

AUBURN SCHOOL DEPARTMENT
AUBURN, MAINE

REPORT OF REGULAR SESSION MEETING OF THE AUBURN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Auburn Hall

April 16, 2008

Members Present: Mr. Francois Bussiere	Mr. Tom Kendall
Mr. David Das	Mr. Jason Pawlina
Mr. Lane Feldman	Mr. Lawrence Pelletier
Ms. Bonnie Hayes	Mr. Ron Potvin

Others Present: Mr. Tom Morrill, Superintendent; Mikael Heikkinen, Student Representative.

I. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

A. Introductions

Mr. Das called the meeting to order at 7:05 P.M. and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Committee members introduced themselves and stated which ward they represent.

B. Communications/Recognition

Mr. Potvin shared that the newspaper article in the Sun-Journal on April 16, 2008 was confusing. He stated that the information regarding the proceeds of the sale of the building at Mt. Auburn Avenue, closing the Land Lab, the lay-off of 21 teachers and the elimination of another 8 jobs was incorrect.

Mr. Morrill indicated the reduction of labor force is 16.5 positions, noting that it is the original proposal that was put in the paper, not the proposal that is on the table tonight.

Mr. Das also received a communication from Auburn Chief of Police, Phil Crowell. Mr. Das read the letter regarding Chief Crowell's concerns with budget cuts that would directly impact the students. Mr. Crowell expressed his appreciation of the cooperation and professionalism shown by the school staff.

Mr. Pelletier shared information regarding an Edward Little High School student who was accepted in to an academic program, People to People World Leadership Forum in Washington, DC. He also shared information regarding an article in the newspaper on April 16, 2008 regarding Mike Davis of Sherwood Heights who was named the outstanding music educator of the year.

Mr. Potvin expressed concern about how the agreement was reached on a final number for the budget. He indicated that the entire school committee never agreed to this figure.

Mr. Das indicated that the communications section is not the place for this discussion and it could take place during the budget portion of the agenda.

II. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Agenda

B. Approval of Minutes – April 2, 2008

It was moved by Mr. Potvin; seconded by Mr. Pelletier, and voted unanimously to approve the Consent Agenda.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Tim Doughty, 75 Cherryvale Circle, indicated that he is a concerned taxpayer who has become involved in the budget process. He noted that he is feeling that the budget is not being shared in an appropriate manner. He expressed concern about a Sundry Account, calling it a “wish list” account and wondered if there is a need for the assistant superintendent position. He noted that in his view administration takes away from direct services. Mr. Doughty stated that all departments are asking for increases, but he wonders if we should be trimming budgets and keeping only the core. He stated that the city could not afford all the “bells and whistles” that are listed in the budget and suggested that social service programs be taken out of the school budget. Mr. Doughty indicated that he has made many calls to councilors and committee members requesting budget information and has had to “jump through hoops” to get the information. He noted that the citizens want to see a realistic; needs based budget and a financial consensus should be reached regarding the amount. Mr. Doughty stated that it is time to end the divisiveness and work together for the betterment of all. He noted that the default move to balance the budget by increasing the mill rate should not be the only solution and the citizens of Auburn and its’ elected officials are charged with the responsibility of producing a realistic needs budget with the assets available. He stated that the second editorial regarding the Eretzian contract disturbed him and asked for the School Committee members to respond to their feelings with respect to the article.

Mr. Das responded that there were factual errors in the editorial. He stated that Lewiston does not have an Assistant Superintendent, but they do have a Director of Personnel who performs many of the same duties that our Assistant Superintendent used to perform. Mr. Das felt the writer of the article was uninformed on many accounts, noting that the School Committee had already decided not to pursue this contract, but to hire an assistant superintendent instead.

Mr. Doughty inquired if Mr. Das has spoken to the Sun-Journal regarding correction of the article.

Mr. Das responded that he had contacted the newspaper and was informed that the only method to respond was to write a letter to the editor to state his views. He noted that he felt that would not be worth it at this point in the process.

IV. STUDENT INFORMATION

Mr. Heikkinen reported that Foreign Language Week just finished at the high school with a game of Jeopardy. He noted that the Latin club won the Jeopardy game, but the Spanish Club was a close second. Mr. Heikkinen also reported that baseball and lacrosse seasons have started and the teams look strong. Mr. Heikkinen stated that lacrosse has also started with a large JV team. He stated that the fields look messy and muddy, but practices are also taking place indoors and at Bates College.

V. SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

A. Budget

1. Budget Approval For Fiscal Year 2008-2009

Mr. Morrill reported information regarding a number of recent awards and accomplishments that the Auburn School Department is especially proud of. He stated that Erin Towns, a Social Studies teacher at EL, was recently awarded a Japanese Fulbright scholarship to study in Japan this summer; Melinda Campbell, a Fairview art teacher, will be traveling to Italy to study landscape painting this summer thanks to a Maine Alliance for the Arts scholarship; the Land Lab teacher, Cameron Sutton, received the Maine Project Learning Tree Stewardship Award in March; and College acceptance letters are in the mail for EL students who are now making plans to attend colleges from Maine to Colorado. Mr. Morrill also reported that an Auburn Middle School Odyssey of the Mind Team has earned their way to the "2008 World Finals" competition in Washington D.C.

Mr. Morrill also reported that Auburn Middle School teachers have recently been using DonorsChoose.org to obtain outside funding for science equipment, musical instruments, digital cameras, etc. He noted that the DonorsChoose.org phenomenon is quite infectious and has great funding potential for supporting teaching and learning across the system.

Mr. Morrill reported that he had received information from Bonnie Washuk, Sun Journal reporter indicating that a former Auburn French teacher, Libby Goldman, recently celebrated her 100 birthday.

Mr. Morrill continued the discussion on the 08-09 School Department budget. He indicated that there is an obligation to provide a quality education and still provide fiscal responsibility to the taxpayer; however, there has been a significant shift happening now due to problems with the State budget. Mr. Morrill stated that the constant moving of the percentage of state funding and their inability to deliver on their promise to fund 55% of the school budget creates a great deal of concern, not only in Auburn, but in many communities across the state.

Mr. Morrill provided a handout including details on the budget amount and a draft of the budget resolve. He reviewed the handout, responded to questions and clarified concerns from Committee members. He reported that the total budget request is \$34,206,840, which reflects a 26-cent drop on the education side of the mil rate.

Mr. Das clarified that the members had previously held discussions regarding the Assistant Superintendent position and the project based consultant position. He noted that Mrs. Eretzian had been approached with respect to filling the consultant position again and responded that she would be willing to accept the position only if the School Committee and the City Council were fully on board with this proposal. Mr. Das stated that it is clear that this is not an option; however, we need to determine whether we are looking at a full time assistant superintendent or a project based consultant who does not have the knowledge of the system and the skills that Mrs. Eretzian has. He noted that the full time assistant superintendent position is reflected in the budget amount.

Mr. Morrill stated that the monies are in the budget for a full time assistant superintendent and if there were going to be a project-based consultant then the budget figure would need to be changed. He noted that the difference in the cost of the two positions is: \$45,000 for the project-based consultant and \$85,000 for an assistant superintendent.

Mr. Feldman asked where the cuts were going to come from in order to take care of this additional \$40,000.

Mr. Morrill indicated that these monies are already built into the budget. He noted that relocation of an administrator from a school is not viable solution because there is a need for a full time assistant superintendent position. Mr. Morrill stated that he would recommend that a full time assistant superintendent be hired a salary of \$85,000.

Mr. Feldman responded that he felt the salary amount was too high.

Mr. Das responded that this is fair market value for this position noting that he is concerned about Mr. Morrill's personal health based on his current workload. He noted that there are many other districts in the state that have either an Assistant Superintendent or a Director of Personnel.

Mr. Morrill responded to questions regarding the restructuring process in the past year noting that he has been assuming approximately 80% of the duties that the Assistant Superintendent previously performed. He noted that Ms. Dow has taken over the Title Funds; Ms. Dow, Ms. Mogul, and Ms. Cutler have been interviewing new hires. Mr. Morrill noted that there have been major issues all year (such as the Park Ave issue) and all resources have been strained throughout the course of the year. He reported that the State Department of Education sends Administrative Letters regularly throughout the course of the year, with more than 140 letters received to date. He noted that all the letters require some work in response; however, Auburn wants to be able to provide services for students and parents as well.

Mr. Pelletier requested Mr. Morrill to outline the duties of the assistant superintendent.

Mr. Morrill outlined a number of duties and Mr. Pelletier responded that he has a deep respect for what Mr. Morrill does. He noted that it was clear to him that there is a need for an assistant superintendent in Auburn.

Mr. Potvin indicated that he would want the position of one Dean of Students at the middle school removed if an Assistant Superintendent is hired.

Ms. Hayes stated that she would support that both positions remaining in the budget.

Mr. Potvin indicated that a policy was made by the School Committee that two administrative positions be eliminated and that has not been changed.

Mr. Das indicated that it was not a policy but a decision made in the budget workshop, clarifying that if members vote for the budget today, it is a vote for the three positions, and if they vote against the budget, then it would need to be reviewed again.

Mr. Kendall clarified that a previous decision can be reversed by a current decision.

Mr. Potvin responded that he would like this budget rejected and reworded to remove the assistant superintendent and the assistant principal at Auburn Middle School from the budget.

It was moved by Ms. Hayes; seconded by Mr. Pelletier, and voted 6 to 2 with Mr. Feldman and Mr. Potvin opposed to approve the 2008-2009 School Department Budget in the amount of \$34,206.840.

B. Planning and Development

1. Resolve to Vacate Webster School

Mr. Morrill indicated that the School Department was not awarded the revolving loan fund for Webster School and the costs of updating the school are prohibitive.

Mrs. Hayes stated that by vacating this building now, we would be able to save additional costs that we are currently paying.

It was moved by Ms. Hayes; seconded by Mr. Kendall, and voted unanimously to approve the resolve to vacate the property located at 99 Hampshire Street, Auburn and request that if the City sells the property, the proceeds of the sale be placed back into the School Department Capital Renewal Fund.

VI. INFORMATION / COMMITTEE REPORTS

• City Council Update

Mr. Potvin indicated that the city counselors would most likely reject the proposal of the School Department to keep a balance of the proceeds from the sale of the Mt. Auburn property and the City would keep those funds on the city side of the budget.

VII. UPCOMING MEETINGS

- Presentation of School Department budget to City - April 17th – 6:30 pm
- Regular School Committee Meeting – May 7th – 7:00 at Auburn Hall.
Scott Brown, DOE, will be available at 5:30 pm for questions regarding school construction
- Regular School Committee Meeting – May 21st – 7:00 at Auburn Hall

VIII. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS – REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

- Discussion of Early Release Wednesdays

IX. EXECUTIVE SESSION

It was moved by Ms. Hayes, seconded by Mr. Bussiere and voted unanimously to adjourn from regular session at 8:30 PM and enter Executive Session to discuss a student issue pursuant to MRSA 405(6) (B).

It was moved by Ms. Hayes, seconded by Mr. Kendall and voted unanimously to expel the student under consideration with conditions as outlined and instruct the Superintendent to provide a letter of fact and conclusions to the grandparent and student.

It was moved by Ms. Hayes, seconded by Mr. Bussiere and voted unanimously to adjourn from executive session at 10:20 PM. with no further business.

X. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Mr. Bussiere, seconded by Mrs. Hayes and voted unanimously to adjourn from regular session at 10:21 PM.

Attest, a true record,

Thomas Morrill, Secretary
Superintendent of Schools

TM/dc/rw