

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, THE BRANDON SCHOOL DIVISION, HELD IN THE J. L. MILNE BOARDROOM, ADMINISTRATION OFFICE, 1031 - 6TH STREET, BRANDON, MANITOBA, AT 7:00 P.M. MONDAY, MARCH 1, 2010.

PRESENT:

Mr. G. Buri, Chairperson, Mr. D. Karnes, Vice-Chairperson, Mr. P. Bartlette, Ms. R. Coey, Mrs. B. Jolly, Mr. B. Mayes, Mr. J. Murray, Dr. L. Ross, Mr. M. Snelling.

Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. G. F. Barnes, Recording Secretary, Mrs. S. Bailey.

Senior Administration: Dr. D. M. Michaels, Superintendent, Mr. G. Malazdrewicz, Associate Superintendent, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. K. Zabowski.

CALL:

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and referred to the Call.

The meeting had been called for the purpose of considering the following:

- a) Public Budget Feedback Presentations
- b) Tender – Green Acres Roof Replacement

The Chairperson welcomed all in attendance and explained the process and procedures to be followed for presentations. Mr. Buri outlined the timelines and events which had taken place in the budget process since the All-Day Budget meeting held on February 16, 2010.

The Chairperson asked the Secretary-Treasurer to expand on the meetings, events and Tax Incentive Grant offer which had taken place over the past two weeks. Mr. Barnes, Secretary-Treasurer, noted the Board had voted on February 16, 2010 to decline the original Tax Incentive Grant of \$1,073,685 as it would have meant cutting approximately \$800,000 from the budget and no enhancements. The Board received a revised Tax Incentive Grant of \$1,297,837 which was also declined as it would have meant cutting approximately \$500,000 from the budget also without any enhancements. The Board then met and lobbied members of the School's Finance Branch on February 18, 2010 regarding Provincial funding, the Division's growing enrolment and increase in English as an Additional Language students. The Board was offered a revised Tax Incentive Grant on February 23, 2010 in the amount of \$1,848,013 which would mean the Board could maintain the proposed budget approved on February 16, 2010 with a cut of approximately \$85,000 to that proposed budget. The Board then held an In-Camera Special Board Meeting on February 26, 2010 to review the new Tax Incentive Grant offer which was followed with a Press Release regarding the new offer and its impact on the proposed budget and the local taxpayer.

The following individuals made presentations regarding the Proposed 2010/2011 Budget:

- A) Mr. Darren Hardy, President, Brandon Teachers' Association began his presentation by thanking the Secretary-Treasurer for his clear explanation regarding the Revised Tax Incentive Grant (TIG) and its impact on the proposed budget.

He noted that when he learned that the TIG had been modified so that only \$85,000 had to be removed from the draft budget he was shocked because the press release had left him to believe that the total funding \$1.85 million which would have meant cutting over \$800,000 from the budget. When he learned the TIG funding had been improved so that only \$85,000 had to be cut this situation looked much brighter and that this was a dramatic change in monetary support by the government.

He noted the TIG exists outside of the funding formula and so there is no guarantee that it will be offered again in following years. If the province pulls the funding, then the Division will have to find the money to get back to level ground plus fund any increases and enhancements on top of that.

If the Division is going to take the revised TIG, the BTA asks that that reduction does not come from resources that will impact the classroom. He noted there are glaring needs in the Division that the Division has been forced to react to such as English as an Additional Language. Very little in this budget is for the "average student in the regular classroom" except to maintain programs that already exist.

He stated the Brandon School Division still lags \$521 behind on dollars spent per pupil using the 2009/10 data. Money should be allocated intelligently and efficiently to have the impact on education that students receive.

The Brandon School Division needs to decide what kind of education system it wants. The work that needs to be done every year is increasing and if resources to match aren't increased then it is the students who suffer.

He noted the BTA has made a conscious effort to stay away from commenting on teacher salaries and their impact on the budget, but perhaps at this time the Board should point out to the public where the salaries of BTA members are ranked compared to the rest of the Province. The salaries are a large part of the budget and should be because the teachers do the work of education. BTA members have a right to expect a fair, comparable collective agreement. It is unfair to expect the employees in the Division to accept less than what is settled for in the rest of the province.

He concluded by stating the BTA appreciates the hard work and efforts of the Board and Senior Administration. He hopes that future students and Boards are not put in a difficult position where the special levy has to be greatly increased to maintain programming if the TIG is removed.

Trustees requested clarification from Mr. Hardy about the data he had collected for his presentation. Mr. Hardy noted he had obtained his information from the FRAME document.

- B) Ms. Deb Arpin, President, CUPE Local 737 noting concern over the In-Camera session held Friday, February 26, 2010 followed by the Press Release which stated the Division had decided to accept the revised TIG from the government. She asked if the Board had decided which areas will be effected by the \$85,000 reduction to the budget noting it was difficult to make a presentation as important information and factors were missing.

She noted the original budget had approximately \$100,000 in the budget for extra secretarial support. There was strong support for this proposal yet it was cut in half at the Board table. They requested that the dollars go back to the original amount, or, at the very least maintain the \$50,000 agreed upon on the 16th of February.

She also addressed the enhancement related to the Workplace Safety and Health Officer, noting the Division is large enough to support this position. The Government is mandating more and more issues that fall under the Act and the Division must adhere or face a hefty fine. She confirmed there are many items that fall under the Act and not just maintenance of buildings.

Ms. Arpin also asked that the Division maintain the Professional Development dollars for support staff. She clarified that the \$56,000 in PD Dollars for support staff includes all the Administrators as well, leaving very little for CUPE's 500 employees. She also noted that this money is not spent and often when members ask for dollars to attend a workshop they are told there are no dollars available.

She concluded her presentation by asking the Board if there is room in the budget to cut \$85,000 noting Sr. Administration would not have asked for anything that was not needed to help the Division run more efficiently.

- C) Ms. Darlene Wilkinson, President of the Brandon Association of Principals, noted school leaders are the front lines when it comes to carrying out the directions of the Board in order to provide the best possible education for students. They are the ones charged with the responsibility of making such decisions as which new textbooks can be afforded, how much professional development can be provided to each teacher and how many new chairs can be purchased.

She confirmed the responsibility of school administrators to be both educational leaders and managers requires huge commitment of energy and time. They are appreciative of the three schools who will hopefully be receiving an additional .25 administrative support position. These positions will also provide a mentorship opportunity for educators ready to take on administrative duties.

She concluded her presentation stating the changing needs of schools is a day to day reality for administrators, noting the focus of their work, and the Board's, is the achievement of the individual students and she thanked the Board for their efforts to improve those opportunities for Brandon students.

- D) Mr. Chris Griffin, President, Brandon Chamber of Commerce, noted the Chamber is a non profit membership driven organization that represents over 650 businesses in the City of Brandon. He noted as a representative of the membership it is their mandate to comment and remain an active player in the debate on the educational impact on taxation.

He thanked the Board for working with the Chamber over the past year to better understand and appreciate the fiscal challenges of your organization noting they have since been active on several fronts lobbying the provincial government on areas that they felt the Division is not being appropriately funded.

He also congratulated the Board for successfully lobbying the Province to keep the tax levels frozen for the upcoming year. He felt taking the TIG would be a welcome pause in what had become a rapidly increasing burden on the local taxpayer. He noted he still has questions regarding the TIG's long term sustainability and felt that proper fiscal management and keeping yearly spending increases limited is important to this sustainability.

He noted there have been substantial annual increases to the Brandon School Division budget that exceed the level of inflation. Manageable growth is understandable, but every year there are over a million dollars in proposed increases in services. He noted no list of possible cost reductions is publically presented and felt clearly the emphasis seems to be on spending, not necessarily managing costs. He confirmed that "Fiscal prudence is required to balance the needs of our educational system with the local ratepayers' ability to manage cost increases."

He noted the Chamber recognizes the Division faces continuing challenges in new areas. The Government's failure to properly fund is an abdication of the Province's responsibility and "is a blatant downloading of costs to the local rate payer." He noted the Chamber will remain active in lobbying the Province to fully fund programs in the Brandon School Division.

He concluded his presentation by noting that Education is an important tool, but is also a publically funded institution that must be accountable to the ratepayers who support it. He noted Trustees must make tough choices. His membership has had to face difficult decisions in the past year in terms of managing their budgets and limiting increases and asked the Board to do the same.

Trustees debated several issues raised through the Chamber's presentation, including what reductions the Chamber would like to see the Board make; the cost of each program in the Division; the Chamber's lobbying efforts; whether or not the mandate of the School Division/Chamber Ad-Hoc Committee is being met; working with the Chamber to review how the Division could be more efficient; appropriate educational programming and other government mandated initiatives that are not properly funded by the government and early years education.

- E) Mr. Grant Reynolds, local taxpayer, thanked the Board for allowing him to speak at the Board table. He noted he is a senior citizen on a fixed income and one of the people who has to pay for the Board's proposed budget. He asked the Board to remember the economic times we are currently living in and the impact this has on people on a fixed income. He noted that a \$50 to \$60 increase may not be much to some people, but it is to him. He requested the Board temper their budget with restraint noting the taxpayer does have a limit. He stated he realizes education is important and the Board must make some tough choices but Trustees need to ask themselves if it is really necessary as a tax increase is a lot of money to some members of the Brandon community.

Trustees referenced several issues with the presenter, including the difference between home owner tax and business property tax, noting home owner taxes have overtime decreased. They noted they were bound by decisions made by past Boards and Government mandates that caused them to make the choices they had to make with respect to the budget. Mr. Reynolds stated he did not come to argue with the Board but wanted the Board to understand his position and the position of those in Brandon on a fixed income.

- F) Mrs. Laurena Leskiw, local taxpayer, noted that she heard on TV and read in the newspapers that the School Division was even considering that the Brandon taxpayer would have their School Board portion only of their annual taxes increased by another 9.1% for next year was unbelievable!

She confirmed that the proposed education tax increase on the education portion of her tax bill would be an extra \$134.00 on her annual taxes. She noted there are many seniors who have lost spouses and have had their income virtually cut in half but their expenses continue to increase. There are young families who are struggling with daily financial obligations and trying to keep their own homes. Manitoba is being severely affected by the economic depression and she felt the Board's budget had not considered this at all. She stated the decisions made at the Friday In-Camera meeting meant that now the taxpayer would pay through their Manitoba taxes instead of the Brandon taxes.

She asked the Board the following:

- 1) Is this really the time to implement all these new educational plans and changes which require movement of so many students from their own neighbourhoods and movement for so many staff and teaching supports from their regular teaching positions in designated schools?
- 2) Should the Board even be considering all the extra costly changes where extra buses are being required to bus students to all different parts of the city for their required Manitoba programs?
- 3) Has the Board really considered the students and their families increased traveling times of these bus changes?
- 4) Should the Board even be considering the closure of school areas where special handicapped children require special programs and specialized building facilities are essential?

She noted many of the members of the Board are in the same income bracket as the people of which she was speaking. She asked the Board to reconsider their

proposed changes and “whittle” the budget down even further to make it fit the present day economy in which most people live.

Trustees discussed the bussing needs and French Milieu issues with the presenter.

Mr. Jim Murray exited the meeting at 8:25 p.m.

The Chairperson referred to the Green Acres Roof Replacement tender and asked the Secretary-Treasurer to speak to the matter. Mr. Barnes, Secretary-Treasurer, provided the Board with background information and explained the two bids received with respect to the roof replacement at Green Acres School.

29/2010 Mr. Karnes – Ms. Coey
That the low bid for Green Acres Roof Replacement from 3065448 Manitoba Ltd. t/a Gaiser Construction, be accepted in the amount of \$1,365,000 for the base bid plus Alternates #5 & 6 in the net amount of (\$9,369); and further the bid be submitted to the Public Schools Finance Board for approval.

Carried.

Mr. Barnes, Secretary-Treasurer, also noted that a property assessment sheet of various properties in the City of Brandon had been circulated at the Board table for the Board’s review as requested. He confirmed that the data was similar to the data collected by Pembina Trails School Division.

Mr. Barnes also noted a confidential item had been circulated at the Board table for consideration at the March 8, 2010 Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees.

Mrs. Jolly – Mr. Snelling
That the meeting do now adjourn (8:30 p.m.).

Chairperson

Secretary-Treasurer