn't work first.

***First Motion re:  
Parrott Avenue Site***

Mr. Lyons said he would vote against the letter as written, and noted the changes he would want made before he would approve it. He said the letter contains too many demands and conditions.

Mr. Lyons moved the Board send a letter to the City Council declaring that it is prepared to support the Parrott Avenue site based on certain conditions. Mr. Ristaino seconded the motion. There was much discussion to the motion. The Chair asked if the athletic fields would be included in this motion; Mr. Lyons responded yes.

Dr. Lister said the letter was a draft, based on comments from last week's work session, and was stamped as such. The Superintendent said it is imperative for the Board to move forward and to come up with a recommendation.

Mrs. Clayburgh said she believes the conditions should be stated in the letter that goes to the City Council, and said the athletic fields should be included in the letter. She reminded the Board that the cost of the athletic fields, if part of the middle school renovation, would be reimbursed 43%. She also expressed concern about the bus turn-around at the Parrott Avenue site and adequate parking,

Mr. Hayward said he is in favor of the motion and also understands Mrs. Clayburgh's concerns and where Dr. Lister is coming from. He said the Board cannot wait any longer. He stated his concern about Parrott Avenue is to be sure there is access and egress for emergency vehicles.

Mr. Bartlett said he thinks the issues discussed by the Board last week are do-able, and can be written into RFPs (Requests for Proposals).

Mrs. Walker said she personally feels that Sagamore Avenue is the better site. She agreed the study circles were not representative of our school families, and said she does not think the educational narrative would be met at the Parrott Avenue site, but she is willing to see if it possible. Mrs. Walker also said she is opposed to the City taking the land by eminent domain.

Mr. Ristaino said he would support the motion and stated the Board would be getting ahead of itself by adding conditions to the letter.

Mr. Lyons offered to amend his motion to read that the Board go on record as indicating it is in support of the Parrott Avenue site subject to whether or not the Board can agree to certain conditions that will be included in the letter. Mr. Ristaino, the seconder of the original motion, did not agree to and would not second the amendment.

(Approved by the Portsmouth School Board on July 10, 2007.)

There was further discussion to the motion. The Chair stated that, regardless of the conditions, he could not support the site if the cost of Parrott Avenue is prohibitive.

***Motion Withdrawn***

Mr. Lyons withdrew his motion. Mr. Ristaino agreed to withdraw his second.

Mrs. Clayburgh suggested the Board do what it said it would last week: write a letter to the City Council stating that it is considering the Parrott Avenue site if it meets certain conditions, those being: accommodating grades 6, 7, and 8; parking for staff and visitors; bus safety; parent drop-off; athletic fields; and where the students will be housed during renovations. She said a feasibility study needs to be done on that site to determine that. Mrs. Clayburgh said she is willing to look at the Parrott Avenue site, but is not willing to say she will vote for it until questions are answered.

Mr. Smith said the Board needs to take a stand.

Dr. Lister said everything cannot be solved in one gulp, and the Board needs to state what it believes. He said the Board believes in keeping grades six, seven and eight together, and wants to follow the educational narrative. He said the administration and teachers in the classrooms know what is needed for a middle school. He said the Board and the City Council need to form a cooperative partnership and work together to move this along. He said the issues have to be broken down into smaller tasks, and everything cannot be solved in one gulp.

Mr. Hayward moved the Board recommend the Superintendent's draft with one change in the first sentence (change Mr. Lyons' name to "School Board"). Mrs. Clayburgh seconded the motion. There was discussion to the motion. Mr. Ristaino said he would not support the motion as the letter does not move us forward. Ms. Garrity said she would not support the motion and stated there is only one sentence in the letter that she would support.

Mr. Lyons asked for a straw vote. The Chair declared the straw vote would be non-binding. The motion was defeated in three to five straw vote. Mr. Hayward withdrew the motion; Mrs. Clayburgh withdrew her second.

Mr. Lyons moved the Board do a straw vote that the School Board write a letter to the City Council indicating that the School Board is prepared to support the Parrott Avenue site based on certain conditions. Mr. Ristaino seconded the motion. The Chair stated the straw vote would be non-binding. The motion passed in a six to three straw vote.

*(Approved by the Portsmouth School Board on July 10, 2007.)*

Mr. Lyons said the Board now needs to decide what the conditions are. The Superintendent asked Board members to list the conditions. They are: (1) the middle school be comprised of grades six, seven, and eight, (2) the educational narrative will be met, (3) athletic fields will be included/addressed, and (4) parking/parent drop-off/bus safety. Dr. Lister stated that it is his responsibility to address the issue of where students will be housed during renovations/construction. He said that he has held discussions with administrators, but tonight is not the time to discuss that topic.

Mr. Lyons moved the School Board is prepared to send a letter to the City Council indicating we are prepared to support the Parrott Avenue site if they will provide the necessary funds to have an architectural feasibility study to determine whether the Parrott Avenue site can support: grades six, seven, and eight; meets the educational narrative; athletic fields; and parking. parent drop-off/bus safety. Mr. Ristaino seconded the motion. Mrs. Clayburgh requested the word “sufficient” be placed before the words “athletic fields.” Mr. Lyons was agreeable to amend the motion to include this; Mr. Ristaino also agreed. In a roll call vote, the motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Lyons stated that it is easy to have opinions when you are not sitting up here voting, and sometimes folks just don’t know how hard it is. He said that every School Board member compromised something in order to get something done and it was a consensus vote. Mr. Lyons said he is proud to be a member of this School Board.

Mrs. Clayburgh said this Board has sat together for two years and she said they really do think of the kids first. She said the Board only has a certain amount of money to spend and she hopes that everyone understands that they really do think of the kids first and what is best for them. She stated that she, too, is proud to be a member of this Board.

The Chair stated the City Council will not meet again until July. He cautioned that what the Board did tonight was the easy part, and the Board will now face more challenges. He said the Board will need to keep its focus on the conditions as what is important to them. He said that everyone should be proud that they can compromise and work together.

### **Professional Nominations**

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Mr. Zadavec presented the nomination of Elizabeth Wentworth to the position of physical education and health teacher at Portsmouth High School. Mr. Ristaino moved, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the

(Approved by the Portsmouth School Board on July 10, 2007.)

**Professional  
Nominations (cont.)**

nomination be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Zadravec presented the nomination of Charles Andrew French to the position of visual arts teacher at Little Harbour School. Mrs. Walker moved, seconded by Ms. Garrity, the nomination be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Zadravec presented the nomination of Michael Lyford to the position of math teacher at Portsmouth High School. Mr. Smith moved, seconded by Ms. Garrity, the nomination be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

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**COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Summer  
Professional  
Development  
Activities**

**Curriculum Council:** Mr. Zadravec presented a follow-up to last week's Literacy Institute. He reported 140 educators participated. During the four days, the educators defined the most essential learning expectations in reading for all grade levels.

The Assistant Superintendent reviewed future professional development activities that groups of Portsmouth educators are participating in this summer:

- Science Curriculum Work (July 9-10 and August 8)
- Facilitator Leadership Training (July 16-20 and August 13-17)
- Everyday Math Training (August 6-7)
- Mentor Training (August 14-16)
- Responsive Classroom Training (August 15-17)

He said the teachers are doing a lot of professional development work this summer. He stated the additional early release days that were approved by the School Board allows this work to continue throughout the school year.

Superintendent Lister said there were a number of teachers from Greenland who joined the Portsmouth teachers. He stated that, in addition to all of the professional development activities, teachers are traveling all over the world, and will bring their experiences back to their classrooms.

The Chair stated that, due to the late hour, he will ask that this topic be discussed at the next meeting.



**FINANCIAL**

The Business Administrator did not have any business at this time to bring before the Board.

***Negotiations  
Workshop***

Chair LaPage said the Portsmouth schools will host a pre-negotiations workshop through the New Hampshire School Boards Association in September. He said other school districts will be invited to attend. The Chair told the Board that negotiations for union contracts will begin in October. The details of the workshop have not yet been finalized.

***Next Meeting***

The School Board's next meeting will be held on July 10, 2007 in the Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers at City Hall. Dr. Lister said that Mrs. Patricia Laska, School Nutrition Director, will report to the Board that evening.

Mr. Hayward requested the letter to be sent to the City Council include the signature of Helen Maldini, Chair of the Newington School Board, to show that SAU 50 is in agreement. Mr. Lyons requested the Superintendent follow up with Dr. Shuldman, who is not present this evening.

***Adjournment***

There was no further business to come before the Board. On a motion by Ms. Garrity, seconded by Mr. Ristaino, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Robert J. Lister  
Executive Secretary