



School Facilities Ad Hoc Committee

Committee Co-Chairpersons

Marnie Morrione, Chair, Portland Board of Education • Ethan K. Strimling, Mayor

David Brenerman, District 5 City Councilor

Justin Costa, District 4 City Councilor

Stephanie Hatzenbuehler, District 4 Board of Education

Nicholas M. Mavodones, At-Large City Councilor

Sarah J. Thompson, At-Large Board of Education

Anna Trevorrow, At-Large Board of Education

Thursday, November 17, 2016

5:00pm – 7:00pm

City Hall – Council Chamber

Meeting Minutes & Notes

The meeting began at 5:04pm.

Attendance:

Mayor Strimling, School Board Chair Marnie Morrione (Committee Co-Chairs)

Superintendent Xavier Botana

Councilors: David Brenerman, Justin Costa, Nicholas Mavodones

School Board Members: Stephanie Hatzenbuehler, Sarah Thompson, Anna Trevorrow

Superintendent Xavier Botana

Deputy City Manager Anita LaChance

Special Assistant to the Mayor Jason J. Shedlock

Mayor Strimling and Board Chair Morrione began the meeting by welcoming the Committee members and the public and letting the attendees know the purpose of the evening. This meeting would consist of an update on the attempts to secure state funding to defray the costs of the Buildings for Our Future plan. The Committee would also see a presentation on some proposed budgetary alterations, based on Committee feedback from throughout their analysis. The Committee was reminded that the master question and answer document, along with other supporting documents, can be viewed in its entirety at <http://www.portlandmaine.gov/1803/School-Facilities-Ad-Hoc-Committee>.

The minutes of the November 8th meeting of the School Facilities Ad Hoc Committee were approved unanimously.

Superintendent Botana explained to the Committee that he would be presenting to the State Board of Education at its December 14th meeting, to be held at Casco Bay High School. He will be presenting the previously-discussed proposal to ask the State to support an interest only interim local financing plan which would allow for local funding of interest for Reiche and Longfellow schools until there is additional room in the state's debt cap for funding at the state level. While most feedback points to this proposal's success as a longshot, Superintendent Botana stated that all avenues were being explored.

Councilor Costa cautioned about requesting only the interest only financing option, and suggested that we approach the state to just include Reiche and Longfellow in the current funding list. He also inquired about the fate of schools in years past that were similarly placed on the funding list, and whether they received funding in subsequent years.

Councilor Mavodones stated he was pleased that we were exploring this avenue, and suggested professional representation to contact the state board to help them understand why they should support our proposal. Councilor Brenerman agreed. Superintendent Botana stated that he was working with the Portland delegation in Augusta as well as the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce to gain their assistance and support.

The Committee discussed the updated financial numbers from Deputy City Manager LaChance, as she described the numbers changed because the new state valuation was available, and that Portland would see an increase in the State Equalized Valuation and its accompanying decrease in state funding. It was also stated that the numbers reflected the recently-ratified teacher contract.

Mayor Strimling stated that the impact of state referendum Question 2 has not been incorporated into any budgets. Estimates of its impact on Portland can be anything between a \$2 Million and \$11 Million influx of funds.

An update was given of the School Facilities Assessment, which is still incomplete and in draft form. Initial reviews did not uncover any surprises, but did show a significant amount of work needed over the next twenty years. The first priority of work would be code and life safety issues that were identified. Immediate needs for middle schools would be approximately \$100,000. Superintendent Botana stressed that the items identified in the school facilities report are not to transform buildings into 21st century learning institutions, rather perform maintenance and necessary upgrades. The needs identified would also not address current space challenges. It was stated that for middle schools, in the one to five-year window, the needs for ADA, code and security would cost about \$3.5 Million. The final report is scheduled to be complete by December 1st. Councilor Brenerman stated that the data compiled from the study would be helpful as we apply for state funding for schools in the future.

Responding to Board member Thompson's request, Xavier Botana stated that the school department would learn of the fate of its application to the state revolving loan fund in January 2017.

The Committee then transitioned to a presentation that reflected budgetary adjustments that reflected suggestions heard throughout the Committee process. Xavier Botana stated that he met with the principals from each school and that while none were overly excited with proposed reductions to the plan, each stated that the suggestions would still allow for the chances needed to achieve 21st century learning environments for kids. He thanked the principals for their willingness to work with him on difficult decisions. Principals Loring (Presumpscot) and Young (Longfellow) were in attendance and offered their support.

A copy of the presentation, led by Tyler Barter of Oak Point Associates, is incorporated into the meeting minutes.

A review of the adjusted school budgets revealed the following questions and comments:

- The plan still allows for a stage on the newly-constructed gymnasium at Presumpscot.
- The built-in and moveable equipment reductions would make for some difficult choices, but would be workable.

- Concerns were raised about outdoor learning area reductions. Principals stated that schools will find innovative ways to incorporate outdoor learning and search for alternative funding and partnerships to accomplish these goals.
- As some site work has been backed out of the proposal to avoid duplication, the CIP should reflect ongoing and previously-scheduled work at Lyseth.
- Fee reductions that should accompany budget reductions have already been incorporated into the updated budgets.
- It should be made clear in the CIP and in the proposal if something has been funded through CIP or just requested.
- All modulars are still to be removed in the updated scenario.

Councilor Mavodones stated that he appreciated the principals and staff being good stewards of public money, and that he was comfortable that the proposed changes do not harm teaching and learning. He cautions that the budget number is still too high, and that he very much hopes for state funding to be able to lower the costs.

Councilor Costa also thanked the staff for their work. He stated that he is open to all of the adjustments made; though he does not necessarily want to make reductions, he understands the need to do so. He stated that there are still major decisions to be made, including whether or not we qualify for state funding and whether we fund Reiche and Longfellow locally or wait for the state to act.

Board member Hatzenbuehler expressed her appreciation. She cautions against inaction. Politics aside, we must get something done and go as far as we can to ensure we meet the needs identified.

Councilor Brenerman appreciated the conversations around the reductions, and was pleased that the principals were in agreement. He stated that if we are sure that a school will get on a funding list, we should wait for state funding. If not, we should move forward. If we can get a “free” school because of state funding, we should absolutely do so. He also mentioned the possibility of consolidation in order to make schools more attractive to be funded by the state.

Board member Trevorrow cautioned that while these cuts might not ultimately hurt, any more would certainly do so. The Committee’s job is to act. When we find out whether or not we qualify for state funds (December 14th), that will be a turning point where we must move forward.

Mayor Strimling stated that inaction is not an option. He stated that while we are doing everything we can to get state funding, it’s not realistic that we will receive it. With or without state funding, we must cross the finish line regardless.

Councilor Costa asked if the Clerk could map out the referendum timeframe. We need to know the impact of delay and moving past March, losing a construction season. We still need to send the package back to the school board, then back to council for Finance Committee review, then to full Council. We should plan to meet again after we learn of the state decision (December 14th) and also ensure we schedule a public hearing of any recommendations.

Board Chair Morrione also expressed her appreciation. She stated that this process was many years in the making, and that we must get this to the voters to decide.

Deputy City Manager LaChance was asked to run the budget numbers with the new \$60 Million figure. An announcement will be made on the date, time and location of the next meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 6:38 pm.

Submitted by Jason J. Shedlock, Special Assistant to the Mayor