

(The following is not a verbatim transcript of comments or discussion that occurred during the meeting, but rather a summarization intended for general informational purposes. All motions and votes are the official records).

SPECIAL FINANCE COMMITTEE – APRIL 21, 2021
(BUDGET HEARINGS)

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Wednesday, April 21, 2021 via Zoom Webinar.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 PM. by the Chair.

Present Councilwoman Jessica M. Marino
 Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli
 Councilman John P. Donegan
 Councilman Matthew R. Reilly
 Councilman Robert J. Ferri, Vice-Chair
 Council Vice-President Edward J. Brady, Chair
 Council President Christopher G. Paplauskas

Also Present: Councilwoman Aniece Germain
 Anthony Moretti, Director of Administration
 Christopher Rawson, Assistant City Solicitor
 Robert Strom, Finance Director
 David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst
 Leanne Zarrella, City Clerk
 Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees

SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

Director Strom stated that there is an increase of approximately \$6 million in the proposed budget, of which monies level-funded from the State at \$68.9 million. The Mayor and Administration is proposing an additional \$1.5 million from the City, which would bring us to \$97.5 million. Total budget is approximately \$169,641 for the Schools, which represents 54.6% out of a total budget of \$310 million. There is in the works additional money through the Emergency Relief Program of approximately \$22.3 million for the City. By mid-May, we should know more of how much we are getting and what it could be used for. In the last four years, the School has generated surpluses and they have been fortunate to put money into Capital Reserve Fund. In 2018, it was \$500,000 and 2020, it was \$750,000. Right now, they are trending to end the fiscal year either balanced or with a surplus and through March, the City and School are showing surplus balances that can change between now and June 30th, but he feels confident that both entities are going to end ok this year and also going forward to 2022, if the federal money comes to fruition, which he believes it will.

Daniel Wall, School Committee Chair, appeared to speak and stated that on behalf of the School Committee, teachers, administrators and staff and more importantly on behalf of the more than 10,000 school students. He asked that the City Council fully support and fund the Cranston School Committee budget. This budget takes into account contractual obligations, pensions as well as increases in costs to Charter School and outside tuition.

Michael Traficante, School Committee Member, appeared to speak and stated that public education in the State of Rhode Island are solely dependent on State and local aid. He thanked Mayor Hopkins for not only his public support of education, but his meaningful allocation of \$1.5 million for the 2021-2022 school budget. He also thanked the City Council for their support in the allocation.

Domenic Fusco, School Committee Member, appeared to speak and stated that schools are extremely important to the communities. He thanked the Mayor for his increase in school funding and hopes the City Council can find more money for our children.

Superintendent Jeannine Nota-Masse appeared to speak and stated that our strong School Department is something our City is proud of. Families move to Cranston for our schools. She also stated that she knows that funding the School Department is an extremely difficult task when 54% of the City budget goes to our schools. She realizes that that is a huge portion of taxpayer money and you want to spend it responsibly. She is very confident that her team, the School Committee, those who worked to put this budget together, have done that in a very responsible manner. The School should not be punished because they finished the year with surpluses. Many of the other departments in the City do not do that for whatever reason. She does not think that a surplus at the end of the year is a bad thing on the School Department. That means that they have lived within, if not, beneath their means. They are receiving federal money and they have to be extremely cautious about how that money is spent. She is truly appreciative of the Mayor's commitment to the schools and for his budget allocations this year. she asked that the School Budget be fully funded.

Council President Paplauskas questioned if CARES Act funding can be used for transportation costs.

Councilman Donegan asked for an overview of the bond projects in the budget. Superintendent Nota-Masse stated that there are five major projects. Garden City School is going to be rebuilt starting in June as soon as the students leave and that will take approximately 1½ years. From there, they will move onto Gladstone School where a brand new building will be built on the property that is currently in existence there then the older building will be taken down. Cranston High School West will be receiving improvements to its building, which will be fixing the heating system and addressing the insulation issue. Eden Park School will be completed and then the last big project will be Park View, which needs some ADA upgrades and other improvements.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees