

CITY OF STAMFORD 19TH CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION FINANCE COMMITTEE

Shelley Michelson, Chair

Members

Susan Halpern

Steven Kolenberg

Alex Martinez

Clemon Williams

MEETING REPORT

Wednesday, December 7, 2022

7:00 P.M.

This meeting was conducted remotely

Guest Attendees:

Dr. Tamu Lucero, Superintendent, Stamford Public Schools

Ryan Fealey, Director of Finance, Stamford Public Schools

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 P.M. In attendance were the two guest attendees as well as Commissioners Halpern, Martinez and Williams, Commissioner Kolenberg notified the Chair of a prior commitment and was unable to attend. Also joining us for all or a portion of the meeting were Commissioners Lane and Camporeale. Commissioner Bowser joined the meeting at 7:26 P.M. Commissioner Martinez left the meeting shortly after 8:00 P.M.

Dr. Lucero and Mr. Fealey felt that the Charter seemed to be working well for them and had no suggestions for changes. They did not feel it necessary to hold the Board of Education budgetary process earlier in the year as suggested by Charge #74, as they had recently instituted a process of identifying hard-to-fill positions and was posting them early. Commissioner Williams asked about the difficulty in attracting substitute teachers. Compensation-related adjustments at the local school level have been instituted to attract more substitute teachers, including incentivizing regular teachers to add extra courses to their teaching loads.

Both Dr. Lucero and Mr. Fealey were enthusiastic about the idea of biennial budgeting (Charge #73) believing that they always had a two year strategic focus and that most of the budgetary factors affecting the Board of Education/SPS were well known, so that only second year tweaks would be necessary. They also mentioned the length and workload associated with the annual budgetary process.

The Alliance grant, the largest single source of state funding, spans several years, making that part of the school budget easy to predict. The Excess Cost grant, which includes funds for special needs students, had been fairly predictable, but the formula recently changed to account for municipal wealth, rather than actual need, so Stamford may be penalized with the new formula. However, the formula will be taken up again in the state legislature again in January. The State has not increased the size of its Excess Cost grant pool.

Mr. Fealey's slides demonstrate that the cost for Special education funding needs have recently increased by close to 6% annually with meager reimbursement from the State.

Dr. Lucero and Mr. Fealey agreed to review Charge #83 relating to Budgetary Procedures /Additional Appropriations and notify the Committee as to whether they believed any changes are required. They indicated that additional appropriations are seldomly required. In response to an inquiry from Commissioner Michelson and in order for the Committee to grasp the full impact of the City's operating and capital costs, Mr. Fealey has agreed to prepare and submit additional historical analyses that demonstrate the budgetary relationship of the SPS budget to that of the City which will reveal the overall cost of running the City. A comparison to relevant to CPI will be included.

SPS has its own grants office for academic-related grants and works with the City's grants office on the capital side. The potential for a \$1.5 million capital grant to defray costs at Stamford High School is being discussed at the Board of Finance. Issues relating to timing of grant receipt and permitted purpose are under consideration, including use of funds for ADA-compliant projects.

Commissioner Martinez raised the issue of the need for SPS and the Board of Education to employ specialized legal talent and Dr. Lucero mentioned that a separate attorney had been hired to attend to special education issues. Other attorneys deal with labor issues and negotiations and grievances.

Mr. Fealey mentioned that the federally funded free meal program at SPS would continue for the time being as long as Stamford remained qualified for the program. During the worst of the COVID epidemic, SPS had qualified under a State program.

Mr. Fealey shared with the Committee his slides entitled Stamford Public Schools BOR Education Committee Budget Discussion, November, 2022. Strategies are under discussion for addressing the fiscal cliff (a gap of \$8-9 million) when federal ESSER funds will no longer be available to cover positions that were eliminated by necessity in FY 2020-2021. Of the approximately 137 positions cut, the Board of Education would like to be able to budget to retain 120 of those positions, including technology experts paraeducators and parent facilitators, among others. Large SPS budgetary increases are forecast in health insurance, electricity, heating and special education. The SPS Capital Program encompasses construction of new schools and rehabilitation of others over a 20 year time span with cost estimates varying from \$750 million to \$1.2 billion. Inflation estimates may change; therefore, the scope and cost of the capital program may change.

Substitute language was requested to be made in the meeting notes of the November 16 meeting under heading of Board of Education Issues to replace the words "A Chinese Wall" with the words "A virtual barrier. " A motion was made to approve the minutes with this change by Commissioner Williams and seconded by Commissioner Halpern. After unanimous approval, the minutes were deemed revised.

No new business was discussed, but the Committee meeting for December 13th was canceled due to a conflict with Commissioner Williams' meeting the same night. New Committee meetings will be scheduled beginning in January. A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Williams and seconded by Commissioner Halpern. After unanimous approval, the meeting was adjourned at 8:27 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Commissioner Michelson