

**BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
APRIL 18, 2017**

Mayor Casavant called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Roll Call: Michael Swanton, Stephen St. Cyr, Robert Quattrone, Jr., Bob Mills, Norman Belanger Michael Ready, Laura Seaver
Marc Lessard arrived at 5:52 p.m.

John McCurry, Jr. was excused.

The Committee, and all who were present, recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Discussion with Superintendent of Schools, Jeremy Ray

Jeremy addressed the concern that the Budget Committee had brought up at their April 13th meeting in regards to the School Department proposing a Pre-K program and the potential sustainability of that program in future budgets. Jeremy talked about the academic benefits, as well as the spending formula the State will use if and when a Pre-K program is added. Jeremy explained that in the first year, the City would upfront all the costs of instituting a Pre-K program; however, starting in the next budget year, State subsidies would end up covering the costs of this additional program, and then some. The Pre-K program is slated to go into the JFK School building, and an estimated \$8,000 of renovations will need to be done to bring the needed classrooms up to State guidelines for this particular program.

Committee member Seaver asked what percentage of the School budget is for CIP. Jeremy could not readily answer that, but will get that number to the Committee.

Jeremy distributed a report that had been prepared by the Engineering firm of Weston & Sampson, which cites the reasons why the bleachers at Waterhouse Field can no longer be used. Jeremy clarified that the Biddeford Athletic Alumni Association (aka, Waterhouse Commission) actually owns Waterhouse Field, and not the City of Biddeford. In 1973, the Association began leasing the field to the City for \$1.00 per year. Along with the engineering report, Jeremy also provided the Committee with letters that had been written to the former Superintendent and to the President of the Biddeford Athletic Alumni Association that addressed concerns about the deterioration and safety of the bleachers at that time. This has been an ongoing issue that never got properly addressed.

Committee member Lessard made a suggestion of repurposing the bottom 12-15 rows of the bleachers by reinforcing the steel structure and using the wooden seating planks and steps that are still in decent condition. Due to the extreme deterioration of the bleachers and the overall structural compromise of the bleachers, Jeremy does not feel this is a feasible option.

Committee member Seaver asked what the cost would be to completely remove the bleachers and bring in rental chairs, at least for the interim. Jeremy answered that the City Council, School Committee and Waterhouse Commission really need to get together to have a discussion on how

to proceed. There is an idea that with the demolition of the bleachers, there could be enough steel in the structure to sell off and generate some money towards replacement bleachers.

Jeremy went on to explain that generally speaking, all the bleachers are well over 30 years old, and were given to the Waterhouse Commission already used back in 1985 and in 1998. The light poles are also over 30 years old. As far as the replacement of the bleachers, Jeremy cautioned that there is a lot to take into consideration. The City Council, School Committee and Waterhouse Commission have to figure out what's most important in determining how many bleachers are actually needed. Must there be enough to accommodate the Lobster Bowl, which is by far, the largest event held at Waterhouse Field each year? Must the High School Graduation ceremony be taken into account? Or should the decision be to go with less bleachers since Biddeford's sports teams don't bring in the same crowds as there were 30 or so years ago? He further cautioned that this cannot be done as a rush decision and many factors need to be taken into account, including ensuring that the bleachers are code compliant and safe.

Committee member Seaver reiterated that this has been a long-term issue that has come to light due to the closure of the Field; and it's a result of years of neglect and no real investments being made at the facility. She understands that this is not going to be fixed or resolved quickly.

Committee member Lessard agrees that the City Council, School Committee and Waterhouse Commission need to come together and come up with a plan. He agrees with Jeremy that the City must consider what size is best to rebuild to. He feels that there needs to be a 3-5 year CIP plan and priorities need to be set on identified projects. There also needs to be a discussion on how the CIP plan will be funded and what investments are going to be made.

Motion by Committee member Ready, seconded by Committee member Swanton to adjourn.
Vote: Unanimous. Time: 6:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Carmen J. Morris, City Clerk