

**BOARD OF ALDERMEN
BUDGET DELIBERATIONS SESSION
BOARD OF EDUCATION PRESENTATION
APRIL 29, 2009**

The Board of Aldermen held a budget deliberation session on Wednesday, April 29, 2009 in the aldermanic chambers of City Hall. Chairman Blake opened the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m. welcoming everyone. Chairman Blake recognized Board of Education member Greta Stanford and asked her to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Roll Call

Board Members Present

B. Bier
J. Blacketter
B. Blake
V. Ditchkus, Jr. (7:25 p.m.)
A. Giannattasio
M. Hardiman
S. Manning
R. Nunno
J. Patterson
J. Rosen
J. Toohey
N. Veccharelli
P. Vetro
R. Vitali
S. Willey

Also Present

Mayor J. Richetelli, Jr.
L. Bull DiLullo, Mayor's Admin. Asst.

Ald. Toohey and Ald. Patterson made and seconded a motion to come out of recess at 7:10 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Blake welcomed the Dr. Polansky and company as well as members of the Board of Education who were present. Chairman Blake recognized Frank Lacerenza from Saint Mary's regarding the Acct. 4992 Private School Textbook.

Mr. Lacerenza thanked the Board for allowing him to speak tonight. He stated he was here on behalf of the three schools as well as the parochial school parents. He encouraged the Board to keep the account the same as last year. He stated these monies would not take away from the Board of Education budget. Mr. Lacerenza continued reading from a prepared statement recognizing these difficult time and good relationship and cooperation level the three schools have maintained with the Board of Education, as well as the number of projects they have worked on together. He stated this is a small allocation of \$21,000, but a good investment. He continued reading speaking to the dedication of the parochial school parents. He also pointed out these three school relieves the burden of the taxpayer saving approximately \$5,000,000 if these students were to be placed in the public school system. Mr. Lacerenza continued reading, his comments also addressing how the monies

are utilized. He stated the monies are granted they did have plans for them. He stated they would use the funds for books for special needs students already being used in public schools. He expressed his appreciation to the Board.

Ald. Vitali thanked Mr. Lacerenza for all they do adding he would support this. He asked the total enrollment of students in all three schools.

Mr. Lacerenza responded it is around 500, but for just Milford students it is 450.

Ald. Nunno asked how the money was spent last year.

Mr. Lacerenza responded the did not have that list with him, but to the best of his recollection, St. Ann's used the monies for math and science, St. Gabriel's used the monies for math and social studies and at St. Mary's it was the same. He pointed out at St. Mary's they did not use the full allotment.

Chairman Blake thanked Mr. Lacerenza. He stated they would now move to the presentation of the Board of Education and again welcomed Dr. Polansky, Mr. Russell, Mr. Cummings and Chairman of the Board of Education, David Hourigan. Chairman Blake stated they could proceed to the presentation or begin with Questions and Answers.

Mr. Hourigan introduced the other members of the Board of Education present: Ms. Stanford, Mrs. Rohrig, Mrs. Casey and Mrs. Staneski). He continued by reading from a prepared statement (attached). The Board then watched a brief video presentation.

Dr. Polansky thanked Kathy Bonetti for putting the video together. He stated they felt it was important to show the video as to what the school district provides. Dr. Polansky stated they would demonstrate tonight where they are with their budget. He stated the Board of Finance recommended an \$817,000 cut. He stated in the Board's package there were over 85 questions that were asked. He stated they can in with a budget of 2.49% and now they are at 1.49%, with fixed costs that just cannot be replaced. Dr. Polansky pointed out how they have lowered their kilowatt usage considerably and also spoke as to their partnership with the community and Board of Aldermen. He stated the budget right now decreases services and with further cuts people would go. He continued onto a PowerPoint presentation explaining they took their role seriously and presented a budget worthy of recommendation. He added the Board of Education did their due diligence as well. He also spoke of the capital improvement plan and the need for the replacement of 13 roofs. Dr. Polansky continued with the PowerPoint presentation.

Ald. Veccharelli asked if they expected any stimulus funds that could help out and how much.

Dr. Polansky responded if it were up to him he would spend it all on facilities, but stated it has to be put into programs. He stated they would also receive Title 1 money and explained how those monies need to be spent. He also spoke as to IDEA, which is additional special education money and that \$1.7 million would be received over two year. He explained 50% is to maintain effort and the other part is for programs and improvements. He explained the SFSF fund is \$3.5 million, but the State has yet to apply for those funds. He stated originally those monies were to offset ECS, but the Federal government said no that it must go to local education funding. He stated that money is still undeclared. With regards to the \$400,000, he stated they are looking to bring in a number of programs.

Ald. Veccharelli asked what would happen if they got that money.

Chairman Blake interjected stating the SFSF would go to the State.

Dr. Polansky stated that was incorrect, that it must go to LEA adding there seemed to be a legal definition concerning this.

Mr. Russell stated he was at a meeting just yesterday and even if they were to receive that money it would be very little.

Ald. Hardiman asked if they knew what the ECS dollars would be.

Dr. Polansky stated they have been told it will be the same level of funding, but it was pre-mature at this point. He stated it was his understanding the State Department of Education would like to see that money go to LEA.

Ald. Willey raised a point of order stating Dr. Polansky is the boss of Mr. Hardiman and Mr. Nunno.

Chairman Blake asked what the specific point of order is based on Robert's Rules of Order.

Ald. Willey stated his concerns were more ethical.

Chairman Blake responded the point of order was not well taken.

Ald. Nunno asked what positions had been identified as being cut.

Dr. Polansky replied 5 media aides, 2 secretaries, maintenance and a technician.

Ald. Toohey noted the presentation discussed funds for special needs. She asked for an explanation as to how the money is broken up between the schools and also asked if the same aide goes continues on with that child.

Dr. Polansky explained 7 years ago a class action lawsuit was finalized that limited or restricted having special education children from being by themselves. He stated currently they are integrated into most classes. He stated there are three or four ways support is given to a child. He stated the medically fragile child has a nurse and a paraprofessional; there is one on one tutor, one tutor or students that go to external places for support. He continued with an explanation as to the classification of disabilities. Dr. Polansky pointed out these services are all State mandated processes and also that services are very different for each child. He also explained the Response for Intervention which is being implemented and explained the new structure.

Ald. Blacketter asked for clarification on entitlement grants and if positions that are funded by grants are included in the budget.

Dr. Polansky responded there are Title 1 grants and IDEA. He stated there are students demographically challenged and referred to page 123 of the budget book.

Ald. Blacketter asked if the positions are included in the budget.

Dr. Polansky replied no.

Ald. Willey asked about the stimulus package and the comment made by Dr. Polansky that “we wouldn’t see a dime”. He asked if Dr. Polansky could explain that statement.

Dr. Polansky explained it is \$2.2 million over two years and only \$400,000 for special education and \$1.7 for programming. He spoke as to the long range implications and that you must sustain the effort locally. He stated because we are a Title 1 district they can’t turn the money down. He expressed concern as to where the district would be two years from now and the sustainability.

Ald. Willey asked about unfunded mandates and if they were useful or if they exceed their cost.

Dr. Polansky responded unfunded that benefit the kids are best, unfunded for bureaucracy are not. He stated there are certain things they have to provide, i.e. buses, programs, etc.

Ald. Willey asked about arbitrated settlements.

Dr. Polansky explained there is arbitration and negotiated. He stated there are 50 or 60 that are not.

Ald. Manning spoke as to the \$536,000 Block Grant Funding and if those monies were split between the City and schools how that would impact energy costs in this budget.

Mr. Russell stated there are not monies for energy projects in this budget. He stated they have applied for many grants, but noted there are still two schools that have not been retrofitted.

Ald. Manning noted in the budget there are items such as AC, HVAC, etc. and suggested perhaps they could look through the budget book for duplication.

Dr. Polansky addressed Milford 2020 and utilization of their buildings. He stated that has been put on hold in light of the economic times. He also stressed there is no district that has been as energy efficient as Milford.

Ald. Ditchkus commented every town is struggling and asking for concessions and have asked again this year. He asked if they had gone back to their unions or Board and if they had offered anything. He also commented he has heard of arbitrated contracts that come back to the unions. He also noted a number of years ago this City fought a 5% increase as it was very costly for this City.

Mr. Hourigan responded they have entered into preliminary discussions, however, he wished to point out it was like comparing apples to oranges when you compare the contracts. He stated once this Board makes its decision they will enter into more serious negotiations.

Dr. Polansky stated just on co-pay alone, their teachers are at 14% and other unions are at 0.

Ald. Ditchkus for clarification asked if they had gone to the unions regarding the correction contract.

Dr. Polansky replied yes.

Ald. Patterson asked the impact on the budget if they don't have concessions before June 1.

Dr. Polansky replied it would probably come in services as well as elimination of staff and programs.

Ald. Rosen asked how many special education administrators there are.

Dr. Polansky responded 4.

Ald. Rosen asked if that number could be reduced and the work streamlined.

Dr. Polansky responded absolutely not. He stated Milford has one of the lowest number of special education administrators in the State. He also pointed out they have one on a grant and 3 are paid. He went on to speak as to the complexity of the mandates that they must comply with.

Ald. Vitali stated in the budget there is approximately \$75,000 allocated to wiring of buildings and asked if those are additions.

Mr. Russell explained a lot of that money is dedicated to wireless entry into the buildings. He stated they are moving towards a wireless environment.

Ald. Blacketter stated she wished to follow up on entitlement grants. She asked if they were to lose those if they would then have to find that money in the budget.

Dr. Polansky explained the IDEA grant is where a major portion of the money is. He stated if it is not mandated it would be striped and the kids that need it most would lose out.

Ald. Blacketter asked if they would be adding personnel if these grants were not fulfilled.

Dr. Polansky stated the staffing would be 6 specialists.

Ald. Blacketter asked about the proposed changes to the middle school programs and how that would impact the budget.

Dr. Polansky stated the FTE would remain the same and explained it would be a shifting.

Ald. Bier commented the average class size is 18.53 in the elementary school. He asked is that has been steady over the last five years.

Dr. Polansky stated they would like to keep it under 18 for K-2 and at 20 for grades 3,4 and 5.

Ald. Bier asked how the current \$800,000 that was cut would affect class size.

Dr. Polansky responded there would be some seepage. He stated is concern is the high school level and the need to reduce class size in the 9th grade especially.

Ald. Bier asked how class size in Milford compared to the rest of the State.

Dr. Polansky responded they are in the middle of the pack comparatively.

Ald. Manning asked about contracted services and in the PowerPoint a reduction was pointed out and then again contracted maintenance on p. 57 of the budget. She stated it appears to be a \$30,000 increase.

Mr. Russell explained contracted services are a 3000 series and the question being asked is regarding the 4000 series. He referred the board to p. XIV which shows all contracted services. He also stated all maintenance expenses have to be separated out. He pointed out the total in the 3000 series is down \$90,000.

Ald. Willey commented the mandatory arbitration law ultimately leads to higher costs.

Dr. Polansky stated arbitration law is complex, but what it does is prohibits strikes. He stated teachers here are paid much lower than in Fairfield County, which is who they compete with. He stated it doesn't cost extra it just make the district competitive in salaries.

Ald. Willey asked Dr. Polansky where he expected to be in 3-4 years.

Dr. Polansky replied it would be based on the efforts of the federal governments as well as the economic times.

Ald. Willey spoke about potential conflict of interests with the Board of Education where there are members that are former Board of Education employees or their spouses are. He asked how they are able to advocate for the taxpayer and well as for their own union.

Dr. Polansky responded he believe the BOE understood and demonstrated their performance in putting together this budget and that they did it in an ethical manner.

Ald. Vetro asked why adult education is an unfunded mandate.

Dr. Polansky explained it is for those adults who need high school graduation credits or don't speak English.

Ald. Vitali commented regarding the structure of the schools and questioned the physical plants. He questioned the duplication of services, specifically 2 high schools that cost \$22.0 million, 2 sports programs at a cost of approximately \$800,000 each, upkeep to the buildings. He stated this is a community ready for one high school and two middle schools.

Ald. Veccharelli interjected raising a point of order. He stated tonight was not the appropriate time to discuss one high school and that they should be discussing the budget.

Chairman Blake stated he would allow Ald. Vitali the leeway to continue.

Ald. Vitali responded the duplication of services has a tremendous impact on this budget especially when they look at what is expended in the budget for 2 high school buildings. He stated it would seem the budget would be best suited by building one green high school and having to continue to re-wire buildings at a cost of \$75,000, not being able to sustain current technology. He stated a plan of action needs to be in place in order to

move forward. He asked if the stimulus money coming in that is planned for programs could be redirected and used for new buildings. He also stated we have 13 buildings in need of new roofs. He invited his colleagues to visit these buildings and encouraged the Boards to begin to think and talk about building a new school. He stated there are a number of advantages such as lower transportation costs. He stated they needed to do what is best for kids.

Dr. Polansky stated they were not ready to bring something like this to the Board. He also commented the Vitali plan could have merit and that Milford 2020 was to discuss those issues; but currently there are two high schools that need work as well as the other facilities. He stated quite simply that the infrastructure was in dire need of work.

Ald. Vitali commented there are many other communities that have one large high school.

Dr. Polansky stated they have a backlog of facility needs and to think of going to another plan is irresponsible.

Ald. Vitali pointed out there is a 5-year plan which changes every 5 years pushing the work back each year.

Dr. Polansky stated his recommendation to the Board at this time is to hold off on Milford 2020. He stated they needed to meet the current needs.

Ald. Vitali stated it was also important to realize the need to cut down on the duplication of services.

Ald. Toohey referred to p. 108 concerning postage and asked if that fee is contractual and also a new machine.

Dr. Polansky explained it is a 5-year lease.

Ald. Toohey asked about the utility body plow.

Mr. Russell explained it would replace a 1999 truck.

Ald. Toohey asked if they do their own plowing.

Mr. Russell replied Public Works does the major roads to the schools and they are responsible for the grounds.

Ald. Toohey noted it was in the budget in 2007-2008 for \$70,000 and in 2008-2009 for \$35,000 and in 2009-2010 for \$35,000 again. She asked if the money had not been spent.

Mr. Russell referred to p. 16 of the budget book, which shows all vehicles owned by the Board of Education. He stated with that schedule it could take up to 28 years for replacement. He stated they elected to replace 1 each year.

Ald. Manning referred to p. 80 of the budget book, Printing Expense - 5501. She stated this was something she thought was on-line and asked if it could be eliminated.

Dr. Polansky responded State law indicates they must have the print on hand. He stated this is another NCLB mandate.

Mr. Cummings noted \$7,500 for printing had been eliminated. He stated they are moving towards that, but they will always have some paper. He went on to explain some of the ideas they have for reduction. He reiterated they are constantly seeking ways to eliminate papers.

Chairman Blake recalled there was a print shop years ago and questioned if that could be utilized in some way.

Mr. Cummings responded they do continue to use that equipment. He stated there are transportation issues to consider when getting things out.

Mr. Russell also pointed out they pay only .9 per copy.

Ald. Blacketter suggested they give out with the handbook an option that they may not wish to receive it.

Dr. Polansky responded Federal law has made it very clear they must have paper in hand. He stated they have tried for an opt out clause and have even spoken with our Congresswoman.

Ald. Ditchkus asked where in the budget he would find costs for salt/sand.

Mr. Russell referred the Board to p. 67 of the budget book under Maintenance Supplies.

Ald. Ditchkus asked if they knew the cost.

Mr. Russell replied they would be able to get that and forward it to the Board.

Ald. Giannattasio asked how services would be affected with the reduction of the media aides.

Dr. Polansky explained the Board deliberated at length and that they were looking for positions that did not impact students in the classroom.

Mr. Hourigan added when they decided to find the \$800,000 they tried to find what would provide the least disruption of service and again would have the least impact on student learning.

Ald. Toohey asked the hours a media aide works.

Mr. Cummings responded they are comparable to teachers and explained their schedule.

Ald. Bier asked if the library would now close when school closes and if a teacher could volunteer to say.

Dr. Polansky stated teachers have contracted hours and he was not sure they would fill that void.

Ald. Manning commented the perception in the newspapers is that the Board cuts services and not administrative services and asked if Dr. Polansky could address that.

Dr. Polansky responded the district has the lowest in our DRG. He also pointed out they cut two administrative positions last year. He stated the work still has to get done. He stated they have fewer teachers than last year, but the work still gets done.

Dr. Hourigan read from a list of schools in Milford's DRG and the number of administrators those schools have. He stated Milford has the third worst ratio of teachers/administers in the DRG.

Chairman Blake thanked the Dr. Polansky and his staff for their presentation and comments. He stated it was much appreciated and that they would consider all comments during the Board's deliberations. Chairman Blake announced the Board would not be meeting on May 6, 2009, but would meet on one of the other scheduled dates on the meeting agenda.

Ald. Vetro and Ald. Patterson made and seconded a motion to recess at 8:57 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen K. Huber
Recording Secretary