

PORTSMOUTH SCHOOL BOARD MEETING MINUTES FOR MARCH 24, 2009

PORTSMOUTH MIDDLE SCHOOL

PORTSMOUTH, NH

DATE: TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2009

TIME: 7:00PM [or thereafter]

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

Present: DR. MITCHELL SHULDMAN (CHAIR), SHERI HAM GARRITY (VICE CHAIR), REBECCA EMERSON, PATRICK ELLIS, DEXTER LEGG, KENT LAPAGE, STEVE BARTLETT (BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR), DR. ROBERT J. LISTER (SUPERINTENDENT), STEVE ZADRAVEC (ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT), ANN WALKER, LESLIE STEVENS, LISA SWEET, ANN MAYER (SAU 50 REPRESENTATIVE) LINDA BRIOLAT (EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVE) AND ABIGAIL ROCKEFELLER (STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE)

Absent:

Chair Shuldman called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

III. INVOCATION –

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Chair Shuldman leads in the pledge of allegiance. Dr. Lister congratulated the Portsmouth High School Varsity boy's basketball for winning the state championship last weekend at UNH.

V. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

1. February 12, 2009 Special Meeting -

Motion: Motion to accept the minutes by Mr. LaPage

Second: Ms. Walker

Discussion:

Vote: Unanimously approved

2. February 12, 2009 Budget Work Session -

Motion: Motion to accept the minutes by Ms. Sweet

Second: Ms. Walker

Discussion:

Vote: Unanimously approved

3. March 10, 2009 Regular Board Meeting -

Motion: Motion to accept the minutes by Ms. Walker.

Second: Mr. Ellis.

Discussion:

Vote: Unanimously approved.

VI. COMMUNICATIONS

1. Other

VII. RECOGNITION/UPDATE OF STAFF AND STUDENTS

1. **Professional Retirements (Teachers)** – Dr. Lister announced the list of teachers that would be retiring at the end of the school year. They will be missed and Dr. Lister appreciates their extensive contributions to the Portsmouth School Department. The following teachers will retire in June of 2009:

Ms. Joan Christy, Portsmouth High School Library Media Specialist

Ms. Janice Fortunato, Dondero Elementary Special Education teacher

Mr. Kent Hubbard, Portsmouth Middle School Computer Integrator

Mr. Michael Modern, Portsmouth High School Guidance Counselor

Mr. R. James Andrews, Portsmouth High School Computer teacher

Mr. David Jule, Portsmouth High School Resource Room teacher

Motion: Motion to accept teacher professional retirements by Mr. Legg

Second: Ms. Walker

Discussion:

Vote: Unanimously approved

2. **Professional Nominations for 2009-2010 school year (Teachers)** –

Motion: Motion to accept teacher nominations by Ms. Walker

Second: Mr. Ellis

Discussion:

Vote: Unanimously approved

3. **Professional Nominations for 2009-2010 school year (Administrators)** –

Motion: Motion to accept administrative nominations by Ms. Walker

Second: Mr. Ellis

Discussion:

Vote: Unanimously approved.

4. **Nomination of Director of Student Services** – Mr. Zadravec announced that the search for a new Student Services Director has been completed and he was pleased to nominate Ms. Paula Wensley of Wakefield, New Hampshire.

Motion: Motion to accept Ms. Wensley as Director of Student Services by Ms. Walker

Second: Mr. Legg

Discussion:

Vote: Unanimously approved.

5. **Other**

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION

1. **Ms. Barclay Jackson of 36 Marston Avenue.** Ms. Jackson is the Executive Director of Green Start, a local not for profit company devoted to educating the public and leaders throughout the community on the benefits of using bio-diesel fuel for transportation and heating. Green Start is the recipient of several grants that Ms. Jackson has the authority to disburse to organizations throughout Portsmouth to further the use of bio-diesel fuels.

Ms. Jackson requested to address the board in greater length about exactly what Green Start does and how the company could possibly assist the school district in switching to bio-diesel fuel in the future. Ms. Jackson stated that diesel is a pollutant and represents a health risk to our children but is a risk we CAN change for the better. Ms. Jackson commended the school department for negotiating with the bus company to use bio-diesel fuels in the future. Ms. Jackson understands that First Student is the largest bus provider nation wide, but other districts have made the transition and are operating at full capacity on bio-diesel.

On April 8, 2009 Green Start will be making a presentation called "Field to Fuel" to 7th graders at the Portsmouth Middle School. The presentation begins at 8:00 a.m. and she encouraged school board members to attend. Dr. Lister apologized for Ms. Jackson missing the past public comment session scheduled on March 10th and explained that bio-diesel would be included on a future agenda. He looked forward to inviting Ms. Jackson back to discuss this important subject further.

IX. FINANCIAL

- 1. Extension of Bus Contracts** –Mr. Bartlett explained that the current transportation contract is split into two types of transportation: general and special needs. The Provider Bus Company provides the district with transportation for special needs students. The district has been asked by First Student Bus Company to initiate a two-year extension to the current general transportation contract.

Mr. Bartlett also believes that the proposal received from Provider Bus Company is reasonable. Out of district transportation increased by 2%. Provider is also requesting that the board consider negotiating an extension to the current contract.

Mr. LaPage requested that Mr. Bartlett clarify with both companies that school bus monitors are CPR certified.

Mr. Ellis inquired whether or not the district pays an adjustment for fuel costs that fluctuate up or down. Mr. Bartlett stated yes. The district did have to pay an adjustment this year because it went over the ceiling. Costs are never adjusted down. Mr. Ellis asked when the last time the district opened transportation up to bid. 5 years ago was the last time. Mr. Ellis followed up asking if there was a strong reason why the district would not put the contract out to competitive bid? Mr. Ellis believes First Student is asking for a rate that is not in line with inflation. Mr. Bartlett expressed that competition is scarce for general transportation and especially Special Needs transportation. Chair Shuldman asked how many companies would bid if the district decided to accept new proposals. Mr. Bartlett believes only two or three would be in a position to bid. Mr. Bartlett attended a conference on negotiating bus contracts six months ago and found out that many districts have driver shortages, payroll issues and other stresses that Portsmouth has been fortunate not to experience.

Mr. LaPage provided a brief history on the Provider Bus Company. A family out of Freemont, New Hampshire who had a special needs child created the company. The family recognized the need for reliable and safe transportation and decided to step up to fill the need for a large portion of New Hampshire. The Provider Bus Company does not have many competitors, if any, due to the difficulty of making a profit. Most funds come from grants; not from services provided.

Mr. Bartlett stated that because Provider has what is called “remote parks”, buses are located all over the state and can usually be seen parked at driver’s homes in the evening. Therefore, they are unable to rely on a specific diesel location for their buses.

Ms. Emerson does not feel comfortable with the district maintaining a contract with a bus company that is switching from diesel back to gas and believes it to be a step backwards. Ms. Emerson asked if either company were willing to discuss bio fuels. Dr. Lister stated that the transition to bio fuels is a process and that First Student is very willing to look at bio-diesel fuels. It will not happen overnight.

Chair Shuldman clarified that the board was being asked to consider another two-year extension. Mr. Bartlett stated that was correct.

Ms. Emerson requested that the board have a broader discussion at some point about putting the transportation contract out to bid. Mr. Bartlett stated that in a future budget, he hopes to hire a consulting firm to analyze all aspects of the current contract for re-negotiating purposes. Mr. Legg inquired what the district spends annually for special needs transportation. Mr. Bartlett will provide the cost breakdown at the next scheduled board meeting.

Mr. Bartlett stated that the current contract with First Student states that the company would switch all buses to bio diesel before the next renewal. This has not happened due to a couple variables; the largest being escalating fuel costs over the past two years. All purchased buses going forward will be bio diesel. Mr. Bartlett announced that over the past 5 years, even with escalating fuel costs, the district has not been hit for overage. First Student made adjustments and absorbed all overage costs.

Before demanding that they use bio-diesel fuel, Mr. Bartlett would like to guarantee First Student a steady and reliable bio diesel option. Mr. Bartlett is discussing options with the City’s supplier and is waiting for a legal reading to be completed, regarding selling fuel back to a private industry. What Mr. Bartlett has calculated for fuel costs will be deducted from the contract. Fleet and labor costs have increased for First Student and require them to negotiate a 4% increase.

Ms. Emerson inquired if there would be any discussion on safety and seatbelts? Mr. LaPage stated that this topic was thoroughly researched six years ago and shows a growing trend NOT to have seatbelts due to certain accidents where only one adult was present to unbuckle up to thirty students.

Mr. Legg asked Mr. Bartlett, in his experience, did he believe there was any opportunity to go back and renegotiate for a lower cost? Mr. Bartlett stated this IS the result of renegotiation. The original proposal was 15 to 20% higher, but included all new buses. Mr. Bartlett proposed to siphon old buses out, therefore lowering the final increase to 4%.

Mr. Ellis commented that the city purchased salvage and waste vehicles. Would they consider purchasing buses? Mr. Bartlett doubted the city would want to incur the up front cost of purchasing a fleet of buses. Mr. LaPage stated that the state of Maine owns their own buses and the costs to maintain the fleet are not worth the hassle. Payroll issues, storing buses and labor costs all make it cost prohibitive.

Motion: Motion to approve Mr. Bartlett to enter into a discussion with current bus companies to consider a two-year extension to the current bus contract and to approve full contracts at the next regularly scheduled school board meeting.

Second: Ms. Walker

Vote: Roll Call Vote: Unanimously approved

2. **Other** – Ms. Kathleen Dwyer, Assistant City Attorney, discussed the Clarification Agreement with SAU 50. The original AREA agreement was adopted in 1971, when a recognized cost for special education did not exist. This agreement was later clarified in 1993. For the 2009 school year, the agreement was reassessed and clarified to more clearly show tuition costs per student. Attorney Dwyer asked that board members adopt this clarification agreement.

In 1971, one of the individual's last names that worked on the original AREA agreement was LaPage. If not for this agreement, said Mr. Kent LaPage, PHS would not exist as it currently does. Surrounding towns do not only provide us with 35 to 38% of our students, but valuable resources as well. Mr. LaPage stated that he hopes this agreement is long lasting and future boards see that Portsmouth High School would not be the same without this agreement.

Motion: Motion to accept the Clarification Agreement with SAU 50

Second: Ann Walker

Vote: Roll Call vote: Unanimously approved.

X. AGENDA

1. **Graduation Dates** – Dr. Lister received a letter from Dr. Lyonel Tracy, Commissioner of Education, approving Dr. Lister's proposal for concluding the school year, while still fulfilling the required amount of instructional hours. If accepted by the board, Dr. Lister will notify all staff and parents.

Early release days in April and May will now be full days of school. District wide professional development workshop days will now occur on June 23 and 24. Dr. Lister acknowledged the principals and leadership team who worked diligently to come up with this creative solution.

Motion: Motion to accept by Ms. Walker

Second: Mr. Ellis

Vote: Unanimously approved

Chair Shuldman commended the administration on their creativity as well in moving workshops for teachers to the end of the school year and not cancelling them all together.

NOTE: At 7:55 P.M., Superintendent Lister excused himself from the remainder of the meeting. Assistant Superintendent. Mr. Steve Zadravec presided over the remainder of the meeting.

2. **Middle School Update** – Chair Shuldman stated that JCJ Architects is present tonight to provide an update on where they believed the middle school timeframe and costs to be at this time. It is important that dates are maintained, due to the market being so volatile. JCJ Architects stated that, with the formation of the JBC in June, the engagement of the construction manager will begin. The construction manager will verify costs and construction phasing. By September, a schematic design of the project should be approved. There will then be a 5-month cycle to create designs for bidding purposes.

JCJ Architects are monitoring the city's consideration for a parking deck and possible construction at the Connie Bean Center. The architects want to address all needs but not duplicate any needs of the city. Ms. Walker asked, if a gym were included in the Connie Bean Center, would it delay the middle school timeline? JCJ did not believe so, not if everyone understood that it was part of the middle school project.

Any construction needs to be decided on and approved before technical drawings are created. Otherwise, there will be a delay, which will cause the entire project to miss the bidding process around the month of June when construction costs are at their lowest. If all construction is not part of the design when land use approvals are visited, they will also need to be readdressed. This will further delay construction.

Ms. Sweet stated, "This means that the needs assessment for the Connie Bean Center would need to be done by this July or some time shortly thereafter." Mr. LaPage stated that a decision would not happen until around November 1st or December 1st, with a complete asset report. Mr. Ellis believes that the process needs to move forward if the city wants to help control costs. We cannot let the middle school process slow down because of the Connie Bean Center.

Another issue that will need to be watched closely is parking issues. School board members, architects and library personnel, along with city officials, have participated in productive discussions to ensure the needs for all facilities are addressed.

JCJ's 4th Quarter in 08 was a trying time with school projects and reactions to the current market have become extremely variable. For example, a project set to bid last October was projected to come in \$7 million over budget. The district decided to bid the project out in January and the completed project came in under budget. Construction managers will need to be consulted to see where the heartbeat of the market is heading. JCJ still intends to build corrections into the budget for program protection. Mr. Legg encouraged board members not to get caught up in the euphoria of picking the bottom of the construction market. Mr. Legg would hate to be squeezed because managers believe trends will continue to spiral down. JCJ stated that the current market is a market where no comparisons can be made.

Mr. LaPage requested a work session, prior to bonding. He believes that construction has been experiencing a recession for the past 16 months. The most viable materials are metals and raw goods. With metals at an all time low, he would be interested in seeing what an adjustment of current metal costs would do to middle school project costs.

Ms. Emerson inquired if the board thought it would be beneficial to write City Council, gently encouraging them to work together on construction projects. Getting in on the ground floor with the Connie Bean Center would benefit them. Chair Shuldman will talk with Mr. Bartlett regarding the letter.

Chair Shuldman stated that a joint workshop with the Recreational Department was scheduled from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. on April 14. After a report is received, a letter can be drafted.

3. **Other** - Ms. Stevens stated that last year Dr. Lister provided board members with a copy of the scholarship book. She would like a copy this year as well. Ms. Stevens also requested a clean copy of the final recommended budget cuts that the school board voted on. A summary page will be created by Mr. Bartlett and included in the next school board packet.

Ms. Sweet thanked the Family Consumer Science class for making cookies for the meeting. Their effort is greatly appreciated by the board members.

Mr. LaPage would like to caution the board on individuals handing out business cards during a meeting. The board does not want to set precedence on handing information out, not included on the agenda.

XI. COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Other

XII. NEXT AGENDA ITEMS (April 14, 2009 Council Chambers, City Hall)

1. Recreational board update
2. Sustainability Fair May 9, 2009
3. Extension of Drivers Education contract
4. Other

XIII. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

1. "The Story" – Budget 2009-2010
2. Whiteboard demonstration at Little Harbour Elementary
3. Technology Plan
4. Teacher Evaluation Update
5. Cable Television
6. Sustainability Fair – May 2009
7. Bio-Diesel Fuels
8. Recreational Board Work Session

XIV. ADJOURNMENT: At 8:26 p.m., voted to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted by:

Dr. Robert J. Lister
Superintendent of Schools