

## FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of the standing committee on Finance was held on Tuesday June 18, 2024 at 6:00PM in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 45 School St., Brockton, MA. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM with all members present. With Councilor Rodrigues presiding.

Ordered: Receipt of the proposed Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Appropriations.

Mayor Sullivan began the meeting by commending President Rodrigues, as well as thanking everybody for their hard work navigating through the budgets.

### 1. Brockton Public Schools – Dr. James Cobbs

Vice Chairman Rodrigues apologized to the Council for sending out a letter last minute regarding the FY25 School Budget as well as read it out loud for the record.

Dr. James Cobbs began a FY25 Budget Power Point Presentation.

Dr. Cobbs stated FY25 spending considerations including an enrollment increasement having classes up to 30-31 students. Larger bilingual classes are also being implemented as well as Special Education mandates.

Dr. Cobbs stated and stressed the lack of teachers in regard to the number of multilingual students. Highlighted an 80-student classroom with only one teacher.

Dr. Cobbs stated the FY24 spending processes and included strict position control processes as well as all vetted personnel requests. A significant reduction in overtime spending was also mentioned as well as a regular monitoring of all expenditures.

Dr. Cobbs stated a Critical Staffing Need for the School Department totaling to \$5,918,123.26.

Councilor Minichiello stated that he wanted to be clear starting tonight off by expressing how the entire City Council cares deeply about education and the kids of Brockton.

Councilor Minichiello asked Dr. Cobbs about the transportation budget within the School Department as well as inquired about the programs ran at schools. Dr. Cobbs explained that transportation is a major part of the budget and that some students need it for all programs.

Councilor Minichiello stated more work needs to be done in regard to what programs the city can handle that can stay within budget as well as highlighted how there is not an endless pool of money and that certain areas like transportation need to be tightened up.

Councilor Lally wanted to echo Councilor Minichiello, specifically mentioning how the children of Brockton need services, and the money that the School Department has been asking for is not being put into these services.

2. Mrs. Patricia Boyer, Interim School Business Administrator

Councilor Lally asked for clarification as to why the budget shows “unknown positions” but yet are being told that a specific amount of money is being requested and that they are known. Dr. Cobbs stated that they are listed within his presentation.

Councilor Lally asked if they feel comfortable with the money that was set aside for layoff & unemployment compensation. Patricia Boyer responded by stating they do feel comfortable due to the fact that last year’s layoffs are coming to an end, and there have been very few layoffs this year. Councilor Lally asked if they anticipate layoffs in this coming Fiscal Year. Dr. Cobbs responded by stating they do not anticipate teacher layoffs but they have cut some positions. Councilor Lally asked if it is more so not filling positions rather than laying people off to which Dr. Cobbs clarified to be the case.

Councilor Lally asked if the FY24 Substitute Teacher budget of \$2,577,940 was entirely spent. Patricia Boyer explained that it was not due to the difficulty in finding substitute teachers, and that that is why it was reduced to match what the numbers have been historically. Councilor Lally asked if there has been consideration regarding increasing the compensation for substitute teachers to get more to come. Dr. Cobbs explained that that is a stipulation within the current contract and would have to be negotiated within the next contract.

Councilor Lally questioned that Traffic Duty was zeroed out & was stated to be funded by school non-net sending. Ms. Boyer stated that when creating the budget, they wanted to place everything where they belonged. Councilor Lally questioned if Traffic Duty was always covered by the school non-net spending budget to which was stated to be true.

Councilor Lally questioned by matches were down to zero and asked if we are anticipating any matches. Ms. Boyer responded that we are not anticipating any grant matches.

Councilor Lally stated how the Adult Learning Center receives yearly grants which is predicated on them doing exactly what they say they would be doing over there, and later questioned whether they believe that grant will be acquirable or if the grant will be pulled. Dr. Cobbs stated that he doesn’t see any reason why they cannot do what they’ve stated they would at the Adult Learning Center.

President Rodrigues stated that T.J Plante is available to Councilor’s for questions via Zoom during this meeting.

Councilor Farwell stated his belief in the misuse of resources, specifically highlighting the School Department’s Human Resource’s salaries and the major differences between the City and School sides regarding salaries.

Councilor Farwell asked if Assistant Principals would be able to meet with students and families regarding attendance issues instead of overly funding Attendance Officers. James Labillois responded by stating that they do such, and that the Attendance Officers help by doing home visits and other resources that administrators do not have access to during the school day.

Councilor Farwell requested to be given, regarding this past academic year, the total number of interventions, and home visits.

Councilor Farwell highlighted the salaries for the night and day time school supervisors which are \$239,856 and \$217,751 respectively, as well as stating that he believes these are astronomically high as well as part of the problem for the School Departments budgeting, stating that they are using their resources incorrectly.

Councilor Farwell stated that the Transportation budget is inefficient and that the City should bring in a Transportation Specialist to assist and see where the issues are coming from.

Councilor Thompson asked if based on our struggling School Budget, are we unable to accept more students into our schools, and what would be said to those who are looking to move to Brockton. Dr. Cobbs stated this is irrelevant because if a student wanted to attend Brockton Schools, they would have to be accepted.

Councilor Derenoncourt asked Dr. Cobbs if he was the one responsible for the decision to cut out the overtime funds. Dr. Cobbs responded by stating he did not need anyone to tell him how to do his job.

3. Mrs. Jennifer Perez-Siciliano, Transportation Director

Mrs. Perez-Siciliano started by making a few brief statements regarding School Transportation.

Councilor Derenoncourt asked Mrs. Perez-Siciliano if she has a degree in transportation to which she responded that she does not, and that she has a degree in business administration.

President Rodrigues stepped down and questioned the number of Bus Drivers to Custodians, as well as highlighted the fact that more Bus Drivers are absent day to day than Custodians. President Rodrigues also stated that the School Department does not have a money problem, but that they have a money managing problem.

Councilor Lally thanked Mrs. Perez-Siciliano for taking the time to meet with him last week. Councilor Lally questioned the motive behind discontinuing the practice of the charters for the buses. Mrs. Perez-Siciliano responded by stating that we do still charter the buses internally just not outside of the school system that they used to charter the

buses outside. Councilor Lally stated that chartering the buses internally is good, but externally is where it seems that the school was able to recuperate some of their losses regarding the bussing. Dr. Cobbs stated that he put a stop to this as it was not profitable.

President Rodrigues stated that he is going to have each individually invited guest from the school department come state and name their title and information regarding their department. Then will have each councilor call up who they would like to ask questions to.

4. Dr. Soraya de Barros-Monteiro, Director of Community Schools

Dr. Soraya de Barros-Monteiro began by speaking on her background within the city and then explaining what being the Director of Community Schools entails, such as before and after school programs, summer programs for students, as well as also having programs for the community itself not just students.

5. Ms. Sharon Wolder, Deputy Superintendent, Teaching and Learning

Ms. Sharon Wolder began by speaking on her background within the city and then went on to explain her position, and the focus on working with principals through evaluations and support to make sure they are leading their schools correctly, and allowing the students to receive the education that they need.

6. Dr. James Labillois, Assistant Superintendent, Unified Student Services

Dr. James Labillois started by speaking on his background and then went to explain that he holds direct oversight and responsibility regarding the Special Education and related services department.

7. Dr. Kathleen Moran, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources

Dr. Kathleen Moran began by speaking on her background within the city. Dr. Moran then stated her departments functions including the onboarding of all employees and everything from that point on up until retirement/resignation. These responsibilities carry over between the eight union groups, several non-union groups, substitutes, and seasonal employees.

8. Dr. Karen Spaulding, Assistant Superintendent, Grades Pre-K-5

Dr. Karen Spaulding began by speaking on her background and then mentioned she wanted to circle back to one of Councilor Thompson's questions regarding why families would want to come to Brockton, stating that some of those reasons are present and in front of them. Dr. Spaulding then went on to praise all of the elementary school teachers who have worked extremely hard over the last few years to enforce a new curriculum with an emphasis on reading.

9. Dr. Michele Conners, Assistant Superintendent, Grades 6-12

Dr. Michele Conners began by speaking on her background within the city, later stating the importance of bringing on other High Schools within the city to give Brockton student's the ability to have a choice as Brockton High may not be for every student within the city.

10. Mrs. Marcia Andrade-Serpa, Director Parent Information and Registration

Mrs. Marcia Andrade-Serpa began by speaking on her background within the city, later stating her departments functions such as assigning and enrolling students, as well as being the first welcome for families looking to choose Brockton Public Schools. Mrs. Andrade-Serpa also commented on Councilor Thompson's words regarding families choosing Brockton, stating that Brockton has a place for every child whether it be a multi-lingual learner, special educational needs, or a talented and gifted student.

11. Ms. Kellie Jones, Director of Bilingual Services

Ms. Kellie Jones started by thanking everybody as well as briefly discussing her background within the city. Ms. Jones then went on to discuss her department's functions, stating that they offer transitional bilingual education, as well as being the only district in Massachusetts that offers a three-strand global study school at the elementary level.

12. Mr. Dan Vigeant, Senior Director Information Technologies

Mr. Dan Vigeant was set to speak but Dr. Cobbs informed the Council that Mr. Vigeant was ill and unable to attend.

Councilor Derenoncourt wanted to state that he was told that Ms. Kellie Jones is the most hardworking, dedicated, and committed person in the School Department, and he wanted to personally thank her for all of her hard work regarding language within the school systems.

Councilor Nicastro stated that she regrets having to meet under these circumstances and acknowledged although it feels like an antagonistic relationship, this is not what the council wants.

Councilor Minichiello stated his displeasure regarding the transportation budget and specified how no one is willing to take accountability for the loss of \$\$ within the transportation budget as well as stated that those who are in charge of the decision making need to be better.

Councilor Minichiello stated frustration regarding how no one within the School Department is owning up to the choices of the department.

Councilor Derenoncourt asked Dr. Cobbs if the School Committee had voted on the School Budget that the councilors were presented. Dr Cobbs responded by stating yes to which Councilor Derenoncourt stated he would leave it there.

Councilor Derenoncourt asked TJ Plante, in regard to the school budget, what the exact number should be. Plante stated that the budget is roughly \$227,000,000 and that the \$232,000,000 is that with the additional \$5,900,000 that the School Department is requesting and stating that they need.

Councilor Derenoncourt asked Mrs. Andrade-Serpa if when a new arrival appears, if the students and families are presented their options for schooling or are just advised to attend the night school. Mrs. Andrade-Serpa responded by saying it all varies depending on the age of the student.

Councilor Farwell stated he would like to ask CFO Troy Clarkson a question, to which he asked, when decisions are made at the school department that have cost implications what is your involvement? CFO Troy Clarkson responded by stating the process has evolved tremendously ever since the news of the deficit, and that there is no clear structure for it.

Councilor Farwell asked Mrs. Perez-Siciliano if there is a clause in the contract in which drivers are given an extra amount of time if they work past 9 o'clock. Mrs. Perez-Siciliano responded by stating anything above the originally slated six hours that they work they are granted an additional three.

Councilor Farwell stated that he wanted to make one final remark on his end for the night, highlighting that the Mayor and the CFO have been thrown under the bus due to the School Department requesting \$5,900,000, as the School Department knew that would not be appropriated, and in turn made them look bad.

Councilor Lally asked if Dr. Spaulding could offer some background regarding the Launch Program that they observed together. Dr. Spaulding responded by stating absolutely, and that she would also like Ms. Kellie Jones to also speak on the topic afterwards as well. Dr. Spaulding explained the class they observed is a class for those who are learning English at the early stages. Ms. Kellie Jones stated that they have had 122 new multi-lingual learners in second grade this year alone. Councilor Lally stated that the classroom he sat in on was very full, but all of the students were very engaged and invested in the class work.

Councilor Lally asked Dr. Cobbs if any Brockton Public School employee is receiving any extra compensation or overtime for being there tonight. Dr. Cobbs explained that any of the Union Personnel are contractually obligated to be paid overtime compensation, but that none of the salaried Brockton Public School employees receive overtime.

Councilor Lally highlighted differences between the City side of things compared to the School side, pointing out the difference in number of custodians in comparison to buildings that need to be maintained for each side respectively.

Councilor Lally stated he would like to hear from Principal Mccaskill to which President Rodrigues stated one more councilor was set to speak, and then Principal Mccaskill can take questions himself.

Councilor Thompson stated that he believed the School Committee voted on implementing an RFP or checking in to First Student and seeing their costs for transportation services and asked for information regarding such. Mayor Sullivan explained that they are working with Mike Morris, the Chief Procurement Officer, to get RFPs out on the street and stated that it is a work in progress currently.

Principal Mccaskill stated that even with his 30+ years of work in this field, Brockton “is where it is at”. Mccaskill also stated that he is aware that a lot of work is left to be done, but that they have the hard workers who are committed to making that work happen, and change occur. Principal Mccaskill also highlighted what Councilor Minichiello stated regarding finding answers, stating that when it comes to Brockton High, whether it be good, bad, or indifferent, there is only one person to go to, and that that is him.

Councilor Minichiello asked Principal Mccaskill what time he arrives at Brockton High School to which he responded that he would be there at 6:15 in the morning. Councilor Minichiello said that he would meet him there Friday.

President Rodrigues adjourned the meeting.