

**COMMITTEE ON LIAISON
OCTOBER 23, 2017 AT 6:03 PM
COMMITTEE ROOM
WOBURN CITY HALL**

Voting Members:

Attending: President Richard Haggerty, Alderman Michael Anderson,
Alderman Joanne Campbell, Alderman Michael Concannon (late), Alderman Lindsay Higgins,
Alderman Darlene Mercer-Bruen, Alderman Edward Tedesco,
Absent: Alderman Mark Gaffney, Alderman Richard Gately

* * * * *

On the resolve to meet with the Chairman of the School Committee and the Superintendent of Schools to discuss matters related to the Woburn Public Schools system: Representing the School Department were School Committee Chairman Ellen Crowley, Superintendent of Schools Mark Donovan and Asst. Superintendent for Curriculum & Assessment Dr. Matthew Crowley. President Haggerty said the meeting is being held to continue a line of dialog between the City Council and the School Dept. beyond the annual budget meeting in the spring, and that such occasional meetings in the past have helped build a relationship with school officials. Motion made and seconded to receive a place on file a copy of a handout from Supt. Donovan enumerating the “successes” and “challenges” of the School Dept.; approved, 6-0. Chairman Crowley told the Liaison Committee that Woburn High School has been recognized with an award as a 2017 National Model School, one of eight high schools in the country selected by the International Center for Leadership Education. Chairman Crowley the high school has maintained a level two rating in 2017 based on MCAS results, with a sizeable increase in percentile rating. Dr. Crowley attributed the higher test results to better training on the open response portion of the test. Chairman Crowley said the increase in the high school’s status to level 2 has helped the community’s economic stability. She praised the talent and dedication of the school staff, and said the MCAS scores from this year should be very positive. Chairman Crowley noted Supt. Donovan is retiring in December and Dr. Crowley has been appointed interim superintendent, while Wendy Sprague will serve as Asst. Superintendent for Curriculum & Assessment. According to Chairman Crowley, Ms. Sprague has had great success at the Altavesta Elementary School. Chairman Crowley invited the Council to attend a presentation on January 23 with Dr. Bill Daggett, who will provide the school system with a strategic plan. Chairman Crowley said one of the primary challenges facing the school system is the greater need to address students’ changing social and emotional needs. She said Woburn High Principal Jessica Callanan has been able to address an influx of mental health crises without increasing her budget, but it might behoove the city to think about establishing a program to address social and emotional issues within the schools. Chairman Crowley said the School Dept. does try to be innovative with its funding stream. Supt. Donovan announced Kennedy Middle School’s Carl Nelson has been selected 2017 middle school principal of the year by the Mass. Association of Secondary School Principals. At the elementary level, there continues to be an increase in assessment-based instruction, with the school system able to gather great amounts of data on each student, which allows instruction to be molded them individually, according to Supt. Donovan. Dr. Crowley told the Committee there has been an increase of the use of Google

classroom at the middle and high school levels, and that the students are usually ahead of the teachers when it comes to technology. On the day of the municipal election on Nov. 7, there will be a professional development seminar at the high school which will involve the students teaching the teachers how to use social media more effectively. School officials have received good feedback from teachers about the Atlas curriculum management tool, which is used throughout the district, and is designed to create consistency in the curriculum, Dr. Crowley said. Supt. Donovan touted the strong, innovative administrative staff at all levels. He said the ideas that are generated at administrative meetings are amazing. Dr. Crowley said the department's relationship with the community continues to thrive, particularly with organizations like the Boys & Girls Club, the Woburn Community Educational Foundation and the Woburn Public Library. The library has made available a website called TutorMe.com, which provides access to tutoring services. Dr. Crowley said one of the goals for the department will be to create a resource guide for parents. Supt. Donovan said the department is encountering increasingly needy students. He said there is an effort to continue to move the district forward, but principals get frustrated at times when they have good plans that aren't implemented due to a lack of funding. Dr. Crowley said the ELL (English Language Learners) population has increased 42 percent over the past four years, and there has been an influx of students from Brazil and El Salvador, whose primary languages are, respectively, Portuguese and Spanish. Also, a portion of the ELL students fall under the SLIFE (Students with Limited Formal Education) category whose education was interrupted or inadequate in their native country. Chairman Crowley added the SLIFE students also tend to have undergone a traumatic transition. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said she can't imagine how horrible that type of transition must be for the students. Chairman Crowley said school staff often become mentors for the SLIFE students, and Supt. Donovan added many of the teachers have become like family members. Chairman Crowley said the teachers who work with ELL students are amazing. Alderman Mercer-Bruen asked how many more positions in the school system could be devoted to working with ELL students. Dr. Crowley said it is hard to estimate, partly because ELL students tend to arrive in Woburn in December or January, when the schools in their native country are on break. He added it would be helpful if the School Dept. could add a Director of ELL services, a role he currently assumes. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said she would prefer to hire more teachers than administrators to work with ELL students. Dr. Crowley said another issue is that it is difficult to evaluate ELL students with special needs because of the language barrier. He estimated there are currently 308 ELL students in the district. Alderman Concannon arrived. In response to a question from President Haggerty, Chairman Crowley said ELL students who enroll in the district at the middle school or elementary level tend to stay until they graduate, but Dr. Crowley said the ELL students who enter at the high school level are more apt to drop out because they have to work, and the high school takes a hit because their departure is recorded as a drop-out. President Haggerty asked how Woburn's ELL population compares to other communities. Supt. Donovan said Woburn's relative affordability continues to make the city more a viable option for families with ELL students. Supt. Donovan said there are students who have medical costs for which the district must account. He said the School Dept. may have to spend as much as \$425,000 for a new student next year who requires 24-hour in-home medical care. Alderman Anderson asked if there would be any reimbursement from private insurance. Supt. Donovan replied there may be circuit breaker funds that become available, but Chairman Crowley said private insurance cannot be accessed. Alderman Anderson said the Medicaid funds the School Dept. earns are going into the city's general fund. Alderman Concannon said he thought the mayor might direct the Medicaid

money to the School Dept. Chairman Crowley said every year the School Committee thinks using Medicaid money to fund Special Education is a good idea. Supt. Donovan said that happened one year, but it hasn't happened since. President Haggerty said he remembers a year when the city allocated \$500,000-\$600,000 for special education, and it could be something that could be looked at again. Dr. Crowley said there will be a coordinated program review by the Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education in November, with state officials meeting with school personnel for 3-4 days. The review occurred once every six years. Next year, the high school will undergo examination for accreditation, which occurs every 10 years, and the School Dept. will need members of the community and parents to fill out surveys, Dr. Crowley said. Supt. Donovan said the Hurld-Wyman Elementary School project is currently under budget and ahead of schedule. Supt. Donovan acknowledged a greater need to retain principals with a better and new salary package. President Haggerty agreed retention of principals is really important for the district. In response to a question from President Haggerty, Supt. Donovan said there are various models the School Dept. is considering about the role of department heads; whether they should be full-time teachers, part-time teachers or teach one class. In response to a question from Alderman Concannon, Supt. Donovan said the School Dept. currently has about \$200,000 raised in an account to replace the turf at the field at Woburn High. Supt. Donovan said he expects the cost of replacing the turf will be around \$1 million, and the cost may be an issue within the next few years. In response to a question from Alderman Concannon about Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs, Dr. Crowley said there are initiatives at the high school, which has partnered with Raytheon and the School Dept., and the programs will be examined in June. Alderman Concannon asked about the Northeast Regional Vocational Technical High School's pending building program and what types of programs would overlap with the programs offered at Woburn High. Supt. Donovan said things are going really well in the school system, and programs like Alternative Education, work study, ELL and Best Buddies are incredibly good things. President Haggerty thanked Supt. Donovan for his efforts as superintendent and said he is happy the School Dept. is being left in good hands. Motion made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 6:57 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees