

Joint Commission of City Council and School Board Meeting
January 20, 2022
5 PM
City Hall Chambers

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Councilor Dumont.

Roll call was taken for attendance. Present: Dumont - Yes; Austin – Yes; Larson – Yes; Marsh – Yes. Also present: Superintendent of Schools Lori Lane; Business Administrator Katie Krauss; Mayor Dana Hilliard; City Manager Bob Belmore; City Finance Director Scott Smith.

A motion to accept the meeting minutes from the October 5, 2020 Joint Commission meeting was made by Austin. Seconded by Dumont. Motion passed, Two Yes; Two abstentions

Purpose of the Joint Commission. Mayor Hilliard explained that the purpose of the Joint Commission is to bridge the communication gap between the school board and the city council. This Commission is sanctioned by a city ordinance that states that it will be made up of two city councilors and two school board members. Joint projects and funding discussions that affect both governing bodies are regular topics of the Joint Commission.

SYC Task Force Recommendation. Mayor Hilliard explained that the SYC Task Force was an off shoot of the Joint Commission that was charged to review the programmatic and financial sustainability of the SYC program. This is the last year of the federal grant that supports a large percentage of the program costs and as such, a number of decisions need to be made about the future of the program. The Mayor said that the SYC Task Force completed its work in December 2021. Throughout the Task Force’s work, there has been overwhelming support for the SYC program and the multiple benefits it brings to the families of Somersworth.

The Task Force’s recommendation is to not apply for the federal grant and that city and school district leaders need to create a financial plan for the program. The Mayor explained the federal grant program has moved away from its original intent by becoming much more restrictive in the students that it can serve and a very high bar has been created by the NH DOE in order to receive the funding each year.

City Manager Belmore said that there have been several meetings to work out the basic financial plan and how this will fit within the district’s budget structure. Superintendent Lane said that it is her intention to recommend to the school board that we incorporate the SYC Director position into the operating budget for next year. Finance Director Smith said that the City will look to increase its community programs contribution for SYC from \$5,000 to \$50,000 – this could help to fund scholarships for families that cannot afford the program fees. A program fees structure will need to be created that will sustain the program expenses. Belmore stated that the City Manager does not make changes to the Community Support line items so that once he is directed to plug in \$50,000, then this amount would not change moving forward until the Council made any change.

Councilor Austin said that he has been a long-time supporter of SYC and is glad to see that we are moving forward to sustain the program locally. He has always felt that the City should contribute more. He asked about managing the finances. Business Administrator Krauss said that the Director will be responsible for collecting the fees, but the financials will be handled through her office as it is currently done.

Board Chair Larson said that she was glad to hear that stabilization is coming for this important program as many families depend on the program to assist them with childcare. Board Vice Chair Marsh is also a supporter of the program as his own children participated when they were younger. He is appreciative of the City's continued collaboration with the school district. Larson suggested that perhaps the program could be made available to non-residents. There was a discussion that this inclusion might allow for City and School District employees in having the ability to have their children participate, perhaps at least during the summer. This possibility may be examined by the SAU and School Board at a later time.

Councilor Dumont said that the program has been in place since 1998 as part of the Somersworth Housing Authority. There is something to be said for building programs without grant help. He mentioned Lydia's House of Hope as a good example of this. SYC is well established and is designed for success.

Austin made a motion to accept the SYC Task Force Recommendation of not applying for the grant and to financially sustain the program locally, seconded by Larson. Motion Passed, Unanimous.

The Mayor will move the adopted recommendation to the City Finance Committee. Lane said that this will be on the agenda for the school board's upcoming budget workshop on February 5th for further discussion.

Adjournment: A motion was made by Austin, seconded by Larson to adjourn. Motion passed, unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 5:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

*Lori Lane
Superintendent of Schools*