

WATERBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION
MINUTES ~ SPECIAL MEETING
Thursday, April 28, 2016 at 8:00 p.m.
Bucks Hill School, 330 Bucks Hill Road, Waterbury, Connecticut

PRESENT: President Brown, Commissioners Harvey, Hernandez, Pagano, Rodriguez, Stango, Sweeney, Theriault, J. Van Stone, and T. Van Stone.

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent Kathleen Ouellette and Director of Personnel Robert Brenker.

SILENT PRAYER

President Brown called the special meeting to order at 8:33 p.m. with a moment of silence.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

President Brown led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

ROLL CALL

CLERK: Commissioner Harvey.

HARVEY: Here.

CLERK: Commissioner Hernandez.

HERNANDEZ: Here.

CLERK: Commissioner Pagano.

PAGANO: Here.

CLERK: Vice President Rodriguez.

RODRIGUEZ: Here.

CLERK: Commissioner Stango.

STANGO: Here.

CLERK: Commissioner Sweeney.

SWEENEY: Here.

CLERK: Commissioner Theriault.

THERIAULT: Here.

CLERK: Commissioner J. Van Stone.

J. VAN STONE: Present.

CLERK: Commissioner T. Van Stone.

T. VAN STONE: Present.

CLERK: President Brown.

BROWN: Here.

1. COMMITTEE ON SCHOOL PERSONNEL

- 1.1 **Upon a motion by Commissioner Stango and duly seconded by Commissioner Sweeney, it was voted unanimously to approve that the Superintendent of Schools be authorized to notify teachers of the non-renewal of their employment contracts in accordance with Connecticut General Statute's Section 10-151.**

BROWN: Discussion? All those in favor, opposed, abstain? Motion carries.

2. COMMITTEE ON BUILDING

SWEENEY: With the approval of the Committee on Building, the Superintendent of Schools recommends approval to file a grant application (EE049) for the proposed Wendell Cross Addition and Renovation Project, **so moved.**

STANGO: **Second.**

BROWN: Discussion? Commissioner Stango.

STANGO: Regarding the Wendell Cross project, we've been down this road for a long, long time; it's been a frustrating road. This Board not because of . . . a board at one point in time decided to change the elementary schools to PreK to eight.

BROWN: I'm sorry Commissioner Stango; I didn't do the public address to the Board.

SWEENEY: I withdraw the motion.

STANGO: I withdraw the second.

PUBLIC ADDRESSES THE BOARD

Upon a motion by Commissioner Jason Van Stone and duly seconded by Commissioner Sweeney, it was voted unanimously to suspend the regular order of business to allow the public to address the Board at 8:40 p.m.

BROWN: All in favor, thank you.

Jami Dohoney, 39 Brackenridge Drive, had the following comments: I am here tonight on behalf of the parents and students of Wendell Cross. A lot of which are sitting with me. Over the last several weeks we've spent a substantial amount of time meeting and discussing why we believe it's time to invest in our neighborhood and in our school and ultimately in our children. Wendell Cross is an amazing school and it's evidenced in part by their district ranking and overall student test scores which far outperformed the district averages. In addition to providing a solid educational foundation, Wendell Cross provides a safe, encouraging environment to its students. This is my son's third year there and not once has he experienced bullying, teasing, or had an unpleasant interaction. They encourage friendship, inclusion, and teach the importance of diversity to all of our children. As a parent the thought of my child going

from a nurturing, safe, controllable environment such as Wendell Cross to one of the middle schools in Waterbury is frightening. From sixth to eighth grade kids begin to take their independence to the next level – socially, academically, and personally. They develop into young adults and begin making decisions that help form who they will become. As a parent I want my child in an environment that is most conducive to promoting and encouraging him to continue on a path of success that has been started at Wendell Cross. Despite the best efforts of the phenomenal educators at our City middle schools, they simply cannot provide the support that our children need and deserve as they transition into the pre-teen stage of their life. Our children shouldn't lose their momentum going from fifth grade to middle school. It's clear that the level of education provided to the students at Wendell Cross cannot be challenged. Why not invest in the number one non-magnet elementary school in our City? Why not ensure the highest performing students in the district continue to learn in the same environment through their preparation for high school?

I have a packet that I provided to each of you tonight. These are letters from other Wendell Cross parents who support the expansion. We all strongly believe it's time to invest in the East End, specifically in East Mountain and Wendell Cross. We have watched our tax dollars hard at work all around the City . . . renovating, expanding, and building new schools, now it's our turn.

East Mountain has great neighborhoods, families, and a great school. If you don't move quickly with the expansion . . . we run the risk of losing our neighbors. People will move to other districts and new families will not move in instead opting for homes in neighboring towns . . . provide to our students and that is the opportunity to continue to strive and goal in an educational environment that was begun for them at Wendell Cross.

I've heard comments about unforeseen costs . . . presentation by O & G you know that may increase the overall expense to the City. The developers and architects are the masters of their craft, this is what they do for a living, it's up to the Board obviously to ask questions and be informed on all of the ins and outs, but this is their job, that's what they do. Contingency funds are built into every major construction project. Will there be asbestos? Of course there will, the school was built in the 50's. The experts that put together the plan account for that. Are there going to be potential issues for I don't know, underground oil tanks, environmental issues? Well at Wendell Cross, no probably not, not environmental concerns. There is no manufacturing up in that area, there is no underground oil tank. So you know instead of grasping at straws trying to find reasons why we shouldn't do this – listen to the parents, listen to the teachers, listen to the students, this is something that we need. The East Mountain area has been neglected for quite some time in line with what we're doing in our schools, the educational system, we've never . . . expansions and all the renovations throughout this City, it's time to pay some attention to us and our area. The States funds nearly 80% of the project and the City bonding – 10, 11 million dollars, nothing to shake a stick at, however, it's bonded out for what 10, 15 years? I think that our children are important enough to invest in. I'm a taxpayer and everyone sitting here with me right now are all taxpayers in Waterbury. You know what, it's not even a question to me because the alternative to having this expansion and having my child continue his education at Wendell Cross, sure there's parochial schools but they're overcrowded too because there are so many residents doing the same thing, pulling their kids out of the public

school and sending them to private. Unfortunately my husband and I when we considered the pros and the cons have decided that if our son cannot remain in the environment of Wendell Cross we will sell our home and we will move outside of the City. Thank you very much for your time, I appreciate it.

Jennifer Penhallow, 155 Bracewood Road, had the following comments: I chose to purchase my home so my children could go to Wendell Cross because of the reputation it has held for very many years and I also wrote a letter which is included in the packet but I felt it was important to come and show my support and read my letter and make sure you hear what I have to say. It's not as long or involved. What Jami said, I stand behind 100%. I also brought my daughter here tonight, one of them, and she is a member of the student council at Wendell Cross, a voice of the student body, and they're working to show their support as the student body as well. So hopefully maybe she'll . . . at the Board of Aldermen. I'm gonna read my letter now. Dear members of the Waterbury Board of Education, I am writing this letter in support of the proposed expansion of Wendell Cross to a pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. I have two daughters who are presently in third and first grades. I want to begin by saying that Wendell Cross is an amazing school environment. The principal, the teachers, and the entire staff work as a cohesive group that fosters an environment where learning is achieved while students are enjoying their experiences. I have spent a lot of time as a parent volunteer in Wendell Cross and have had the opportunity to be in the school during the day. I was truly amazed. The children are engaged in their learning, they are respectful of visitors, and they all show the Wendell Cross pride.

Having studied education in college, I am in support of the pre-k to eighth grade model. The older students are given the opportunities to be role models to the younger graders. They hold themselves to a higher standard of behavior in an effort to model respect to the younger students. They are given opportunities to help in the classrooms of the lower grades and learn many characteristics that make them future leaders. In turn, the younger students see how the older kids behave and they tend to follow suit.

I feel that going through with the renovation and addition to Wendell Cross, a building that is in need of renovation anyway, is a win-win for the city, the Wendell Cross community, and the East Mountain neighborhood. With the administration, faculty, and staff these students deserve an opportunity to stay at Wendell Cross through eighth grade in this environment they have been accustomed to. I am amazed at the education my children have gotten so far at Wendell Cross and as a parent I want them to continue having these same experiences as they grow up. If they are able to stay at Wendell Cross through eighth grade I know they will continue to be successful in their academics. I also stand strong in support of the expansion so that the east end of Waterbury has pre-k through eighth grade, just as the west, north, and south ends do. I appreciate your consideration and hope you see what a great opportunity this can be for the City. And I'd also like to say my husband and I have discussed it as well and if our children aren't allowed to stay at the Wendell Cross school to eighth grade . . . we also will consider selling our home and moving out of the city because this is the type of education that we want for our children and I feel that . . . middle school . . . over the years but it is starting to not do what it was put in place to do. I know the City clearly . . . having built them in the other districts in the town so I think, I agree with Erin, the east end, it's time for us to have that opportunity as well. Thank you for your time.

Rosanna Quinche, 89 Bracewood Road, had the following comments: I agree with everything that Jami and Jen has mentioned tonight, I appreciate those who have come to visit us at our PTA meetings and special events that we have had. It's a great school and I'm very honored to have my daughter there . . . you could look at the test scores; you know they speak for themselves. It's the only school in all of Waterbury that's measuring up to the magnet schools. I would love to keep my daughter there, I have another one on the way so I'm invested in the school. I did purchase my property in the Wendell Cross area in East Mountain because of the school. I had other options, I could have bought outside of the City, now I'm faced with once she gets to fifth grade what do I do. I would love to keep her there. I think Wendell Cross is a great school, I've been on the PTA board for the past several years, I know they all would like to have been here, some of them had to work tonight, they couldn't be here. We really appreciate your support if you would at least bring it to the Board of Aldermen, give us a chance to speak to them, see if we can get it to go through. Thank you.

Unidentified speaker: My two oldest, I had to do exactly the same thing, there was no way I was sending them to Wallace. Coming from the school that they were in, going to that environment is totally different than they experience at Wendell Cross. I think we purchased our homes with . . . for a reason and it seems like we don't get the same kind of service that we should as other parts of the City do. It's a shame that our kids can't enjoy that time in that school. I really agree with everything that's been said . . . it's pretty much my same thoughts exactly. Thank you.

Erin Ellington had the following comments: I wasn't going to actually speak. And one of the reasons I wasn't going to speak is I get so emotional. Because for me. I just want to say I have invested in Waterbury . . . grew up in East Mountain, I teach in the district . . . people say all the time why are you still in Waterbury? I love it. Why do you teach in Waterbury? I've been teaching for 17 years, I could go to another district, make a lot more money because we were frozen for years. People say why buy in Waterbury? I love Waterbury, I love East Mountain, I love the community that is there, I love what Joe Amato has done with Wendell Cross. He has made it a community school. He has done for those kids there what Jamie and I had when we went there. Jamie and I both grew up in the East Mountain and reinvested there because that's what we wanted for our children. You all know as a Board that the middle school model has not done for us what we needed and you recognized that many years ago when the Board, some of you were there back then and some have come . . . you made a conscious decision to start to build pre-k to eight schools and you did that because you knew that's what we need to do. We can wait, we can wait another year because we don't have enough money, we can wait, . . . and our buildings are falling apart and our schools are not performing. And then we stand before you and talk about test scores, why aren't your test scores going up? We know what we need to do. We need to stand by our commitment to building pre-k to eight schools . . . because that's what we need in order for our schools to succeed. We need instructional leaders, we have an awesome instructional leader. We need teachers that are committed. You walk into Wendell Cross and every single teacher there is a top-notch teacher. We need families that are involved and we have that. If you don't make this commitment we are going to start to lose some of them. You lose any of those pieces to that puzzle and it's not there. You know and you talk time and time again what we need to succeed. We're asking you to reinvest in us and make us a model for the district for what we can do and how you can build a successful school. Thank you very much.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Jason Van Stone and duly seconded by Commissioner Sweeney, it was voted unanimously to return to the regular order of business at 8:54 p.m.

BROWN: All in favor, motion carries.

2.1 Upon a motion by Commissioner Sweeney and duly seconded by Commissioner Stango, it was voted, by roll call vote, to approve to file a grant application (ED049) for the proposed Wendell Cross Addition and Renovation Project.

BROWN: Discussion? Commissioner Stango.

STANGO: I think I've been here before. We've been down a long road here with building a new school or renovation and the Board of Education a long time ago has been committed to build new schools in Waterbury and unfortunately we can't get that one in the east end started, not for lack of trying. We had it off the drawing boards and to the State I think at least two times only to be drawn away. There were other plans that never got that far. So we did a, one of the reasons why we stopped the last time was wanted a study done by, and was done by McBroom, and to see where we should go with new schools and they came back with a plan that we all listened to and I think agreed with more the less that we did need new schools and one was the east end, and one plan also alongside of that was to renovate as new Wendell Cross. So since then the east end school once again was drawn away from us from lack of administrative support. However the long-range plan of this Board was at one time was to return all schools to neighborhood schools and to be pre-k to eight. As it's been stated many times, people have lost faith in the middle schools. I think personally, probably they should not have lost as much faith as they did, there are still many things that go well in there and I think they're doing an excellent job however it's not the trend we're going in, we decided to move to pre-k to eight. So now having lost the east end school site . . . for a new school, we're still on the other, twin side of that was the renovate as new Wendell Cross and I do support that. I think that the public lost faith in the east end building a new school for a number of reasons, one of them was trying to find a site, another was the taxpayers association. But I don't hear all of that with the Wendell Cross renovate as new. I hear support for that. And seeing how our commitment for years now was to do that I think that it's important that we move along with that and not to stand still. If we stand still, again, after standing still for about five or six years now, I don't know when we're going to get started to return to that because the State money is not going to get any bigger, we're not going to get anymore. The City of Waterbury taxpayers are not all of a sudden going to be able to afford more, that's not going to happen. So we still have to put our heads down and plunge ahead. We're gonna have to try to do that. So I will support it and the reason why I'm supporting it is for all of those reasons and my commitment to it earlier and the fact that I think Wendell Cross project is a good project, for many reasons that were stated, about redoing, the building is going to need work anyway at some point and going ahead with our proposal that that's what we want to do and the fact that the State grant is 78%. I don't know what the State grant is going to be if we try to do this this time next year, if there's even a State grant. But so far it's still there so I think we have to take advantage of it now while we can. So I will be supporting it and I thank you for allowing me those comments.

BROWN: Any other discussion? Commissioner Theriault.

THERIAULT: I certainly can respond to the passion that the parents come with. I think every single one of them are actually right. I don't represent just the East Mountain area and they are right in the fact that other areas in the City have gotten their school – the north, the south, not the east, but the west. Eventually we're going to have to move forward with breaking up those middle schools and bringing them into pre-k to eights. I know it's going to take some courage to do that . . . so we need to look at that. I don't necessarily think that the middle schools have failed; I think our middle schools have just outlived their usefulness because we have, instead of having three or four guidance counselors, we already cut that out. We cut out the foreign language, we cut out that. The original plan of the middle school is nowhere near what it was when it was conceived and implemented. And Commissioner Stango can assert to that because he was there during that time. It had unified arts and it was a state of the art building that provided an absolutely great education and both of my kids went through it and both of my kids got an excellent education. So it has changed. Maybe it's time to modify and move all of those schools to pre-k to eight. The only reason I'm against Wendell Cross is because I represent all of the taxpayers as well as East Mountain and I hope Jamie doesn't move away because she's my neighbor so I don't want her to move away, and she's a good neighbor. But as I was proposing before, when we look at \$216,000 per student for the number of students we're gonna increase that building by, we could probably pay \$110,000, half of that, and get twice as many seats, 550 seats. You have convinced me at least in terms of the leverage that something needs to be done there, possibly a new school, but I certainly am, with all due respect to the parents and the community, am not in favor of spending the money on that particular project. I think, you know we couldn't go to the bird sanctuary; we couldn't go to the cliff, Ferrone Avenue, because we knew both of those would go to referendum and be defeated. So we needed to look for another option. I mean the original option here was \$220 million dollars plus. It would probably be 240 to 250 million to build two new schools – two in the north end and two someplace else in the City namely the east end. Now why we would consider putting two more schools in the north end when we haven't even filled Reed with the student population that we need. I don't know why we would do that. But that being said, we looked at sites, we looked at sites in the east end, in the north end, and then now we have the budget, the State budget falling through and we have thousands of people being laid off. And if our funds are cut, that's gonna mean another increase. I mean a two mill increase for the City of Waterbury, these people got a two mill increase. For me that's gonna be five or six hundred dollars more on my taxes plus everyone else. And if the State cuts more then it's gonna be four mills, then it's gonna be a thousand. That's just an aside. But for me something needs to be done. I don't think we're gonna get enough bang for our buck by renovating Wendell Cross. I think we should look for another site. Thank you.

BROWN: Thank you. Commissioner Sweeney.

SWEENEY: First of all thank you to the parents who came out. It's always great to see a dad in the room, so thank you for that. I like that you speak to the concept of the pre-k to eight and what it does for the children, what it does for the parents, what it does for the school, and what it does for the community. So we're not talking about the building here, we're talking about the concept, that has obviously raised some interest in the

Wendell Cross area. In terms of the budget and the State, the State has already come out with its recommended list of projects for this budget year, so somebody will get funded, probably most of them will get funded. In terms of bonding at the City level if you go back and take a look you'll see that although the last three times that the east end school was turned down we didn't bond any less we just bonded for different projects. So when people say it's my turn, when is my time, that's what we're talking about. So if we don't move forward with this and at least try to seize the opportunity, somebody else will. So I applaud you all for coming out and speaking on it. But in terms of our bang for our buck, we're not talking about doing a project for just 213 students, we're talking about a project for 550 students. We're talking about a better facility for 300 students that currently exist in that building and in addition for 250 students. We're talking about a big dollar amount . . . nothing to sneeze at. It's not for 213 kids, it's 550 kids and a whole community, whole community because you know in the other pre-k to eights that we had left the opportunity, the spaces, for the community to come in and use that school and that's not an opportunity that you have at this current time. And we talk all the time about getting the parents and community in the school, getting everybody to be a part of that, you have to have an open, welcoming presence and you have to have a space for them to come to. So we're talking about something that is not just for the students at Wendell Cross and the parents at Wendell Cross, and the teachers at Wendell Cross. . . . the whole community of East Mountain who can benefit from this. So I think that it's a win. I'm truly heartbroken that once again we do not have the east end school, I truly am, and I think we're still gonna need that and I'm still gonna continue to fight for that. But we have the opportunity here to do a renovate and add to Wendell Cross and bring them to a pre-k to eight option that these parents have expressed a true interest in that and I think that we should do that for them and I will vote to do that.

BROWN: Any other comments? Madam Clerk, take the roll.

ROLL CALL VOTE ON ITEM #2.1:

YEAS: Commissioners Harvey, Hernandez, Pagano, Rodriguez, Stango, Sweeney, and President Brown – 7

NAYS Commissioners Theriault, J. Van Stone, and T. Van Stone – 3

CLERK: Seven/three – motion passes.

2.2 Upon a motion by Commissioner Sweeney and duly seconded by Commissioner Stango, it was voted, by roll call vote, to approve the preparation of schematic drawings and outline specifications for the proposed Wendell Cross Addition and Renovation Project.

BROWN: Discussion?

THERIAULT: Roll call vote.

ROLL CALL VOTE ON ITEM #2.2:

YEAS: Commissioners Harvey, Hernandez, Pagano, Rodriguez, Stango, Sweeney, J. Van Stone, and President Brown – 8

NAYS Commissioners Theriault and T. Van Stone – 2

BROWN: Motion passes.

- 2.3 Upon a motion by Commissioner Sweeney and duly seconded by Commissioner Stango, it was voted, by roll call vote, to approve the formation of a Building Committee for the proposed Wendell Cross Addition and Renovation Project. Such Committee shall consist of Charles E. Pagano, Charles L. Stango, Ann M. Sweeney, John E. Theriault, and Jason Van Stone.**

BROWN: Discussion?

ROLL CALL VOTE ON ITEM #2.3:

YEAS: Commissioners Harvey, Hernandez, Pagano, Rodriguez, Stango, Sweeney, J. Van Stone, and President Brown – 8
NAYS: Commissioners Theriault and T. Van Stone – 2

CLERK: Eight/two – motion passes.

3. SUPERINTENDENT'S NOTIFICATION TO THE BOARD

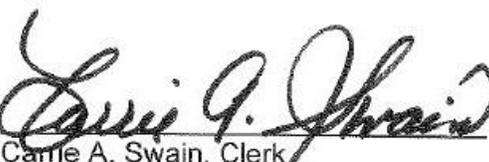
- 3.1 Upon a motion by Commissioner Jason Van Stone and duly seconded by Commissioner Stango, it was voted unanimously to receive and place on file the following resignations:**

Chepulis, Kimberly – Regan Grade 3, effective 04/22/16.
Lombardo, Allysa – Washington Grade 3, effective 06/14/16.
Losty, Shelly – CHS Special Education, effective 06/30/16.
Thompson, Merissa – School Psychologist, effective 06/30/16.
Way, Megan – Regan Grade 2, effective 06/30/16.
Wheelahan, Barbara – CHS Special Education, effective 06/30/16.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion by Commissioner Sweeney and duly seconded by Commissioner Hernandez, it was voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:13 p.m.

ATTEST


Carrie A. Swain, Clerk
Board of Education