

## **Joint Committee of the City Council and School Committee Meeting**

Thursday, June 13, 2024

Video of meeting can be found at <https://youtu.be/NgWliXzWXBA?feature=shared>

City Council Members present: Chair Kevin Jourdain, Howard Greaney

City Council members present on Zoom: Tessa Murphy-Romboletti

School Committee Members present: Vice Chair William Collamore, Rosalee Tensley Williams, Jay Whelihan

Other City Councilors present: Carmen Ocasio, Patricia Devine

Other School Committee members present: Yadilette Rivera Colón, Mildred Lefebvre

Chair Jourdain called the meeting to order at 6:31 PM

Chair Jourdain recognized that HPS Superintendent, Anthony Soto, as well as HPS Finance Manager, Sean Mangano, were in attendance.

Item 1: Minutes of March 14, 2024 meeting.

---> Approved, 6-0.

### **DISCUSSION:**

Councilor Greaney made a motion to approve the minutes. SC Member Williams seconded the motion. Motion adopted, 6-0.

SC Member Whelihan made a motion to take a roll call vote that for the purposes of this meeting would be applicable to all motions to remove an item from the table, place items on the table, package items, or suspend the rules, unless there is an objection. SC Member Williams seconded the motion. Motion adopted.

Councilor Greaney made a motion to remove item 2 from the table. Motion adopted.

Item 2: 2-6-24 Jourdain -- Ordered, that the School dept provide the City Council with a report on their plan to use the remaining \$13 million in ESSER funds by September 30, 2024. Also provide us a report on how the \$44 million thus far spent was used.  
\*Tabled 3-14-24

---> Complied with, 6-0.

#### DISCUSSION:

Chair Jourdain noted that a report for the past month had been provided. He then asked Mr. Soto and Mr. Mangano if the School Department was on track for getting it all used by September 30th.

A. Soto stated that the report included how money was spent over the past 4 years as well as projections of moving forward. He then explained they would be replacing student and staff devices, adding that they could last between 3 and 5 years. He then stated their intent to ensure all students between 3rd and 5th grades had devices for use throughout the school day. He also stated that School Committee would be discussing a policy for the devices. He also stated that they were hoping to take on some HVAC projects over the summer. He then expressed confidence that the funds would be spent.

S. Mangano stated that while the deadline to obligate funds was September 30th, their previous requirement to spend the funds by November 30th had been extended to January of 2026, if requested. He noted that at least one project for windows and doors at several schools likely would extend out that far. He emphasized that that if there were anticipated delays for any projects, they needed to submit requests for extension.

SC Member Whelihan noted that a lot of area school districts were having difficulty finding qualified vendors because they were all trying to spend money at once, leading to those vendors cherry-picking which projects they wanted to do.

SC Member Williams expressed her understanding that if the money was not used, it could be put into another fund.

S. Mangano suggested that may have been for a different fund. He then explained that they did not have another fund ESSER funds could go into, reiterating the funds had to be obligated by September 30th.

Councilor Greaney noted that Holyoke High School had just received a \$500,000 grant for technology. He then asked if they had contingency plans for that.

S. Mangano suggested that may have been a capital grant at Dean to outfit a couple vocational, advanced manufacturing, or nursing programs. He added that it was unrelated to the planned expenditures of the ESSER funding.

Chair Jourdain asked how the window and door project was progressing.

S. Mangano stated that it was around 25% of the way done, noting that a lot of the work could not happen until school was out. He stated that they would request an extension, just in case, but there were not any delays at the time.

A. Soto stated that he would plan to share the schedule once it was ready. He added that the projects had to be mostly done before school started but they had items that could be done without being disruptive to the students.

Chair Jourdain recalled that a tractor/Gator had to be purchased for the high school using city funds. He then stated that the DPW was planning to check to see if around \$30,000 of ESSER funds could be used for that.

S. Mangano stated that they did follow up. He then explained that any expense over \$30,000 required them to submit a capital expense form to the state. He then stated that they had not done that because the funds had been obligated, but they had a list of projects they could do if any of the other projects came in under their estimates.

A. Soto stated that if one of the other projects came in lower, he would be willing to put the tractor at the top of the priority list.

Councilor Greaney asked if there was any funding dedicated to security to prevent intruders from entering.

A. Soto stated that they had already made investments. He then stated that they switched from a key system to a key fob system 4-5 years earlier. He added that they also made sure they had substantial camera coverage in all schools, particularly at the main entrances. He added that they had greater coverage at the high schools. He then explained that they could go online and log into all of the cameras. He also stated that the alarm systems were functioning properly. He also explained they were able to use ESSER and grant money to build out safety vestibules at Sullivan, Holyoke High, Dean, and Morgan schools, meaning any visitors let in did not have access to the school until the main office could see who they were. He added that they were planning to include shades with the window projects that could be used during any incidents.

Councilor Greaney asked if the PA systems and lockdown instructions were all up to date.

A. Soto stated that they were up to date. He added that they made investments in the intercom systems at some of the schools.

SC Member Whelihan stated that the School Committee was aware of the lack of maintenance at some of the schools. He noted that they had recently changed the name of one of their subcommittees from Finance to Finance and Operations, adding that they would be discussing school facilities and maintenance at length going forward. He then provided a partial list of school improvements that had been done through ESSER funding.

A. Soto recalled that when he started 9 years earlier, there had been a lack of investment in the schools, and he appreciated being a role where he could identify resources to make more investments. He also noted that they did a lot of culture work with the facilities team to begin taking pride in wanting the schools to look better.

Chair Jourdain commended them for making investments, as well as helping to defray costs of things that the city may not otherwise be able to afford. He added that the funds were being used for a lot of great programming.

Councilor Greaney made a motion that item 2 had been complied with. SC Member Williams seconded the motion. Motion adopted, 6-0.

(24:25)

Councilor Greaney made a motion to remove item 3 from the table. SC Member Williams seconded the motion. Motion adopted.

Item 3: 5-21-24 Jourdain, Greaney, Devine - Ordered, that the Joint Committee on City Council and School Committee review the process for the naming of the new middle school replacing Peck Middle School at the same location; including, the apparent desire by some to possibly change the name from Superintendent William R. Peck who was Superintendent of our Schools from 1920-1963 and a World War 1 Naval Veteran and had this middle school named for him by the city in 1970. That the Joint Committee and Law Department also review our ordinances and rules on naming Holyoke owned facilities and buildings specifically Chapter 12 of our Ordinances so that we ensure we are following the proper procedure for the naming of the new school which is a city owned municipal building.

--->Complied with, 6-0.

#### DISCUSSION:

Chair Jourdain noted that while Dr. Peck passed in 1970, the school was named for him in 1973. He then expressed his understanding that there was agreement on the process. He then asked if there would be a recommendation coming to the Council or if it should act.

Councilor Greaney recalled that as one of the first teachers to teach at Peck, he believed the name was appropriate at the time and continued to believe the name should be maintained.

Chair Jourdain stated that in doing research, he found valuable historical information on Dr. Peck, noting that he was the youngest superintendent in the state's history, and had done amazing work for women teachers at a time that it was taboo for woman to remain

teachers once they were married. He added that Dr. Peck took a lot of heat for fighting for teach salaries and had been committed to supporting education for disabled children.

SC Member Williams emphasized that Dr. Peck had been for women's rights. She added that he would send teachers to the homes of disabled children to ensure they could still learn. She then added her support for keeping the name.

Chair Jourdain asked SC Member Collamore to share his thoughts about Dr. Peck.

SC Member Collamore recalled that Dr. Peck was always cordial and inviting to anyone that wanted to meet with him to address concerns and hear ideas. He added that Dr. Peck was good with the department's money and thoughtful of the taxpayers.

Councilor Greaney recalled that Dr. Peck was also fair and equitable, especially before a time of collective bargaining.

Councilor Devine recalled in Dr. Peck's bio that he had been a Navy veteran, noting she had been impressed by that as her dad was also a Navy veteran. She added that Dr. Peck was also an advocate to ensure women teachers were earning more.

Councilor Murphy-Romboletti stated that as a Peck Middle School graduate, she appreciated the discussion. She also noted an outline was provided to the committee which called for a public process. She expressed her understanding that the City Council would ultimately vote on, but asked for more information on how the process for naming the school was developed.

Chair Jourdain made a motion to remove item 4 from the table, noting that item spoke to the plan. SC Member Collamore seconded the motion. Motion adopted.

Item 4: 5-13-24 From the School Committee - Draft Plan for Renaming PECK

---> Complied with, 6-0.

#### DISCUSSION:

SC Member Whelihan stated that the topic was vetted through their Diversity Committee. He then deferred to SC Member Rivera Colón to further explain.

SC Member Rivera Colón stated that Mayor Garcia referred the job of making of an equitable plan to name the new school. She noted that DESE (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) considered it to be a new school, requiring a process to name it. She then stated that their committee researched everything they could find on Dr. Peck, noting that it can be easy to lose the memory of who people are after a long period of time. She also clarified that there wasn't necessarily a desire to rename the school but it being a new school required there to be a process for a name. She added that they discussed how to include the community in the process to encourage more people to

have their voices heard. She then explained that the School Committee would review the feedback and make a recommendation. She added that they then learned of the ordinance requiring the City Council to approve the name, then leading to them adding that step into their process.

Chair Jourdain stated that even if the name of Dr. Peck remained, there were plenty of other opportunities to recognize other contributors to the community through the naming of facilities within the school. He added that there were other parks in the community that could be named for people. He noted that it appeared they would be doing community outreach in August through November.

SC Member Rivera Colón stated that was correct.

Councilor Greaney made a motion that items 3 and 4 had been complied with. SC Member Whelihan seconded the motion. Motion adopted, 6-0.

(45:55)

Councilor Greaney made a motion to remove item 5 from the table. SC Member Collamore seconded the motion. Motion adopted.

Item 5: 4-16-24 (copy) Ocasio -- Ordered that the School Department provides a Crossing Guard at the corner of South Bridge St and Sargent St. To protect the children and families crossing the street. Coming to and from Morgan School this is a very dangerous situation that needs immediate attention.

---> Laid on the table, 6-0.

#### DISCUSSION:

Councilor Ocasio stated that she was motivated to put in the order after she started volunteering to help make sure kids were safely crossing the street, and noticed there was not a crossing guard at this location. She emphasized that it was a congested area with parents dropping off their kids and then driving off and was potentially dangerous. She added that drivers often speed through the area as well.

Councilor Greaney expressed support for the order, adding that it appeared to be a definite safety hazard for children. He then requested that Mr. Soto find funds to place a crossing guard at that intersection in time for the new school year in the fall.

SC Member Collamore noted that the crossing guards were from the Police Department budget.

A. Soto stated that the School Department had an agreement with the Police Department for many years. He then explained that with the last change in the Police Chief, as well as a new MOU (Memorandum of Understanding), the matter got lost in translation. He then recalled that there had been agreement that the schools would pay the Police Department, around \$5,000 for a year, for them to hire, train, and monitor crossing guards. He added that it was part of the School Department budget on top of net school spending. He then explained that adding another crossing guard would be another \$12,000 and would require an additional appropriation from the City Council. He then suggested that as an alternative, they could review all of their crossing guard locations to see if traffic patterns or low amounts of students crossing would allow them to move a guard from another location. He also noted that he had recent discussions with the Police Department to address confusion about whether they should continue to be doing it. He added that they would have to do some research on traffic patterns and volumes for that area, as well as how many kids were crossing every day there.

Chair Jourdain suggested that the next step should be deciding who would be in charge of the day-to-day overseeing of the crossing guards. He also suggested collecting data periodically to count how many students were crossing at various intersections every day to determine how to redeploy crossing guards.

Councilor Ocasio asked for clarification that the Police Department were in charge of paying the crossing guards.

Chair Jourdain stated that the School Department paid the money to the Police Department.

A. Soto explained that the School Department paid it, the City Council appropriated it on top of net school spending, with a cost of around \$141,000. He further clarified that it had been past practice that the Police Department hired, trained, and monitored the crossing guards through an agreement. He reiterated that with the newest Police Chief, there had been questions coming up as far as if they should continue to be doing it.

Councilor Greaney stated that \$12,000 was a small price to pay to make sure children were safe. He added that the smallest intersections can sometimes be the most dangerous. He suggested that the request would likely be received positively by the City Council.

Chair Jourdain suggested that one month of interest from the stabilization fund could pay for the crossing guard for a whole year. He further suggested having others come in for additional dialogue on the need after looking at the data.

SC Member Williams emphasized that one child being hurt would be too many.

SC Member Whelihan commended Councilor Ocasio for bringing this to everyone's attention. He noted it had evolved into a bigger topic about who oversaw crossing guards and was in charge of the process. He also recalled that it took time for he and Councilor Vacon to get a crosswalk painted in Ward 5 in front of McMahon School. He noted that drivers often would not take the crossing guard's authority seriously without the crosswalk painted.

Chair Jourdain suggested tabling this to allow Mr. Soto to speak with the Police Department, gather data on the different intersections, and then return to discussion of this situation as well as the broader discussion.

SC Member Collamore made a motion to lay item 5 on the table. Councilor Greaney seconded the motion. Motion adopted, 6-0.

(1:07:10)

Chair Jourdain made a motion to remove item 6 from the table. Councilor Greaney seconded the motion. Motion adopted.

Item 6: 4-2-24 Magrath-Smith - Ordered, that City Council rule 10.D be revisited in discussion.  
D. Every month the City Council invite in a Holyoke School Student to lead in the Pledge of Allegiance.

\*Referred from Charter and Rules 6-4-24

---> Approved, referred to the School Committee, 6-0.

#### DISCUSSION:

Chair Jourdain recalled that this developed out of having a student ambassador at City Council meetings years earlier in an effort to have students volunteering. He then suggested that the intent was to have this committee brainstorm about getting someone on rotation for a specific number of meetings or identify several students to handle a couple of meetings each. He further suggested it could be students of different ages from different schools.

SC Member Whelihan expressed his understanding that the rule had been on the books for a while but hadn't been followed for many years. He then noted that they had student reps attending School Committee meeting. He then suggested that the order could be amended to have it be a class or group of students instead of an individual student.

Chair Jourdain stated that the Council was looking for the School Committee leadership to come up with some ideas for how to make this happen.

SC Member Whelihan noted that each of the School Committee meetings included a student showcase for them to show things they were doing, such as presentations from the music department or the drama club.

Chair Jourdain made a motion that the order be adopted and referred to the School Committee to develop a plan. He then asked that they file a communication to the City Council once they decide how to proceed.



Councilor Devine stated that a roll call vote on every item needed to be taken because one member was on line.

SC Member Collamore seconded the motion. Motion adopted on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 6--Nays 0--Absent 0.

Chair Jourdain made a motion to reconsider the previous actions on items 1 through 5. Councilor Greaney seconded the motion. Motion adopted on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 6--Nays 0--Absent 0.

Chair Jourdain made a motion to approve item 1, that items 2 through 4 were complied with, that item 5 be laid on the table. SC Member Williams seconded the motion. Motion adopted on a call of the roll of the yeas and nays--Yeas 6--Nays 0--Absent 0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:46 PM

Documents for meeting can be [found here](#).