

SPECIAL MEETING – CITY COUNCIL

-SEPTEMBER 3, 2003-

A Special meeting of the Cranston City Council was held on Wednesday, September 3, 2003 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 P.M. by Council President Pastore.

Roll Call showed the following members present: Councilmen Fung, Jackvony, Councilwoman Ellen O’Hara (Appeared at 7:45 P.M.), Council Member Fogarty, Councilmen Ferolito, Lanni, McDonough and Council President Pastore –8.

Absent: Councilwoman Paula McFarland –1.

Also Present: Mike Igoe, City Controller; Patrick Quinlan, City Council Legal Counsel; School Superintendent Catherine Ciarlo; Joseph Cofone, Assistant School Superintendent; Joseph Balducci, School Business Administrator; School Committee members Jacqueline White, Steven Stycos, Steven Drager, Anthony Lupino, Edward Eramian, Michael Palumbo; Dennis Neri, Executive Director of Human Resources; Gregory Piccirilli, School Department Legal Counsel; Steven Angell, Chairman of Cranston Financial Review Board.

Minutes of the last meeting were dispensed with and stand approved as recorded.

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The City Clerk read the following:

CITY OF CRANSTON

RHODE ISLAND

CALL OF SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL

In accordance with the Home Rule Charter and Section 3.07 thereof, I hereby call a special meeting of the City Council to be held on Wednesday, September 3, 2003 at 6:00 P.M. in the Council Chambers, Cranston City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, RI at which meeting the following items of business shall be transacted:

- Reconciliation of the 2003-2004 School Budget
- Funds allocated for education programs and services to the Cranston School System
- Update on the RIDGE Program
- Any new business or old business

And I hereby request the City Clerk to notify all Council members of the Call of the special meeting.

Executed at Cranston, Rhode Island, this 28th day of August, 2003.

/s/ Peter T. Pastore, Jr.

Council President

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CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that a true copy of the attached Call of a special meeting of the City Council to be held on Wednesday, September 3, 2003 at 6:00 P.M. in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, R.I. was delivered via electronic mail on the 28th day of August, 2003 and regular mail, postage prepaid to the addresses listed below.

Council President Peter T. Pastore, Jr.
14 Firglade Dr.
Cranston, RI 02921
Ppastore@randolphsavings.com

Councilman Marc D. Ferolito
mferolito@msn.com

Council Member Cynthia M. Fogarty
Fogarty1@msn.com

Councilman Allan W. Fung
alfung@cox.net

Councilwoman Ellen O'Hara
ellencohara@cox.net

Councilman Kirk McDonough
67 Dellwood Rd.
Cranston, RI 02920
kirkmcdonough@cox.net

Councilwoman Paula McFarland
pmcfarland@prodigy.net

Councilman Randall A. Jackvony
rjackvony@cox.net

Councilman John E. Lanni, Jr.
111 Woodview Dr.
Cranston, RI 02920
Jelan1@aol.com

/s/ Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk

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Council President Pastore asked Mr. Quinlan to explain the pending litigation process against the School Committee.

Mr. Quinlan explained the process of the litigation brought by the Mayor against the School Committee. He stated that there was a conference held today, but given the Caruolo Act requirements, the School Committee is required to come back to the Council and if an agreement cannot be reached for the funding, then the School Committee can take legal action.

Attorney Piccirilli stated that even though this Council was not made aware of this litigation, the Council could take a position one way or another.

Council President Pastore stated that he has asked Mr. Angell to look at revising the Ordinance creating the Cranston Financial Review Board and setting a dollar threshold on approvals by this board. He asked for update on where we stand on putting an Ordinance together. Mr. Angell stated that this issue was taken up at the last Financial Review Board meeting (August 26, 2003) and he asked for specific input from the Board members on this Ordinance and asked for these inputs by the next meeting, which is September 9. These recommendations will be put in a draft form and presented to the City Council for their consideration and approval. He stated that he met with the Auditor General to advise him that the Council was requesting the Financial Review Board's participation and for input on revising this Ordinance. Another reason he met with the Auditor General was to discuss the legal and logistical hurdles in reforming this Ordinance. This draft of recommendations should be made available to the Council by September 20.

Reconciliation of the 2003-2004 School Budget

Mr. Angell addressed the letter from the Auditor General to Superintendent Ciarlo dated July 21, 2003 in answer to her letter to him dated July 16, 2003.

Mr. Angell stated that the Financial Review Board will be meeting with the School Department next Tuesday, September 9, 2003 at 7:30 P.M. in the Council Chambers to discuss the 2003 and 2004 cumulative deficit problem.

Mr. Balducci presented a handout addressing the reconciliation of School Budget and City appropriations to the School.

Mr. Balducci addressed the changes on the School side. He stated an increase of \$450,000 to accommodate the payment of substitute teachers. He also addressed the following reductions:

- Special Education tuition - \$434,000
- Liability insurance - \$33,000
- Sewer tax savings - \$4,400
- Unemployment insurance - \$20,000

Additional retirees – since the School year has started, all retired teachers have been replaced, with actual savings of \$18,458.

Councilman Fung asked what contractual obligations would need to be met in regards to substitute teachers. Mr. Cofone stated that in the past, if a teacher attended a conference and a substitute teacher is needed, the City would pay for it. For the last two years, teachers are not allowed to attend a conference that would require a substitute teacher, unless it is paid for by a grant or some other source. Mr. Cofone stated that other circumstances where a substitute teacher would be paid for is to substitute for a teacher due to illness or death in the family. Mr. Neri stated that paying a teacher to cover from within, by contract, is more costly then bringing in a substitute. It would be twice as much to pay a teacher from within.

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Council President Pastore asked Mr. Angell for his input on the Performance Audit now being initiated because of litigation against the School Committee. Mr. Angell stated that he does not know what those specifications are, but this Performance Audit needs to be done. As a management tool, you really need a Performance Audit. School Committee Chair White stated that she has no problem with a Performance Audit, but the firm needs to have consensus of both sides of the aisle. She questioned whether it is ethical or legal of the individual who will be conducting the Audit and asked the Council to reconsider their choice of the Audit firm. Councilman Jackvony stated that perhaps for the next meeting, we could ask the Administration for specific scope of the work from the Audit firm. Mr. Angell stated that proposals for this type of Audit is generally the type that would get some kind of approval from the Auditor General's Office. Council Member Fogarty stated that she, as Chair of the Performance Audit Committee, asked for proposals and the Committee reviewed them and determined that the funds were not available.

Council President Pastore asked that the Clerk send a letter to the Administration requesting the following:

- Detailed accounting of the work currently being performed or to be performed by Thomas Sweeney, Jr., hired by Attorney Stephen Robinson in conjunction with pending litigation against the School Department.
- Detail shall consist of the scope of review, what information is to be analyzed, the procedural posture of the analysis being performed as part of the review, what interviews and with whom are currently or are to be set up, the estimated hours, hourly rate, and completion date.

This information be completed and delivered to the Council members by September 9, 2003.

Mr. Angell asked that the Financial Review Board should have for their next meeting an overview or scope of work of what this Audit is going to cover.

Council President Pastore asked the School Committee to finalize the bottom line number and the Auditor General be requested to review the School Committee's variance and once the School Committee comes up with their final number, the Auditor General be asked to come in with his staff to review Fiscal Year 2004 budget as passed by the Council. He asked that Mr. Angell check with the Auditor General to see if he can verify the School Committee's number and if he approves this number, then Mr. Angell ask the Auditor General if the City has the capacity to close the gap.

Mr. Lupino asked if the scope of the Performance Audit would not be in the original RFP. Councilman Jackvony stated that what the Council is asking to view is what is the scope of the work that this firm may be doing via the attorney.

Superintendent Ciarlo gave an overview of how money is spent to provide services and programs for the schools. Councilman Lanni questioned the ROTC Program at Cranston High School East and how much it costs to run this program. Superintendent Ciarlo stated that the ARMY gives a percentage of the salary (51-52%) to the Schools. Approximately 150-175 students are enrolled in this program. Discussion took place on the salary for teacher assistants and technical assistants. Mr. Neri stated that teacher assistants salary is between \$9 to \$12 per hour and there are a total of approximately 200 teacher assistants. Technical assistants salaries are \$14 per hour plus 1.9%. Councilman Lanni asked how many secretaries there are in the entire system. Mr. Cofone stated that in the elementary schools, for the most part, have one secretary. High schools have approximately 4 and middle schools have 2-3. Councilman Lanni asked what the average salary is for the secretaries. Mr. Neri stated that the average would be in the low \$20,000, which are union positions.

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Superintendent Ciarlo stated that approximately \$19 million is spent annually for Pupil Personnel Services Special Education. This represents approximately 20% of the total budget.

Council President Pastore stated that he previously asked Mr. Balducci together with Mr. Igoe and Mr. Baron to check into the tax freeze bond issues to see if we could work out an analysis to see if it would be cost effective. He asked for update on this. Mr. Balducci stated that they are trying to get information from Newport, which has had a change in Administration, and getting information going back four or five years is going to be hard. Council President Pastore asked that Mr. Balducci get the Financial Review Board's opinions on this issue. If the Financial Review Board approves this, he would be more than happy to put an Ordinance or Resolution in for the School Department.

Council President Pastore asked that the School Committee keep the Council apprised of when they come up with a final number before they go to the Financial Review Board.

The meeting recessed at 8:25 P.M.

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees