

23-467
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
MEETING REPORT
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2024 @ 6:00 P.M.

This meeting will take place in the Howard F. Alden Memorial Chambers on the second floor of Medford City Hall, and via Zoom.

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Attendees: Council President Isaac “Zac” Bears; Council Vice President Kit Collins; Councillor Anna Callahan; Councillor Emily Lazzaro; Councillor Matt Leming; Councillor George Scarpelli; Councillor Justin Tseng; City Clerk Adam Hurtubise; other participants as noted in the body of this report.

President Bears called the meeting to order on Wednesday, January 17, 2024, at 6:25 p.m. in the Medford City Council Chamber on the second floor of Medford City Hall, and via Zoom. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss compensation for the Medford School Committee (Paper **23-467**). The start of the meeting was delayed by problems with the internet connection at City Hall.

President Bears thanked participants for attending. He said that this paper was proposed by former President Morell. He read into the record a memo from Janelle Austin at KP Law. He said it essentially addresses the question of whether a two-thirds vote is required.

Vice President Collins said that this discussion has surfaced some painful and necessary truths. She said she appreciates that this is a reminder that came out of this discussion. She said that the Council has no authority to make allocations within the schools budget. She said it has been 23 years since the School Committee has had a compensation increase. She said that we have a responsibility to change that. She said she has some proposals for tonight but also wants to hear from her fellow Councillors.

Councillor Tseng said that there is a lot in this proposal that he agrees with. He said that some of these adjustments pay attention to economic realities. He said we need to talk through the details.

Councillor Tseng said he had four concurrent proposals for changes in compensation. He said historically, the School Committee pay has not kept up with Council pay. In 2000, School Committee pay was \$12,000 and the Council pay was \$13,785.81 and is now \$29,359 while School Committee pay is still \$12,000. He said one change would be to implement the percentage changes that the Council received over the years, which would bring School Committee pay to about \$25,000. He said he also looked at tying this to teacher compensation, and the result would be about \$22,000. He said he also collected numbers for a flat 2% COLA, which puts compensation at about \$19,000. Finally, when adjusted for inflation, it is \$3.30 off the MTA cost of living adjustments, about \$22,000.

Councillor Callahan asked how the discussion would proceed. She asked if there are any proposals to change the numbers. President Bears said Councillors can make statements or make motions to amend.

Councillor Scarpelli said he was clear at the last meeting where he stood on this topic. He said teachers get funded by stipends when they advise clubs. He said we are looking for \$36,000. He asked where was this math when the paraprofessionals and teachers negotiated. He said that the perception was that a slate ran for office, and then that slate won election, and that the perception is that this slate is now going to support each other. He said that School Committee work is absolutely different from City Council work, and he's the only one here who has done both jobs. He said that the City Council has many more pressures. He said that the School Committee is a policy-making body. He said that if the community didn't want this, they should have come out to vote. He said we should not look at any increases like this. He said it is borderline dangerous. He said when he joined the School Committee, it was a service opportunity. He said he served on the School Committee with great candidates. He said he looked at what neighboring communities earn. He said that Somerville is the highest at \$16,000-\$18,000. He said that responsibilities are not the same, and this looks and feels funny. He said that if equity is the biggest issue, then let's correct it. He said that if we make \$28,000 and they make \$12,000, then let's cut Council pay. He said that if we're doing this for the money, we're in big trouble.

Councillor Scarpelli said he would move to look at all our salaries and make this equitable by dropping Council salaries. He said that morale in the School Department is very low. He said our facilities are in tough shape, custodians are working harder than

ever. He said he has heard from teachers that have been torn down by administrators and School Committee members because they have come to the podium and raised issues. He said that the vote is going to be the vote. He said that this Council can work in good faith to send the right message. He said we need to be careful what we do. He said once we open this can, we might have to compensate all our boards and commissions. He said we are going to be in deep trouble when we run out of ESSER money next year. He said maybe it's not fair, but School Committee members ran for office at \$12,000 per year. He said he would hope that this is still a feeling out process. He recommended having the School Committee members here, to meet with them. He said that this increase could be the increase that voids kindergarten aides next year.

He said that the decisions we make tonight will affect what we do in June, July, August and September.

Councillor Leming said he would tend to agree that the optics on this are terrible. He said morale is a real issue here. He said he would be more amenable to either the raise to around \$21,000, which is cost of living increases. He said he would also want to see the adjustment over several years. He said that City Council salaries right now are make or break for some of us. He said that the majority are members, and setting that salary based on 20+ hours per week is fair, and if the School Committee members are working this much, then an increase in compensation is fair. He said that there are a lot of people that Medford relies on who are volunteers. He said that volunteerism is foundational to Medford's functions. He said we can't expect to run essential functions on the backs of volunteers. He said some people would be great School Committee members working for free, and some would not be able to do it at the current compensation level.

Councillor Tseng said a lot of arguments are fairly being raised. He said a lot of this needs to be balanced. He said that Councillor Scarpelli's core ask, to look at the timing, is fair. He said he would have this proposal implemented over two years. He said it would give us time to go through the budget process. He said he doesn't think we should pay the full amount in the first year. He said we have a small chunk of money that has been spent but little consensus on what it has been spent on. He said ultimately, he grew up close to his teachers. He said he ran for City Council because the Schools budget got cut during the pandemic. He said that we have to be fair to all our staff, including people who run the schools. He said he thinks the service argument is important, but that there are many people who can't serve because they have to put food on the table. He said we should discuss a phase-in over two years and we should end up near where the teachers end up, basically raising the School Committee pay to about \$22,105, over two years, on July 1, 2024 and July 1, 2025. He said it seems like

the most reasonable approach, and is a compromise that not many people will agree with. He said he'd be happy to motion now, but would also be happy to wait.

Councillor Lazzaro said that an important thing to acknowledge is that all of us ran for office because of the value we have for the city and because we care a lot about our community, and we love and care for our community members. But these positions require people represent the people that live here. She said that because other communities aren't paying their School Committee members at the same rate as the City Council members, she said that when she worked with the Superintendent, the School Committee members worked a tremendous amount, and just because other communities aren't paying at the same level, doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. She said she disagreed with Councillor Scarpelli's point.

Councillor Scarpelli said that when he was a School Committee member, he worked very hard. He detailed a number of policies the School Committee accomplished, and also detailed his outside work. He said he didn't realize that Councillor Lazzaro worked in the Medford Schools.

Vice President Collins said that this isn't about this School Committee. She said that these changes will take effect in the future. She said she appreciates Councillor Tseng's idea around raising School Committee compensation to follow the year by year increases in the MTA contracts. She said that if Councillor Tseng makes that in the form of a motion, she would support that. She said she is part of a legislative body that makes policy and that the School Committee also makes policy.

Councillor Callahan said that in Somerville several years ago, the paraprofessionals were asking for raises to \$25,000 and the Somerville School Committee said no, in part because other cities weren't paying at that level. She said that paraprofessionals are underpaid for the work that they do. She said that the only way we can get things funded the way we need them funded is to increase the City budget. She said we are wildly underfunded in Medford. She said she wanted to talk about the value of having a genuine democracy. She said that this is about getting people who represent and also vote in favor of policies that even the scales. She said our democracy overly supports and overly serves people who are wealthy, well-educated, and white. She said that the problem with the idea that this should be a volunteer effort is that less than 50% of the people earn enough that they can volunteer for 20 hours per week. She said it's not about not being dedicated; it's that they can't do the job if it doesn't pay. She said that she believes that the right thing to do is to increase the pay of the School Committee. She said she wants to do things that materially help people. She said she wants to fix the roads. She talked about funding for school programs. She said she feels incredibly

uncomfortable voting on this as one of the first things that comes up in her term as a City Councillor. She said she wants to ensure that the City represents the underserved, which includes the paraprofessionals and the teachers. She said that the only way to sustain this is to pay the School Committee a little bit more to attract people who come from those backgrounds.

Councillor Tseng said that his proposal, tying compensation to MTA COLAs, brings us closer to a solution. Vice President Collins said that we have two proposals before us. She said she doesn't know which one will advance. She said she would like to see an increase for School Committee members and she would also like to see a method of compensation that allows it to be increased in a regular way. She said it has been 23 years since the School Committee compensation has been increased.

Councillor Scarpelli said it would be a conflict of interest to have the School Committee voting on this. President Bears said that the School Committee can't vote on its own compensation.

Eleanor Brady O'Leary, Secretary for the Medford Teachers Association, said teachers were told they could not have their COLA raises. She said it is unheard of to use the contracts of full-time teachers to pay part-time school committee members. She said she and her family stayed here and taught here. She asked why the School Committee members are not here tonight. She said that the School Committee members deserve a raise. She said she and probably 70% of teachers have part-time jobs. She said she doesn't make \$30,000 in her part-time job. She said she hasn't seen anyone on the School Committee fight for their raises like teachers had to fight for theirs.

Tracy Clements, 20 Alfred Street, said that people do deserve a raise. She said buildings are in disrepair, schools are understaffed. She said people wanted to run for this job and got elected to this job. She said School Committee Member Graham's e-mail was very disheartening. She said it's hard to see how hard these teachers work day in and day out.

Anthony Geehan, 45 Elm Hill Avenue, President of the Medford Teachers Association, said that other communities don't pay as much and he also said that union representatives are paid in stipends. He said that this is a disingenuous argument. He said he wanted to address School Committee Member Graham's argument about compensation going from \$30,000 to \$106,000 over 23 years. He said that many of those teachers earned and paid for Masters Degrees and got their teaching certificates, which cost money. He said many teachers who spoke at the last meeting were called into the Principal's office and disciplined for speaking at the meeting, and told to be

silent. He said that anybody who told anyone to be silent was preserving the status quo. He talked about stipends paid to advisors and others.

Patricia Chery, 21 Wesley Street, asked if ARPA funds are available for anything other than that or if this is a different fund. President Bears said that this is money appropriated by the City Budget. He said that the Council does not negotiate contracts. He said that this would be the only item set by the Council. Ms. Chery said that the School Committee does deserve a raise but the amount is too much. She said that some of the comments made at the last meeting were unfair.

Walter Buckley, President of the Medford Firefighters Association, said he spoke in December. He said several unions recently negotiated 3% increases. He said that this rate would take his union 49 years. He said it is sad that it has come to this. He asked about Robert's Rules of Order and President Bears clarified.

Paul Gerety, 40 Cedar Road, asked if the Charter Committee would have a proposal in place and would there be metrics on performance. He said he would like to see metrics in place for performance.

Maureen Lavin, a teacher at the Andrews, said putting a vote forward would be crazy. She said she doesn't think anybody opposes a pay increase. She said that the huge increase, given the state of what is happening in our schools, and this is a part-time position. She said that this is not a living wage position and if you want a living wage position, go get a full-time job. She said as a teacher she has always had two jobs. She said that the only time she didn't have a full-time job was when she was paying to advance her education. She said paraprofessionals are in high-needs classrooms. She said she would like to see people visit our schools and see what it's like in the classroom. She said that the school buildings leak and there are problems with our facilities. She said our coaches and our paraprofessionals need a better salary. She said it would make more sense to address those issues before addressing the issue with the School Committee. She said nobody on the School Committee in the communities near ours makes \$20,000. She said people should get a second job, as she has. She said when she wants a pay increase, she shows up and asks for it. She asked how many members of the School Committee have asked for a raise.

Gina Coppola, President of the Paraprofessional Union, said that children are not coming in and fighting paraprofessionals. She said Kindergarten teachers are making \$17,000 per year and using Google Translate. She said people don't know what paraprofessionals do. She said we love kids with disabilities and we love all kids. She

said that the job is volatile, not the child. She said that the School Committee should come to the table and negotiate with the unions for a raise.

Hannah Silverman, 15 Maynard, said she teaches at the Roberts School. She said that we need to address zoning. She said teachers are disheartened by this resolution. She said that this job gets harder every single year. She said that it's the School Committee's job to inform the Council of issues in the Schools, and if the School Committee is not doing its job, why are they getting a raise. She said teachers stand outside in the cold for a 3% raise and have to pay their own costs for their own education while working multiple jobs. She said that this resolution would give the Mayor an extra \$30,000 per year. She said that teacher salaries also need to be competitive. She said giving the School Committee a raise is one thing, but that a raise of this size is irresponsible.

Harry MacGilvray, Piedmont Road, said he has been negotiating police contracts since 2002. He said he has decent experience negotiating contracts. He said he is not allowed to bring up inflation at the table. He said he has never received a raise that actually rose with the cost of living. He said he makes a good salary and loves his job, and this is what he wanted to do. He said we all have to stay together as bargaining units. He said we've never met the staffing levels we were promised. He said nobody is against a pay raise. He said let's treat everybody fairly. He said he would love a four year deal like Vice President Collins proposed. He also said he wants the Council to go easy on homeowners.

Doreen O'Hare, 325 Malden Street, said she is appalled that this snuck under the radar in the last meeting in December when old members were leaving and new members were joining. She said filing a motion for every year incremental increases is absurd. She said what brought her to the podium was that paraprofessionals who spoke at the last meeting were silenced. She said we are severely underfunded across the board. She said that the people here are the ones who will vote you in next time. She said we need your vote on common sense.

James "Chip" O'Leary, 30 Norwich Circle, said Councillor Scarpelli brought up meeting with the School Committee, and he said he was surprised that this was not made as a motion. He said we still do not have a new fire house. He said that there are a lot of empty storefronts in Medford, but not in Arlington, Somerville, and Malden. He said that there are no School Committee members here. President Bears pointed out School Committee Member Nicole Branley in the front row. Mr. O'Leary said that Ms. Branley did not bring this proposal forward. He said he is a custodian. He said he was at

school at 5 this morning and hasn't had a contract in two and a half years. He said his wife is retiring as a teacher this year.

Jessica Taddeo, 50 Fellsvie Avenue, said she appreciates that the teachers are here in full force and appreciates the Council for listening. She said that in her understanding, this would not come at the direct cost to teachers. She also said she understands that the Council does not have jurisdiction over school contracts. She said that she comes from a family of teachers. She said we should be able to have a conversation about pay increases without devaluing teachers or devaluing elected officials. She said teachers won't run for office if the pay isn't there. She said many teachers have multiple incomes and multiple jobs but we shouldn't accept that from anybody. She said not everyone is an established individual that owns property that can afford to take a pay cut.

Ms. O'Neill said we are expecting an increased volume because of migrants. She asked if we are prepared for a walkout from our teachers. She said that this money is coming out of the budget of the schools.

President Bears said he would try to put this in a graphical representation. He said he appreciates everything that has been said, that this is a deliberative process. He said that he does not think that any union in this city would go for 23 years without a compensation increase. He said he didn't think that there was any union leader in the City who would accept that. He said it's a false equivalence to say we would. He said for 23 years, nobody took action on this. If a Mayor held out on a union for 23 years, the union would not stand for that.

Mr. MacGilvray said nobody would accept 23 years without a pay raise and there is not a union member here who would accept that. He said that the School Committee and the Council are not bargaining units. He said people run for office knowing what the salary is, and he gives them credit for that. He said it's a bad look to then give yourselves a pay raise. President Bears said we are not giving ourselves a pay raise. Mr. MacGilvray said we are not treated fairly most of the time in negotiations. He said we should not have to get to that to get a 2% pay raise.

Councillor Tseng thanked everyone who participated. He said he wanted to clarify his proposal. He said his proposal follows the rates, not the amounts, of increases over the years, and since the School Committee starts at a lower amount, the total increases are lower. He said that the standard MTA increase is 2.48% per year. He said that the actual dollar impact of this, by fiscal 2026, will cost \$35,472. He said we can't fill empty positions at that rate. He said we need to have a conversation about business districts,

and ballot measures, and zoning. He talked about the work of the last Council. He said we can't legally break a contract to give a raise. He said he thinks a living wage is an ideal. He said neither his nor Vice President Collins's proposals would provide a living wage. He said he is sympathetic toward the paraprofessionals.

Councillor Leming said he really wanted to learn more about paraprofessionals being disciplined. He said Medford for a long time has been penny smart and dollar stupid. He said Medford's operating budget is just over \$200 million and Somerville's is between \$700 and \$800 million. He said we've been trying to cut costs for a long time and that's why we can't pay teachers what they deserve to be paid.

Councillor Scarpelli said he didn't realize that coaches have not received a raise in 20 years.

Grant Martingnetti, Washington Street, said that it's insulting to hear that \$35,000 is not too much for taxpayers. He said he heard Councillor Scarpelli said he was willing to give up some of his pay.

Councillor Collins said we have all spoken and heard and listen and that it is time to move the question, and then place this on the regular meeting agenda. She said that in this role, she does what she has the jurisdiction to do. She said that when she has the opportunity to vote yes on a raise, she does that. She said she would do that if the raises were for teachers and custodians as well. She said that this is a really unusual topic for a City Council meeting. She said that this discussion is all part of the Council's important work.

Councillor Callahan said she is concerned that the final landing pay is more than the pay for paraprofessionals and she would not be voting in favor of that. Councillor Tseng said that would not be true for this upcoming year.

Vice President Collins moved to report the following out of Committee:

Be It Resolved by the City Council of the City of Medford pursuant to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71, Section 52 that the following rates of compensation be set for members of the Medford School Committee effective on July 1, 2024:

- School Committee Member from "\$12,000.00" to "\$17,052.80"
- School Committee Vice Chair from "\$12,600.00" to "\$17,900.00"
- School Committee Secretary from "\$14,400.00" to "\$19,075.00"
- School Committee Chairperson from "\$13,200.00" to "\$18,750.00"

Be It Resolved by the City Council of the City of Medford pursuant to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71, Section 52 that the following rates of compensation be set for members of the Medford School Committee effective on July 1, 2025:

- School Committee Member from “\$17,052.80” to “\$22,105.60”
- School Committee Vice Chair from “\$17,900.00” to “\$23,200.00”
- School Committee Secretary from “\$19,075.00” to “\$23,750.00”
- School Committee Chairperson from “\$18,750.00” to “\$24,300.00”

Be It Resolved by the City Council of the City of Medford pursuant to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71, Section 52 that the following rates of compensation be set for members of the Medford School Committee effective on July 1, 2026:

- School Committee Member from “\$22,105.60” to “\$25,732.70”
- School Committee Vice Chair from “\$23,200.00” to “\$26,920.00”
- School Committee Secretary from “\$23,750.00” to “\$27,755.00”
- School Committee Chairperson from “\$24,300.00” to “\$28,425.00”

Be It Resolved by the City Council of the City of Medford pursuant to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71, Section 52 that the following rates of compensation be set for members of the Medford School Committee effective on July 1, 2027:

- School Committee Member from “\$25,732.70” to “\$29,359.80”
- School Committee Vice Chair from “\$26,920.00” to “\$30,640.00”
- School Committee Secretary from “\$27,755.00” to “\$31,760.00”
- School Committee Chairperson from “\$28,425.00” to “\$32,550.00”

(Councillor Tseng second)—reported out of committee on a roll call vote of six in favor and Councillor Scarpelli opposed.

Councillor Tseng moved to report the following out of committee:

Be It Resolved by the City Council of the City of Medford pursuant to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71, Section 52 that the following rates of compensation be set for members of the Medford School Committee effective on July 1, 2024:

- School Committee Member from “\$12,000.00” to “\$17,052.80”
- School Committee Vice Chair from “\$12,600.00” to “\$17,900.00”
- School Committee Secretary from “\$14,400.00” to “\$19,075.00”
- School Committee Chairperson from “\$13,200.00” to “\$18,750.00”

Be It Resolved by the City Council of the City of Medford pursuant to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71, Section 52 that the following rates of compensation be set for members of the Medford School Committee effective on July 1, 2025:

- School Committee Member from “\$17,052.80” to “\$22,105.60”
- School Committee Vice Chair from “\$17,900.00” to “\$23,200.00”
- School Committee Secretary from “\$19,075.00” to “\$23,750.00”
- School Committee Chairperson from “\$18,750.00” to “\$24,300.00”

(Councillor Leming second)—reported out of committee on a roll call vote of six in favor and Councillor Scarpelli opposed.

Vice President Collins moved to refer this paper to the Governance Committee during the period of Charter Review:

Be It Resolved by the Medford City Council that the Governance Committee consider during Charter Review the inclusion of a mechanism within the updated City Charter to trigger automatic COLA increases and/or compensation review for all elected positions at regular intervals.

(Councillor Tseng second)—referred to the Governance Committee on a roll call vote of six in favor and Councillor Scarpelli opposed.

Councillor Scarpelli moved to report out of Committee the following:

Be It Resolved that the Council lower its own rate of pay to a blended salary that is the difference between the rate of the City Council and the School Committee and then follow the schedule proposed by Councilor Tseng for increases in 2024 and 2025.

(Councillor Lazzaro second)—reported out of committee on a roll call vote of four in favor (Councillor Callahan, Councillor Lazzaro, Councillor Scarpelli, and President

Bears) and three opposed (Vice President Collins, Councillor Leming, and Councillor Tseng).

Councillor Scarpelli moved to adjourn at 8:53 p.m. (Vice President Collins second)—approved.

President Bears adjourned the meeting at 8:53 p.m.