

## **Somersworth Youth Connections (SYC) Task Force\***

Date: December 17, 2020

Time: 5:30 PM

Mayor Hilliard announced the legal authority to meet remotely\* according to the Governor's State of Emergency declaration. Chairman Dumont called the meeting to order at 5:52 PM.

### Roll Call Attendance:

#### **School Board**

Tom McCallion – Yes

Coty Donahue joined the meeting at 6:07 PM

Steve Potter – Yes

#### **City Council**

Marty Pepin - Yes

Marty Dumont - Yes

Don Austin – Yes

#### **Ex-officio Members**

Superintendent Bob Gadowski – Yes

Asst Superintendent Lori Lane – Yes

SYC Director Maureen Jackman – Yes

Mayor Dana Hilliard – Yes

City Manager Bob Belmore – Absent

Deputy City Manager Scott Smith - Absent

Chairman Dumont and Mayor Hilliard explained that the purpose of this task force is to explore the sustainability of the SYC program. Through SYC Director Maureen Jackman's leadership and hard work, the program has become very successful and serves hundreds of elementary and middle school students each year. It has been recognized as a model program at both the state and national levels for providing quality after school care and programming to support the academic and social/emotional development of our children.

Mayor Hilliard said that the program is primarily funded by a five-year federal grant which the school district has received three times, spanning nearly the last 15 years. Though the school district can apply again for another round of federal funding, there is a concern that the grant might not be funded fully or even partially because the district has not been able to provide the level of funding that would demonstrate the district's level of commitment to sustaining the program.

The Mayor further explained that the reason that this Task Force originated out of the Joint Commission is that it will take the city and school district working together to determine the options for financial sustainability as well as how SYC evolves programmatically. There has been discussion over the years that perhaps SYC should become part of the City's Recreation Department in some fashion as the schools were determined to be community centers a few years ago. There would need to be more conversation about what makes the most sense. Board member McCallion spoke about the changes in the Rec Department over the years and it would be good to create a plan to see how to support both the Rec Department and SYC.

SYC Director Jackman spoke about the existing SYC program. There are approximately 400 students in grades K-8 that are enrolled in the program. Fees are charged for elementary aged students because parents pay for the child care aspect of afterschool care for their young children. Middle school families are not charged because the students are older and for parents, having to pay for children who can be

home alone after school might deter them from having their children participate. She said that between \$60,000-\$70,000 in fees are collected annually from parents. There are also scholarships available; no student is turned away.

Director Jackman explained that SYC has many different partners, both in the school district and outside the district which allows the program to provide a number of different services and opportunities for students and families. For example, she works with Tri-County CAP for provide a dinner and snack program that approximately 200 families take advantage of. Within the school district, the Title I program provides staff for afterschool academic support. Mayor Hilliard reiterated that the collaboration between SYC and the various school and agency partners is critical. hesaid that now is the time to look at continues to expand the collaboration with the city to evolve the program.

Councilors Pepin and Austin said that the SYC program is highly regarded and that the Council as a whole does not need convincing that it is vital to many families in Somersworth. Both felt that the City needed to make a stronger financial commitment and that funding the program should become a line in the budget, not continue to receive support like other non-profit organizations do.

School Board members Donahue, Potter and McCallion agreed that SYC is very important and that extends beyond the academic support that the program provides students. The financial commitment will be important and the Board will need to discuss what the can look like going forward. Mayor Hilliard said that the city has worked hard over the last several years to view the funds available as coming from “one bucket, not two” that supports both the city and the school district. The continued collaboration between the two bodies will be critically important for future planning.

Director Jackman will provide an overall budget of the programs expenses and how those expenses are met for the next meeting. Both members of the Council and the Board said the information would be helpful so that decisions could be made.

Supt Gadomski shared the sentiments expressed by others that SYC and its importance to the students and families. He said that even during remote learning, SYC has found different ways to stay connected with students and provide them with programming. Asst Supt Lane talked about the value of the collaborative services model between the city and school district and it is exciting to think about SYC being another avenue where the city and school district can work together. The model can work and work well, but communication is a critical to helping everyone get and stay on the same page.

Councilor Dumont stated that it will be important to ask the right questions to help navigate through the conversation. We will also need to create a plan that will need to be reviewed the Board and Council.

Councilor Austin that aside from looking at the financial situation and potential impacts, it will be important for the Task Force to explore what a “community based program” looks like since the current model is very school based. Depending on what it looks like, there could be potential cost savings.

Board member Potter asked what the time frame was for submitting for the next round of federal funding. Director Jackman said that the grant would likely be due in April 2022.

Mayor Hilliard noted that the city will have an election in fall 2021 which always has the potential to have impacts on the future work of either body. He suggested that a next step would be for the Task Force to prepare a resolution for both bodies to consider supporting this spring. This would set the wheels in motion for future work. There will not be a financial impact this year, but the conversation can start now so that when budgets are being created in the following year, decisions can be made according to the plan that is put in place. Director Jackman said this kind of support would assist her when putting the next grant together and would likely be seen positively when the grant application is considered for funding.

**Next meeting:** To Be Determined – meeting will be set to occur after the Martin Luther King Day holiday in late January.

**Adjournment:** A motion was made by Austin, seconded by Pepin to adjourn. ROLL CALL VOTE: McCallion – Yes, Donahue – Yes, Pepin – Yes, Dumont – Yes, Potter – Yes, Austin – Yes, Motion passed, unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 6:56 PM.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Lori Lane  
Assistant Superintendent of Schools*