

METHUEN CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 2009 – RECESSED
FROM JUNE 27, 2009

Chair Deborah Quinn called the recessed meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. in the Great Hall, Searles Building. Councilor Cronin, Councilor Giordano, and Councilor Lahey were absent.

TR-09-43 Resolution Providing for the Adoption of the Fiscal Year 2010 School Department Budget

MOTION BY: Councilor Kannan, seconded by Councilor Quinn to adopt (for discussion purposes).

Councilor Leone questioned the list of seven people (as noted in the tribune) that are getting sizable increases in salary.

Mayor Manzi said the numbers in that budget didn't accurately reflect the actual numbers and that is what they are looking at. The differentials are based on collective bargaining after the budget was printed.

Councilor Leone said the number listed in the budget for 2009 is what was originally approved for 2009 but was increased during the year.

Mayor Manzi said he understands that it was increased via collective bargaining agreements.

Councilor Leone noted that some of these went up ten percent last year, although these percentage increases really happened during the year, 10%, and 15%.

Mayor Manzi said on the School side they have steps and different pay categories that make those percentages incorrect. They're not 10% and 15% increases.

Councilor Zanni commented, over the past few months, the Mayor along with the City Council, prior to him going into negotiations, all of the Councilors, even one taking his entire salary out, took a 10% cut. In turn, the Mayor negotiated with the city in good faith because of the leadership that he gave. On the opposite side of the ledger with the School department, the administration is not looking at any type of cut. He is going to approve this budget, with reservation. Things aren't going to get better next year and it's important that the Superintendent look from that perspective along with Central Office of where cuts can be made, not a freeze. Going into negotiations, you can't be saying, "I want a freeze" and then tell the teachers to take a decrease in their raise. He is glad that the music teachers and the phys ed teachers are back in the budget. He's sure that's the result from the overwhelming response from people, both from the band and the other areas. He understands some of the other positions may be filled as well. Mayor Manzi (yes)

Councilor Kannan said an email received today talks about what dollars are going to be used to reinstate eliminated positions. However, the only two positions that are here are the two music positions. Actual eliminated personnel restored will be forthcoming. That doesn't sit well with her for two reasons. When is the City Council, who approves this budget, going to know what the money is actually going for? She would prefer to see that prior to voting in a budget. There was a lot of grey area in this budget. This is at least the fourth time this Council has met to address this budget which was a waste of paper because they've gone over it, spent their time and still don't have final numbers. This is the bottom line they're looking at and as long as she knows there is certain Chapter 70 money allotted here, she will vote on it, but along with Councilor Zanni with a lot of reservation. She noted this should be an eye opening to the administration to make sure next year we have this budget well before July 1st.

Councilor Willette referred to this budget as "a dog with many fleas that keeps on biting the City Council". He has a legal obligation to vote on this budget, to pay the bills. Councilors ask for basic information, a breakdown of the cost savings, as well as a breakdown of the restoration of positions. Council got a breakdown of the cost savings because it was reflected in the Tribune but did not get a breakdown of the restoration of jobs as Councilor Kannan mentioned, absolute dereliction of duty of the Superintendent. This Council is the elected body for the City of Methuen. Everything comes before Council, whether its budgets, appointments, local laws, changes, regulations, expulsions, employment contracts, votes of no confidence, etc. To have someone who is paid by the taxpayers not furnishing information within 48 hours to this City Council is an outrage but he has a legal obligation to vote on this budget. It's the absolute worse budget that's ever been presented to him in six years on the City Council and four years on the School Committee. Councilor Willette commended Evan Chaisson, Bob Vogler, and Barbara Grondine and the Mayor for trying to salvage positions for people in this city. It's going to be an outrage to the people when they realize that most of the custodians that were laid off are not going to return to their positions. Some phys ed teachers and the music teachers are returning but Council doesn't know how many program assistants are coming. He commented that the Mayor worked, morning, noon, night, weekends on his budget; resolved all the contracts with all the negotiating groups, a lot of painful cuts. He didn't see any painful cuts from the administration on the school side, absolutely none. Some of the people that got their salary increased have consolidated positions and additional responsibilities. In comparison, when he served on the School committee, we had Dr. Littlefield as a Superintendent, Dr. Harris, John Crafton, and Arthur Nicholson, all of them handled two or three positions and levels of responsibility. It was not a top-heavy administration over there. Someone lost their vision in that Central office and that has to change.

Councilor Pappalardo asked Colleen McCarthy how many program assistants let go (some who worked twenty years) would be brought back into the system. She expressed concern about our resource room program assistants because that is where they are really needed

Colleen McCarthy said she is not sure which positions are coming back. There is a meeting scheduled with the Program assistants on the Tuesday, the 14th.

Councilor Pappalardo said there is another program called “sheltered English” and she is hoping they will bring program assistants back for that because they are needed. She questioned seniority and asked if that is a contractual item.

Colleen McCarthy responded because the positions are eliminated, the people attached to the positions don’t have seniority.

Councilor Pappalardo asked if that was negotiated in their contract.

Colleen McCarthy said it is part of their collective bargaining. However, they have bidding rights and they did have one “bid session”. Some of the positions will be restored but at this point they are not sure which ones yet.

Councilor Pappalardo said she hopes it’s done fairly. Its unfair if somebody that’s been there for twenty years doesn’t come back and then somebody that’s been there for five years does.

Colleen McCarthy explained that when it comes to the bidding, their seniority is in the bidding process of the collective bargaining.

Councilor Pappalardo said they’ve cut \$200,000 out of the energy costs. Every year the weather is getting worse, colder and more snow. She does like that idea. The thermostats are going to come down and the kids could be sicker. It is an unfortunate situation. She doesn’t like the budget and is only voting for it because bills have to be paid.

Councilor Leone said he is disappointed in many things; disappointed that the administration took until June 29th to give the School Committee a budget to vote on. He is very disappointed that the representative of the teachers union chose to state in the newspaper that she felt the teachers deserved their raise and the implication there is that she also felt that the people on this side of the government who voluntarily gave up paying benefits didn’t deserve that too. The employees, union members and unaffiliated, did not deserve what they had to give up. They deserve the same thing that the teachers feel they deserve. He is very disappointed that the rank and file of the teachers union didn’t get a chance to voice their opinion here and one person made all the decisions, very different than the situation here. When the Mayor was speaking to bargaining committees from all the unions, they were going back to their membership, back and forth. The Mayor had a lot of dialogue with them, a lot of communication. In this case (school), we had one email from the administration to the union. The union’s response was basically in the newspaper. He finds it disappointing that Council finds themselves here on July 1st, up against the wall, being told well if they don’t do this budget now, people aren’t going to get paid on Friday. That could be true. He’s not disputing that but lack of planning on part of the School Department does not constitute an emergency on his part. Council has a job to do and the job is to make sure that this budget is presented correctly. He is most disappointed with the attitude of the top officials in the school department not setting the example for their people like the Mayor did. He was the first person to stand up and take a pay cut before he asked anyone else to do it. That same example could have been set in the School department and may have had a much different effect on the rank and file there. He stated he is voting against the budget.

Chair Quinn said she has a problem regarding the program assistants and spoke about it at the School committee meeting. These positions are the link between the teachers, the parents, and most of all the children and are the ones that bring a lot to the table. She left the School committee meeting the other night under the assumption that

most of the program assistants were going to be reinstated. She is not sure of that and still doesn't have an answer. As far as the custodians, they take care of the health and welfare of the schools and the maintenance. That is not a luxury. That's a right to every student who attends Methuen Public Schools and the staff that work there. Cutting that is disgraceful. She's glad the two music teachers were restored but has a problem with the reduction of coaches. Today, kids are in front of computers, Nintendo's and they are not getting the exercise they need. Most of the time, the main exercises they get are in the schools, at the gyms. She commended the Mayor for his efforts. It is still very upsetting and if she, as the Council President, has to take a vote of "no", she believes that would speak for the entire city council with her vote sending a message.

Councilor Willette said technically Councilors could all vote against this budget again and then tomorrow Tom Kelly cannot any bills to any vendors any payroll checks. He asked Mr. Kelly if that is correct.

Mr. Kelly stated that is correct. He cannot pay anything today.

Councilor Willette said he voted against the budget last year. The reason he voted against the budget was because they laid off the part-time truant enforcement officer who was verifying and making sure that students attending public schools were residents of Methuen. That person was eliminated. When he started to hear complaints about class sizes rising, he shouldn't be hearing this from the teachers' union because the Superintendent cut that position out. It was a proactive position that went to the bus stops and to the homes. It was a former law enforcement officer. He was doing a tremendous job. Every year the School Committee votes not to participate in "school choice". To him that's an underhanded way of saying we open up our doors for people outside Methuen to attend our schools. The second thing is when he was on the Methuen School Committee he recommended having a police officer in every school. Now that's influx. Council doesn't know, with approval of this budget, if they're going to be rotating police officers from school to school or leaving schools without coverage. Hopefully that issue is going to be resolved. He hopes the City Council votes this budget because they have a legal obligation to do so to pay the bills.

Chair Quinn asked the Mayor about the school safety officers.

Mayor Manzi said the safety officers are currently are in the adopted school budget the same as they were last year. A subcommittee has been formed of the School Committee to look at the issue with Chief Lavigne, the patrol sergeant that is assigned, and Superintendent Whitten. He doesn't anticipate any changes to that status in this fiscal year. They will look at some of the interactions payment wise between the city, the schools and try to make some changes that would be satisfactory to the full school committee. The number of officers and the sergeant will all remain and all are in the budget that Councilors are voting on.

UPON ROLL CALL VOTE: (approval of school budget) 5 yes, 1 no (Clr Leone) (Councilors Cronin, Giordano, and Lahey were absent)

Mayor Manzi suggested that the City Council and School Committee sit in Joint Session, perhaps at the end of September to discuss issues brought up during the budget process.

ADJOURN

MOTION BY: Councilor Zanni, seconded by Councilor Pappalardo to adjourn.
UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

I do hereby certify that at a meeting of which a quorum was present, the foregoing minutes were adopted by the Methuen City Council by a unanimous vote on September 8, 2009.

COUNCIL CLERK