

City Council – Committee on Education Minutes

Date: April 21, 2020 5:30 – 6:30pm

Location: Senior Center

Committee Members

At Large Councillor Afroz Khan, Chair

At Large Councillor Barry Connell (Absent)

Ward 1 Councillor Sharif Zeid

Sean Reardon, Co-Chair, School Committee Member

Brian Callahan, School Committee Member

Bruce Menin, School Committee Member

Guests

Superintendent Gallagher

Mayor Holaday

Andrew Wulf

Mike Testa

Steve Bergholm

Councillors

At Large Councillor Charlie Tontar

Ward 2 Councillor Jared Eigerman

Members of the Public

Jane Snow

Agenda Items Discussed

Order 175_03_09_20 - Statement of Interest (SOI) MSBA Grant

Cllr Khan gave a background on this effort. Originally the committee met to discuss but were told that we were not going to submit this round. However, on April 14th, the Mayor provided a communication that she would like to submit in this round. The Mayor shared that she was worried that our proposal would be accepted this year and if that was the case, then we would not be able to move forward. She reached out to the Director and Operations Manager, Matt Donovan who said that there is a courtesy call that comes first before they actually accept projects into the pipeline.

The sponsor, Cllr Eigerman, asked about delinking the roof from the science labs. For example, if we decide to change our minds and only want to do the roof, would that be a problem. The Mayor responded that the SOI would need to be modified if that would be the case. In fact, last year the city applied for just the roof alone as part of the Accelerated Program offered by the

MSBA which was denied due to the age not being old enough. Cllr Zied was interested in hearing responses to the following three questions. To start with some pages are missing in this document which describes why we need this. But in general he would like to understand why we need this, what is the order of other capital needs related to the schools, how will we pay for this and finally what are the space needs at the other schools.

Superintendent Gallagher shared that this project was in the Capital Plan and the science labs are also very outdated especially as you see the trends in technology needs. Since there is an opportunity to create more space it's better to do that now. If we just did the roof and then later wanted to do another update to the science expansion, it would not be seen favorably down the road by the MSBA committee. High School Roof was last updated in 2000.

Cllr Tontar would be interested in seeing the school prioritize their financial needs including the expansion in World Languages. It will be important to cross the line between capital and operating needs and understand the prioritizing needs. Cllr Khan agreed and wanted to add information regarding the Chillers that are going to need replacement too. It would be nice to have a two-year projection of all these expenditures.

Cllr Zied emphasized that if we move forward with the project, we will be potentially carrying a \$7M debt. Are we okay with that and is it justified? School Committee Vice Chair Menin answered that the expenditures on the science lab is for both improving and expanding curriculum. There is currently a limitation on what courses can be offered in STEM due to the way the labs are structured. He believes this expense is tied to operational and will keep us on pace in giving the kids what they need. Cllr Tontar wanted to respond that he wants to know the overall prioritization from the district and the school committee across all curriculum items not just STEM.

Cllr Khan asked Steve Bergholm to answer a few questions that came up; the first one on the unbundling of the roof from the expansion and the second portion is that if this gets approved it still needs to be approved by the council. Mr. Bergholm clarified that the MSBA supports larger projects that are more efficiently presented without having smaller projects that build up on each other over time. He also said that we can always just submit an application through the Accelerated Program through the MSBA for just the roof. He also shared that when the high school was renovated 18 years ago, that's when all the HVAC equipment was put in place. All of these are approach their end of life. The feasibility study will help down the road to understand that.

Cllr Khan asked why we didn't apply for the roof repair through the accelerated program. Mr. Bergholm said that the MSBA does not want to see folks apply through that program if you are going to do a larger project down the road.

Cllr Zeid said he can understand the why and appreciated hearing that. He is now interested in debating the priority given the other types of projects needed for the schools. Can someone

address the space constraints in the schools? Sometimes there are statements that there are plenty of rooms but then sometimes we hear about there not being space.

Erin Hobbs from the High School Science Department shared that they are limited on space. They have 9 science teachers and 1 technology teacher. Four lab spaces with one of the lab spaces had to be converted into a classroom. Three labs are shared amongst 8 teachers. Sarah Leadbetter is very limited on where to work and sometimes moves to the hallway. They have also had to limit the class sizes as well. Ms. Leadbetter shared that they have had safety issues as well. Principal Wulf shared that after being in the building for a year and a half, he has been focusing on how to increase elective offerings with another technology person knowing there is an increase in interest by students in these areas. Ms. Leadbetter shared that the way the schedule runs the past two years have been teaching science classes in math rooms.

Cllr Zeid asked if the space problem is only related to the Science classes or is this an issue for other class areas. Angela Bik explained that in the proposal the desire for flexible learning is a focus. The proposal needs to look at flexibility across the building so that some forward thinking is applied.

The committee moved to deliberation. Cllr Zeid shared that there is a reason that the City Council is part of the process in approval of the SOI for the MSBA grant. He has confidence from the High School and the Science teachers on what they need. He does not have confidence on the bigger picture comparison with the district goals. He recommends that we make a motion to send out of committee with no recommendation.

Mr. Menin brought up the strategic plan and looking at that which encourages flexible spaces as well as sharpening and improving STEM education for kids. He said that this has been reflected in the strategic plan for the last 6 years. Cllr Zied followed up by asking if had to pick between increasing an operational budget in the next three years that goes up by 8% versus carrying a debt like this for the next 20-25 years what is the decision process in that. Mr. Menin shared that as much as he would like to say that this operational change will be projected for this amount over this time is not possible since it's unpredictable. If Cllr Zeid is asking between brick and mortar versus students he would say students but the consequence from this will benefit the students. Again, this aligns with the Strategic Plan. Overall hard to say what will be affected.

Principal Wulf agreed with Mr. Menin in terms of looking forward to 5 years down the road. He thinks what drives the decisions is the Vision of the High School in combination with the Strategic Plan. The sharing of lab spaces has created limitations and a big difference can be seen through an expansion effort. He is looking to also be able to have space for advisors to work with a smaller group of students so this effort is not just for science but other benefits.

Cllr Khan was happy to hear that we can defer if this is going to move forward and that there is another layer of approval. Mr. Reardon shared that the five year window that was presented by Steve Bergholm was good and being able to defer is good. He is in favor of this plan and they

have voted in favor of it. Mr. Menin also wanted to ask Mr. Bergholm that considering some of the HVAC systems that need to be replaced, would they be addressed as well with this funding? Mr. Bergholm said that the feasibility study that would result from this would also be an opportunity to look at all of those things when the state project managers come to do their walk through. Cllr Zeid expressed frustration on who we are planning for things in the future. The trend of moving forward and stating that we don't need to decide now. This is a challenge at the city level to between flexibility and planning. Cllr Zeid motioned to send to city council with no recommendation. Cllr Khan seconded and all were in favor.

Cllr Khan asked if anyone in the public would like to speak. Jane Snow 9 Coffin Street provided testimony. She doesn't think there is enough information here. She is hearing that there is not enough space but there are under 700 students there. When she graduated from that same building there were 1500 students. To her this is the first she is hearing about this and not enough information here to make a good decision. She knows we have a pandemic and remote learning in place with its own challenges. She also thanked everyone for their efforts and looks forward to getting more information.

Cllr Khan emphasized that the MSBA SOI needs to get approval from the City Council as one of the steps of submittal. The City Council will deliberate this on the floor on Monday, April 27th.

Cllr Zeid asked for a budget update. The Superintendent shared that five different scenarios will be presented at the School Committee tonight. They are still looking to get ideas on all the ways to move forward. Started the process in December with a preliminary budget presentation in February. Cllr Khan asked to hold questions for Superintendent until after the presentation and we can discuss in Education at our next meeting.

Committee adjourned at 6:28pm.