

**GARDNER CITY COUNCIL
PUBLIC WELFARE COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JANUARY 31, 2019**

Councillor Christine Johnson, Chairperson of the Public Welfare Committee, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. the City Council Chamber. Committee members present were Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas and Council President Scott Joseph Graves.

Others present and participating were Superintendent of Schools Mark Pellegrino; School Business Administrator April Yu; Director of Pupil Personnel Services Joyce West; Chief Academic Officer Catherine Goguen; Director of Facilities Wayne Anderson; School Committee Vice-Chair Jennifer Zlotnik-Pelavin and members Robert Swartz and Anne Hurst; and, City Clerk Alan Agnelli.

I. Minutes of Prior Meetings

On a motion Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas and seconded by President Scott Graves, it was voted to approve the Minutes of the April 30, 2018, June 7, 2018, and August 13, 2018 Minutes, as printed.

II. FY2019 School Budget Discussion

On inquiry from Councillor Christine Johnson, Superintendent Pellegrino informed the Committee that 95.4% of the Budget has been expended or encumbered to-date and that he expects to finish the fiscal year within Budget. He added that snow removal expenses are uncertain at this point.

On inquiry from Councillor Christine Johnson, Mr. Pellegrino said that School Transportation is included in the School Department Budget, but is it considered an indirect cost and is not included in "Net School Spending." With regard to school maintenance/custodial, the annual contract is \$708,000, which is encumbered and paid monthly to the private contractor.

President Graves remarked that the presentation to the Public Welfare Committee by the School Department is an effective way to convey School Department issues to the entire City Council.

Mr. Pellegrino provided the Committee with a Power Point Budget Presentation, attached hereto.

He outlined the following components:

- Reasons to build a new school now.
 - Accessibility and safety of the physical plant.
 - The schools do not comply with current school standards.
 - Monetary
 - The least per pupil cost.
 - The cost will increase in the future.
 - The City's reimbursement rate is at 80%.
- The Tale of Our Ten Districts – The Impact on the Underfunding of the State's Foundation Budget.
 - Foundation Budget Premise.

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- Chapter 70 funding doubled over the first decade, but was reduced since FY2002, resulting in fewer dollars today due to State aid cuts and inflation.
- Chapter 70 Funding for two sample districts – 4 steps.
 - Worcester and Southborough School Districts examples were cited.
- Legislative Charge of Foundation Budget Review Commission.
 - Review components of the Foundation Budget.
 - Seek to Determine and Recommend Measures to Promote Effective Resource Allocation.
- Findings and Recommendations.
 - Health Insurance
 - School Districts are paying \$1.44 Billion above the Foundation budget.
 - Special Education
 - Gardner has a higher percentage of SPED students.
 - English Language Learners
 - Gardner has a higher percentage of English Language Learners.
 - Low Income Students
 - Gardner has a higher percentage of low income students.
 - The Foundation Budget is substantially less than what all districts need, Wealthier communities can spend more to compensate.
 - In Fy2017, the lowest 20% spent \$12,308 per pupil, while the highest 20% spent \$17,315 per pupil.
- Foundation Budget Gaps: Gardner, Clinton, and Webster Analyses.
 - Mr. Pellegrino outlined Foundation Budget gaps in the Gardner, Clinton, and Webster Districts. He noted that there are significant variances in the amount of staff that the Foundation requires and that Gardner has in both SPED and regular programs.
- Impact on Our Districts.

School Committee and Finance Subcommittee meetings schedule relating to the School Budget.

The Superintendent provided the Committee with the FY20 Budget Development Timeline.

Financing Plan for the new Elementary School (City share).

Councillor Christine Johnson announced that the Committee would postpone discussion on this item since the Mayor was not present.

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Establishing a School Building (Targeted) Stabilization Fund.

Councillor Christine Johnson distributed a DOR Division of Local Services document entitled “Special Purpose Stabilization Funds, February 2016.” She said that the City Council could establish a School Building Stabilization Fund and that the Mayor, if he so chooses, could submit a Money Order to the Council in order to deposit monies into the account. She cited the four reasons for establishing the fund, as referenced in the document:

- Encourages a community to think long term.
- Helps a community save money.
- Helps a community manage debt.
- Builds resident confidence in government.

Councillor Christine Johnson stated that she believes that the Montachusett Regional Vocational School District has a Stabilization Fund for this purpose and that the Mayor has talked about stabilization accounts for DPW, Police, and other departmental capital needs.

Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas expressed concern about the process to appropriate to and to expend from such a fund, noting that an Order from the Mayor would be required in both instances, and that it takes two-thirds of the City Council to appropriate from such funds.

Councillor Johnson recommended that the Stabilization Fund discussion be continued to the next meeting.

Adjournment

On a motion Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas and seconded by President Scott Graves, it was voted to adjourn at 6:54 p.m.