

MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING/WORKSHOP
DOVER CITY COUNCIL
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WEDNESDAY
MAY 23, 2001
7:00 P.M.

SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING

1. ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Andrews Parker, Boc, Hindle, Nossiff, Reese and Schmidt. Mayor Pro Tem Berry present at 8:20 p.m.

Members Absent: Dunnington and Mayberry

2. PUBLIC HEARING:

A. SCHOOL PORTION OF:

Resolution RE: Fiscal Year 2002 Budget Appropriations, Property Taxes and Fees. Sponsored by Mayor Wil Boc, by Request.

Mayor Boc opened the public hearing asking if anyone wished to speak:

Ron Huml, 199 Mast Road – reviewed his background in finance and accounting and stated he has been trying to get a breakdown of exactly what is paid for by what in regard to the state portion and the city portion of the school budget and has had no answers. He stated he cannot afford the proposed increase and feels that the extra money received from the State should be used to offset the increase. He concluded by stating that the State is responsible for providing an adequate education and should be funding it.

David Scott, 220 Back Road – stated he is concerned with the sharp increase in school spending and feels that most taxpayers can't afford it. He stated that enrollment has increased 5% since 1998, but spending has increased 38% and feels the Council should hold the increase to 5%.

Malcolm MacNeill, Chairman Greater Dover Chamber of Commerce – stated that the Chamber has been a leader in encouraging meaningful reform of educational standards and read a prepared statement (See 05/23/01 meeting folder) outlining their position and encouraging the Council to provide excellent municipal and educational services in a fiscally prudent manner.

Joseph Covert, 25 Reyners Brook Drive – first spoke regarding the dangerous situation at Woodman Park School and encouraged the bus loop plan be endorsed and secondly, stated that the increase in school spending is due to the fact that the budget had been underfunded for years and feels it should be funded.

Richard Hughes, 51 New Rochester Road – spoke regarding the large increase in the administration costs of the School Department and is upset that the Council was told to go to the Superintendent's Office for that information rather than having it discussed at the public forum. He stated he went to the library to look at a detailed school budget but felt that it wasn't adequate as it doesn't allow for year-to-year comparisons. He is also concerned that the one time expenditures will add 400,000 to the bottom line for next year and feels that the situation with the State funding is still unknown. Finally, he stated that there was a promise made last year to not come back with more than a 10% increase this year and flippant comments have been made regarding this. He feels that, between the 13.5% increase this year and 12.5% last year, people cannot afford to live here anymore.

Denise Jorgensen, former school board member, mother of 4 students in the school system – stated she feels that the Council should continue to fund the requested budget as there are no extras and little room to make cuts. She concluded by stating the extra school money should be spent on education.

Jennifer Dunnells, 1C Greenfield Drive – PTA Vice President at Garrison School – stated that she would like the budget to be supported because she is afraid that the special needs services would not be available for those who need them.

Stephanie Keegan, 58 Cherrywood Drive – stated she has 3 students in the Dover School system and also supports the school budget as presented. She stated that she moved here two years ago and one of the deciding factors for moving here was the school system. She feels that teachers already have to supplement supplies in their classrooms when there aren't enough funds. It is hard for the enthusiasm to be maintained by the teachers and students.

Michelle Holt-Shannon, 14 Florence Street – explained that she is a stay-at-home mom with a son who will start school in September. She stated that she feels that the sacrifice of staying at home is important to her son's future and the same applies to funding the school budget. She stated that the tax increase will be a lot for her family to pay, but feels that a healthy school system where teachers and students feel valued is very important.

Karen Gray, Sixth Street – stated that with the growth that is going on in Dover, it is important to have a good school system to attract people to live here and encouraged the Council to fund the budget as requested.

Paul Vatcher, 27 Richardson Drive – discussed the increases over the past few years and stated that 1/8 of his income will go to pay taxes, but feels that the services haven't improved. He stated that he feels that teachers' salaries are high and that private schools educate children for half the amount. He stated that the 1.8 million being spent on the public works garage should be divided among the other city departments instead.

Mike Downs, 2 Hubbard Road – feels that there is a line being drawn between those who have children in the school system and those who do not. He stated that he is a lifelong Dover resident who attended the schools and has seen no major changes in the buildings in 30+ years. He stated his business located in Rollinsford is the 3rd largest taxpayer in that town, but he doesn't complain about the increase for school funding. He concluded by commending Chief Fenniman and the police department as an example of providing quality service and feels the school system should be at the same level.

Dennis Shanahan, 508 Tolend Road – agreed with the previous speaker that there is a dividing line between fixed income people and those with children in the school system but feels that the increase in the spending over the years is because the city has grown. He concluded by stating that the city has little control over much of the increase.

Chris Wyskiel, 15 Lexington St. – feels that the School Board presented a fair budget. He then spoke regarding the proposed bus loop at Woodman Park School stating that this project was already approved in the CIP and that the Council only has control on the road widening issue.

Sylvia Lisette, 21 Lexington St. – stated she walks her child to school everyday because she feels it is an unsafe area, but worries about those children with no one to watch out for them. She stated that she is unsure if the two issues of putting a Dunkin Donuts in the area and this bus loop are being tied together politically, but feels that they should be dealt with separately. She concluded by relating a story of a near miss of her child and urged the Council not to wait until there is an accident.

Darlene Shanahan, 508 Tolend Road – stated she is employed at Woodman Park School and must park in the lot off of Silver Street. She stated she fears for her safety every time she has to turn into the lot that someone won't be paying attention or come around the corner too quickly.

Tammy Downs, 2 Hubbard Road – stated she is very involved in the school system as a mother and substitute teacher. She stated that there are many new teachers in the system, which is good because they bring a lot of enthusiasm to the school, but they do not have the build up of supplies that other teachers do and often have to supply their own. She feels that unfortunately money does have something to do with quality of education and children pick up on how people talk about the school system whether good or bad and this can affect their attitude about learning.

Parks Christenbury, 98 Cocheco Street – began by stating that he feels it is not good that 1/3 of the Council is missing because people deserve to be heard and their opinions taken into consideration when deciding budget issues. Next, he discussed the cost of education that is too high in Dover because we have the second largest low income housing area in the State and they send a lot of children to the school with no means of reimbursement. He feels that the Council and School Department should be investigating the financial impact this has and pursue funding through the federal government as many of these people are out-of-towners that the feds have relocated here.

Michelle Holt-Shannon – commented in response to the previous speaker that she is proud to be in a town that takes care of everyone.

Mayor Boc explained that both Councilor Mayberry and Councilor Dunnington had been previously excused due to other commitments and Mayor Pro Tem Berry would be here as soon as the ceremony at the high school for veterans was over. Seeing no one else wishing to speak, the Mayor closed the public hearing.

3. OTHER BUSINESS:

A. Review of Woodman Park School Bus Route

Superintendent of Schools Armand LaSelva explained that the City Council has jurisdiction over the Silver Street portion of this project. The project has been reviewed by the Technical Review Committee of the city, which consists of representatives from Engineering, Fire, Police and Planning.

School Facilities subcommittee chair Kevin Quigley reviewed the history of the subcommittees efforts to bring forth this proposal to address safety concerns of parents, faculty and residents of the Woodman Park School area. He reviewed the plan and the revisions that have been made to address various issues that have arisen along the way. He explained that the current teachers parking lot entrance from Silver Street will be eliminated because it is unsafe for people to turn into that parking lot with traffic coming around the corner from Route 155. He stated that at this point the remaining controversial aspect is the Silver Street portion, which will be increased to make a turning lane for the buses onto Towle Avenue and leaving a

center lane for through traffic. He stated that this occurs naturally for the most part, but isn't clearly marked, and therefore, some people won't make room and cause traffic backups. He stated that the School Board has addressed all of the concerns brought forth thus far and feels that a decision needs to be made as the contractor will not wait much longer.

Andrews Parker asked for clarification as to how much wider they are looking to make that area of Silver Street.

Quigley stated that they will only be widening the road an additional 2' but the total width of the turn lane will be 10'.

Hindle stated that this area is in his Ward, but he also serves on the committee and feels there are good points to be made on both sides. He asked how many buses are there that actually access via this entrance and are they concerned that there is a possibility of collisions with a turning bus from vehicles coming around the corner too fast.

LaSelva stated that he has pursued a School Zone blinking light for that area, which would require vehicles to slow to 25 mph during particular hours of the day. He stated he is unsure why there has never been one installed there as all of the other school zones do have them in place.

Hindle stated he would ask that police presence be increased to enforce this school zone. He then asked about the Master Plan recommendation to preserve the historical gateways of the city of which Silver Street is one.

Planning Director Steve Stancel clarified that the gateway begins at the off-ramp of the turnpike and that the Master Plan merely recommends policies. He stated the Planning Board and Council need to bring forth ordinances to establish these policies and feels that there are serious safety issues in that corridor regardless.

Hindle asked if there are any plans in the next 5-10 years to expand 3 lanes further down Silver Street to accommodate potential business growth.

Stancel stated that expanding business in that area would require zoning changes and none are in the works at this point. He then presented the concerns that his staff has with the proposal including a safe level of stacking of vehicles for turning left at the light. He stated there is a plan that proposes beginning the stacking lane right at the off ramp, which has been approved by the NH DOT.

Boc asked if this would require the widening of Silver Street.

Stancel stated yes and explained that there is a \$40,000 bond being held from Holiday Inn Express to be used for that project and that it would require widening by 2' on the left side of the street. He stated that it would only involve the existing right of ways and would not require any taking of land. He stated that they were planning on doing this project in conjunction with Motiva moving into the former Texaco station, but that is at a stand still.

Berry stated his concern is that this is not being coordinated with future city plans for Silver Street and doesn't want to see this work being done without knowing how it will tie into or not tie into future city improvements. He stated that he feels that it should be sent back to the Planning Board for consensus, as they are the experts.

Beecher clarified that the school department doesn't need to have council approval to do the project on school property and they are presenting it to the council as a courtesy.

Discussion ensued regarding the need for more information before taking a vote, as well as the fact that Mayor Boc and Councilor Nossiff will be abstaining from the vote.

Hindle asked about the status of the Motiva project.

Stancel stated that they are still awaiting the legal decision.

Andrews Parker stated she wasn't aware that the Council was expected to vote on this issue tonight, but if so, why isn't there a resolution with information and figures of what is being approved by the Council.

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Reese stated he agrees with Berry that we should be looking at the total picture and feels that we haven't felt the total impact on the traffic of the Culinary School and Holiday Inn expansion.

The Council consensus was to hold a site walk at 7:30 a.m., which will best illustrate the traffic situation being discussed.

Mayor Boc opened the floor to the audience for their input.

Dennis Duffy, 163 Silver Street – stated that this discussion has been going on for 8 months and feels that the bus drop off problem was exaggerated during the winter because of the large snow banks and bike racks that were in the way. He stated that the residents on Silver Street aren't being considered and that adding another traffic lane will make it even more difficult for them to get out of their driveways to go into town. He stated he feels that this has not been looked at fairly because of the pending situation with Motiva and that site walks were scheduled only after it was voted down. He asked that the decision be put off for a year or so.

Dana Lynch, 24 Lexington Street – stated that his wife is the school nurse at Woodman Park School; and as an Engineer he has a lot of background with dealing with accessibility issues. He stated that the problem of a turnpike off-ramp emptying into a residential area was poor planning 45 years ago. He stated that it would be good to have signalization at the MacIntosh Intersection, but whatever decision is made, it should not be left alone. He stated that he wants to see the turn lane added to allow the buses to get into the school area safely.

Stephanie Keagan, stated she drops off and picks up her son every day and waits to make sure that he gets there safely, but sees others who don't have someone to watch out for them. She stated that the cost to the city will be much more if someone gets hit. She concluded by thanking Mr. LaSelva and Kevin Quigley for all of the time and effort they have put into this project.

Mike Dalton, 18 Old Littleworth Road - distributed a proposal entitled WPS Bus Loop and Parking Proposal (see 05/23/01 meeting folder) and asked that the Council review it before making a final decision.

Dennis Bentley, 30 Samuel Hanson Avenue – Principal of Woodman Park School – feels that the safety of the students is what is at issue and feels that the professionals have made their recommendations. He stated he wants to see a decision made and feels that it should be approved as presented this evening.

Dawn Duffy, 163 Silver Street stated she is concerned with the safety of all of the citizens and feels that other options have not been considered due to business priorities. She stated that the school is used 7 days a week, and therefore the traffic problem isn't only during school hours. She concluded by stating that if a site walk is held at 7:30 a.m., everyone should remember that UNH is not in session right now, so the traffic won't be reflected accurately.

John Scott, Engineer of the proposed project – addressed the cost, stating that to do that portion of Silver Street that requires Council approval would be \$6,000 for moving the curbing back 2 feet and restriping the lanes.

Berry asked if it is definite that the Silver Street access will be one-way only to the school. Quigley stated that the original plan was to have it one-way only in the morning, but have it 2 way in the afternoon during dismissal. He stated that the Planning Board has recommended it be one way only at all times, but he has not been able to discuss this with the School Board as a whole yet.

Brenda Whitmore, 141 Henry Law Avenue, Planning board alternate – stated that the Planning Board feels that safety is the utmost concern and is glad to hear that the School Board is willing to consider the one-

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way issue as a compromise. She agrees with Councilor Reese that the full growth of that area has not been fully realized as of yet.

Schmidt moved to adjourn the special meeting into a workshop session, seconded by Berry.

Reese expressed his frustration with having items added to the agenda and not being able to have time to address these issues as fully prepared. He would like to adjourn completely.

Nossiff stated he will ask the City Manager to sit down with the Department Heads to look at balancing the needs of the citizens versus the citizens' ability to pay for it. He stated that he feels the Council has given no direction to Mr. Beecher as of yet and will ask that he keep the budget down to a \$2.50 increase. He stated that the City Manager is the expert and feels it should be his decision as to where to make cuts.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Schmidt moved to adjourn, seconded by Reese. Motion passed unanimously.

**Valerie A. French
Deputy City Clerk**