

BOARD OF ESTIMATE & TAXATION MEETING ACTIONS

**SPECIAL MEETING
MAY 12, 2004**

PRESENT: Mayor Alex Knopp Timothy Buzzee
Ronald Coley David Davidson
G. Randall Avery Greg Burnett (arrived @ 8:50 p.m.)

STAFF: Mary Roman, Asst. City Clerk
Thomas Hamilton, Finance Director
Ann Twomey, Director, Management & Budgets
Scott Binger, Asst. Director, Management & Budgets

OTHER: Dr. Sal Corda, Superintendent of Schools
Stuart Opdahl, Board of Education
Sarah LeTourneau, Personnel Director
Thomas Vetter, Teacher's Union

Mayor Knopp called the meeting to order at 8:10 p.m. and said that he appointed James Cap as the newest member. He said that Mr. Clark would be introduced formally at the next meeting.

Mayor Knopp said that the State legislature adopted the budget provision; it was signed last week. The good news was that Norwalk would receive \$275,000, minus mid-term budget adjustments, in additional aid that was not expected. Additionally, legislation was adopted that would allow the delay of implementation of the property tax revaluation for a three-year period. Norwalk would participate in this if it was determined to be in the best interest of the City. The decision would be evaluated with the Finance dept.

**FACILITIES AUDIT & ANALYSIS AND PRIORITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT –
PRESENTATION FROM GILBANE BUILDING COMPANY**

Mayor Knopp said that there would not be a presentation since two individuals from Gilbane had medical issues to attend to.

**MEET & CONFER WITH BOARD OF EDUCATION RE TEACHER
NEGOTIATIONS**

Mayor Knopp said that the teacher's contract expires June 30, 2005. He suggested that discussion of this item be delayed since Mr. Burnett was not yet present.

FY 2004-05 SPECIAL APPROPRIATION

**** MAYOR KNOPP MOVED TO APPROVE \$2,500,000 FROM CONTINGENCY TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO FUND EMPLOYEE HEALTH BENEFIT EXPENSES FOR FY 2004-05.**

Mayor Knopp said that Corporation Counsel provided their legal opinion that the action of the Board of Estimate & Taxation was legally correct and consistent with the 2001 action between the Board of Estimate & Taxation and the Board of Education. The City's decision to put the funds in contingency was made before the Board of Ed's budget was adopted. The Board followed what was done in 2001. He referred to the memorandum he received from Dr. Corda on May 22, 2002 which approved the special appropriation from the City. Mayor Knopp said that the City's action is legal, proper and based on precedent from years ago. He said that he did not believe the City's position would be at risk. Putting the funds in contingency was an attempt to encourage negotiations between the Board of Ed and the teacher's union.

Mayor Knopp referred to the May 6th article wherein Ms. Bishop-Pullan said that having funds in contingency would not be necessary because the discussions were ongoing. He said that the ongoing tension was becoming a distraction from the main goal. He said that he hoped the negotiations would be productive and successful.

**** MR. BUZZEE MOVED TO TABLE FURTHER DISCUSSION OF THIS ITEM UNTIL LATER IN THE MEETING.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** MR. COLEY MOVED THE MEETING INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS THE ITEM RELATING TO TEACHER NEGOTIATIONS.**

Mayor Knopp said that Mr. Vetter, Ms. LeTourneau, Mr. Hamilton and Ms. Twomey would remain with the others in Executive Session.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Burnett arrived at 8:50 p.m.

The meeting re-entered public session at 9:30 p.m.

**** MR. BUZZEE MOVED TO REMOVE THE SPECIAL APPROPRIATION FROM THE TABLE FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Davidson said that he didn't hear anything that would change his view. He said that funds should remain in contingency. He felt the \$2.5 million should remain in contingency until negotiations are complete or closer to fruition. He suggested delaying moving the item tonight, and encouraged everyone to think more thoroughly about the matter.

Mr. Avery said that he agreed with his colleague that the decision should be delayed. He said that he recognized the lawsuit that was threatened but felt that was unnecessary and divisive. He said that he would rather spend the money on something else. He suggested asking the bargaining group, the Norwalk Federation of Teachers, to come forward and research the evidence that has been presented. He further suggested they be asked to take the savings without asking for any other concessions or changes, reiterating that the \$2.5 million could be spend on things of greater importance.

Mayor Knopp re-stated his position that there would be a greater chance of a successful outcome to the negotiations if the City transferred the funds. Continuing to hold the funds in contingency would serve as a distraction to further negotiations. This would free up the money to pay for contractual benefits if the negotiations are unsuccessful. Mayor Knopp said that a few obstacles remain to be worked out.

Mr. Davidson said that in his opinion moving the money would not eliminate the distraction caused by the Board of Ed. Moving the funds from contingency would send the wrong message. The teachers should realize that they have nothing to risk and that the \$2.5 million could be used for constructive purposes. Mayor Knopp said that there was no reason why the teachers shouldn't believe there is no risk to them.

Mr. Coley said that he agreed with Mr. Davidson and Mr. Avery that the money could be used for other educational purposes.

Mr. Buzzee wondered if there were to be any savings would these come back to the City. Mayor Knopp said that he was hopeful. At the end of the prior fiscal year there was a \$900,000 surplus; \$300,000 went toward textbooks and \$600,000 was placed in health insurance reserves. Any savings would be returned to the Board of Estimate & Taxation.

Mr. Burnett said that he was concerned about the public's perception. He said that taxpayers have advised him that they are upset at what is happening regarding the proposed lawsuit with the City. In his opinion, the sooner this issue was resolved, the better it would be for everyone.

**** MOTION PASSED BY ROLL CALL VOTE WITH FOUR VOTES IN FAVOR (KNOPP, BURNETT, BUZZI, COLEY) AND TWO VOTES IN OPPOSITION (AVERY, DAVIDSON).**

**** MR. COLEY MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol A. Wiggins for
Telesco Secretarial Services

