

**COMMITTEE ON LIAISON
JANUARY 27, 2020 at 6:43 p.m.
COMMITTEE ROOM
WOBURN CITY HALL**

Voting Members present: President Michael Anderson, Alderman Michael Concannon, Alderman Darlene Mercer-Bruen, Alderman Lindsay Higgins, Alderman Joanne Campbell, Alderman Edward Tedesco, Alderman Robert Ferullo, and Alderman Richard Gately

Absent: Alderman Jeffrey Dillon

Also present: Supt. of Schools Dr. Matthew Crowley; School Committee Chairman Ellen Crowley; School Committee members Andrew Lipsett, Patricia Chisholm and Michael Mulrenan; Asst. Supt. for Finance & Operations Joseph Elia; Asst. Supt. for Curriculum & Instruction Wendy Sprague; and Asst. Supt. for Student Services Dr. Michael Baldassarre

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Reading of previous meeting minutes: Motion made by Alderman Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Campbell to approve the minutes of the meeting of September 23, 2019; all in favor, 8-0.

Resolve to meet with School Committee for status report on school issues: Chairman Crowley said the School Dept. wants to be as transparent as possible and looks forward to meeting with the City Council on a regular basis. Supt. Crowley offered to the committee a chart listing the talking points the superintendent intends to address during the meeting. Motion made by Alderman Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Campbell to accept the aforementioned document and make it part of the permanent record; approved, 8-0. Supt. Crowley said Asst. Supt. Elia is retiring on June 26. He said Asst. Supt. Sprague and Asst. Baldassarre are also present to answer any questions about their respective domains. He said the schools are in very good shape. He said time for art and music in the elementary schools has been increased, which not only exposes the students to a wider curriculum but also allows teachers increased time to prepare. He said a middle school report that was undertaken shows the two middle schools operate independently but essentially offer equitable curriculum. He said middle school classes are 41 minutes in length. He said some of the classes are named differently and they should be uniform. He said the next step is to draft a vision for the middle schools. He said an innovation grant was received. He said the goal is to keep students in the district. He said the Student Opportunity Act is legislation that increased Chapter 90 funding by \$241,000. Alderman Campbell said \$241,000 is fantastic. Supt. Crowley said he thinks that money could be even higher. He presented a report from the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) regarding a demographic study with enrollment projections. Motion made by Alderman Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Campbell to accept the document and make it part of the permanent record; approved, 8-0. Supt. Crowley said the report is comprehensive. He directed the committee's attention to page 4 of the report that estimates the city's population will be 44,665 in 2025. He said the variable is what will be the student yield in five years. Supt. Crowley directed the committee's attention to page 7 of the report which indicates the median price of a single-family home will increase from \$485,000 to \$505,000. He referenced page 19 of the

report and said there will be approximately 280 new students in the schools by 2029. He said that is about the same size as the current population of the Malcolm White School. He said the School Dept. is trying to be proactive. He said the School Dept. must think about the impact of development on schools and class sizes. He said the construction of 4-bedroom single-family homes will have an impact on the Reeves School. He said he understands condos will attract younger residents, but that is not always true. He said another potential variable in student population is rental units. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said a lot of people in Winchester are moving to Woburn. Chairman Crowley said the School Committee will be looking at this report in detail at its meeting on Wednesday. She said something will come of it. Supt. Crowley said he drives Lexington Street on the way to work and there always seems to be some construction. Regarding Finance & Operations, Supt. Crowley said the School Dept. is ok. He said the City Council voted a 5.5 percent increase to the budget, a lot of which was spent on out-of-district special education. He said the School Dept. also must pay for transportation costs. Asst. Supt. Elia said there were 11 new students that recently came to the city for whom the School Dept. is now responsible. Supt. Crowley said it is sometimes difficult to forecast special education costs. He said if in-district programming is enhanced, the School Dept. has a better chance of retaining students. He said there are also presently 230 students enrolled in the pre-school facilities. He said the School Dept. has not raised the pre-school rate in 20 years. He said he asked to raise the rate last year, but it was already too late. Asst. Supt. Elia said the bulk of the students in the pre-school program are special education students. Dr. Crowley said a research group came into the schools in January to undertake a review of finances and operations. He said a report is expected in February. He said the surveyors were business managers who asked good questions. He said he feels the School Dept. is doing things well. Supt. Crowley said Judi O'Neil has filled the new position of Human Resources Manager. He said the School Dept. employs 993 people. He said Ms. O'Neil is a 1-woman show. Supt. Crowley said Technology & Innovation director Jenn Judkins has been unbelievable. He said she has been rolling out new curriculum. He said Ms. Judkins and Buildings & Grounds Director David Dunkley are both working on 5-year capital plans. She said it is Mr. Dunkley's idea to invite the City Council and the School Committee to tour the schools on either February 29 or March 14, to see what the needs of the schools are. Alderman Gately asked if there are any roofs that are leaking. Supt. Crowley said most of the roofs are in good shape. He said the high school is not really a brand new building anymore. He said the Reeves School is 20 years old. He said the School Dept. must be able to take care of buildings, or there are going to be issues. Supt. Crowley said a new coordinator position has been phased into the Curriculum & Instruction Dept. He said the Student Services Dept. secured a safety grant for additional service measures. He said a grant was also received that is designed to attract more diverse pools of job applicants. He said Virtual Gateway is a funding mechanism for inclusion of all free and reduced lunch recipients. He said if the numbers go up, so should the funding. He said Maureen Ryan is the new Special Education director. Supt. Crowley said the circuit breaker was audited and increased by more than \$130,000. He said Therapeutic Crisis Intervention is a model for engaging students. He said more than 250 teachers were trained. He said the School Dept. also incorporated staff at the YMCA and the Woburn Boys & Girls Club. He said there are 325 students who do not speak English as their first language. He said that number has increased drastically over the last few years. He said three years ago there were 10 ESL students at the elementary level and 11 in middle school, and there are now 28 and 35, respectively. Alderman Mercer-Bruen asked how the students can learn if they can't speak English. She asked if the teachers are bilingual. Supt. Crowley said the teachers are not bilingual,

but they understand how to communicate. He said technology has improved and staff can use programs like Google Translate. Chairman Crowley said one of the first things Supt. Crowley did when he was hired was to enhance bilingual education. Supt. Crowley said they have brought on volunteers. Alderman Mercer-Bruen asked if the schools use iPads for translation. Supt. Crowley said Google Translate uses the same concept. He said even registering an ESL child for school can be a challenge. He said Adriana Mendes Sheldon with Family and Community Engagement speaks six languages. He said Ms. Sheldon has organized programs for ESL students. Supt. Crowley said the next steps for the School Dept. involve the formation of the FY '21 budget. He said the process has just begun. He said the department is working on a 3-year personnel plan. Alderman Higgins said the personnel plan is a great idea and something to consider on the city side. Supt. Crowley said a 5-year personnel plan is not as practical as a 3-year plan. Alderman Ferullo said he spent years working with the School Dept. in his capacity as police chief. He said the high school is making great strides. He said they are doing great stuff in the School Dept. Alderman Gately said it all comes down to money. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said it doesn't always come down to money, and money is not always the answer. She asked if books are going to be replaced. She said her daughter is a sophomore who carries around big books. She asked when Woburn is going to phase out books and start using iPads. Supt. Crowley said Woburn is in the process of changing textbooks to Chrome Books, which he said are Google-based. He said the Google applications for education are free. Chairman Crowley said there is a reference to technology-based materials in the capital plan. Chairman Anderson said the students will dictate what type of technology is used in the schools because they are tech savvy. Chairman Crowley said Ms. Judkins is coming up with a technology plan. Supt. Crowley said the opportunity to advance the technology program is one of the things that attracted Ms. Judkins to the position. He said you can give a machine to any kid, and they will figure it out. He said it is the teachers who need help. Chairman Crowley said there is an effort to integrate curriculum into a multi-dimensional learning program. She said she thinks members of the council should really come and visit the schools. Alderman Concannon said one of the issues he has focused on as the council's liaison to the School Committee is concrete progress toward cooperation between the Woburn Public Schools and the Northeast Vocational School. He said both parties have displayed an attitude of cooperation. He said there are no programs the complement each other. Supt. Crowley said the public schools do not want to compete with the vocational school.

Motion made by Alderman Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Mercer-Bruen to adjourn; approved, 8-0. President Anderson adjourned the meeting at 7:28 p.m.

Attest: _____
Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees