

MINUTES
RYE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION/
RYE CITY COUNCIL
JOINT MEETING
Rye City Hall
April 14, 2007

The meeting was called to order at 9:10 AM by Mayor Steve Otis who then introduced Council and Board of Education members present:

Board of Education

Mr. James Culyer, *President*
Mr. Joshua Nathan, *Vice President*
Mr. George Cady
Mr. Edward Fox
Ms. Laura Slack
Mr. Michael White
Mr. Robert Zahm

City Council

Mr. Andrew Ball
Mr. Mack Cunningham
Mr. Matthew Fahey
Mr. Duncan Hennes
Mr. George Pratt
Mr. Howard Seitz

Also present: Dr. Edward J. Shine, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. O. Paul Shew, City Manager, Mr. Scott Pickup, Assistant City Manager, Commissioner William Connors, City of Rye Police Department; Mr. William Rodriguez, Recreation Department Supervisor

The meeting commenced with Roll Call for both boards. Mr. Culyer thanked the City for hosting the meeting and for including the Board of Education (BOE) in the Durland Scout Center discussions. He handed out the 2006 Report Card and cited how well the school system is doing, noting that Rye is now rated #1 in New York State by Standard and Poors even as the \$21,000 per pupil cost has remained stable figure over the years. A discussion ensued about whether the emphasis on Science and Math is adequate, as questioned by Councilman Seitz who recommended everyone read a 15-page web site summary of "The Gathering Storm" which cites US deficiency in these two areas. Mr. Culyer said there is on-going conversation about this topic; Mr. Pratt defended the school's program.

In his opening remarks, Mayor Otis said the City has a great partnership with the School and noted we used to be below Scarsdale and Chappaqua in the rating, but are now at the top – good for students and for property values. He said everyone appreciates the joint things the two Boards do together and cited the good working relationship between City Manager Paul Shew and School Superintendent Edward Shine as very positive.

1. Pedestrian and Traffic Study

Councilman Cunningham reported on the progress of the Trail Ways/School Study and thanked Mr. Zahm for all his help, as well as Brian Dempsey for his follow-up district wide study of walking safety to and around the schools. He said they have also gone back to the PTO's for their priorities and everyone wants to promote walking, but safely. He hopes for a full

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report by Memorial Day. Mr. Zahm cited two problem areas:

- Property owners, who have the right to not have sidewalks for a variety of reasons (maintain the rural look, liability, maintenance responsibilities) tend not to want them. He suggested the Council review the existing sidewalk policy (Councilman Fahey suggested more sidewalks could lead to less drainage and was this any safer?).
- Enforcement of the traffic regulations we have. Everyone needs to know they have to stop at intersections. He suggested seeing if the State Legislation can be changed to allow cameras at intersections. (at the moment it is not possible unless the community has 1 million or more residents). Councilman Seitz suggested publicizing names of those who commit anti-social acts (such as driving with a cell phone, going through an intersection). Councilman Cunningham agreed about having better enforcement, noting that during his overtures to Rye Neck and Resurrection, the problem of people driving around school buses actually exists.

Councilman Pratt suggested the area across the street from Eve Lane might be a candidate for a minimal installation of sidewalks connecting a whole lot of streets to the “backdoor” entrance to Midland School. He said maybe this would be a good challenge grant project. Everyone agreed it is important to promote Activate America by encouraging walking to school, but not everyone agreed more sidewalks are the answer (be careful vs. encourage more).

2. School Crossing Pilot Project (Apawamis/Milton)

Commissioner Connors said the pilot project of having a police officer at Apawamis and Milton during the drop off periods has continued without much comment recently, but there are issues (kids not crossing quickly enough; kids crossing too quickly, drivers going too fast; drivers letting their kids off in the wrong place). He said it is hard at this time of day to have a cop committed to one place, but so far it has worked out; that few citations have actually been given out, but his officers have, at times, been treated with hostility or just ignored. He noted the importance of looking at the long term solutions (ramps, one way turns, etc). Scott Pickup said new recommendations, which are being looked at by Brian Dempsey, will be forthcoming shortly concerning the traffic patterns at all the schools. There was support for the proposal to have only left-hand turns onto Milton Road from both Parsons Street and the tennis courts. Ms. Slack said the project has produced improved behavior and if “slow” is a complaint, it is a positive thing. The discussion of education and enforcement of the rules versus humiliation (i.e. publishing names) continued. There was a general feeling the BOE should work with the kids urging them to encourage compliance by their parents, and that giving tickets was better. Councilman Ball wondered if, in this high-tech world, we could figure out a way to override what ever is on the radio to tell drivers to slow down!

3. Thruway update on efforts to secure land for athletic fields

Mayor Otis reported that the idea of acquiring the land on the Boston Post Road across from Rye Country Day School has been thought of since the 1990's. He said until recently the Thruway Authority has had no interest (presumably preferring to keep the land available for
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other uses, such as a transportation hub), but now is entertaining the idea of entering into a long-term lease with the City for athletic fields, hopefully for a minimal amount. The Mayor said the next step is to work with interested parties (RCDS, Rye City Schools, Rye Youth Soccer and Lacrosse) to see how the space should be designed and who should pay for it. He said it is valuable open space at the gateway to Rye and it is in our interests to make it happen. Mr. Culyer agreed, saying the Thruway Authority has been the drawback and now might be the time. The Mayor noted the assistance of Richard Runes. Mr. Zahm commented on the safety of getting into and out of such fields (this will have to be addressed). Mr. Cady said the early spring days were when fields were needed and it is too early for grass. It is also a long way to walk from the High School and while this might be good for RCDS, maybe it is not so great for the High School unless there is turf. The Mayor said at least one group is interested in seeing turf on at least one field. Councilman Hennes said he feels no matter what, it is time to lock up the deal so we continue to have open space. Councilman Pratt concurred.

4. Summer Construction

Dr. Shine said the bids for the infrastructure improvements (boilers, fire alarm and electrical systems at all schools) have come in \$1 million under budget. The work will be done between June and October, 2007 and it is hoped this is the last major construction need in the near future. From now on regular maintenance will suffice. The extra million may be used for the Milton gym or to fix new water problems at Midland – the options are still being considered.

Councilman Ball, liaison for RCTV, said RCTV was prepared to spend \$50-60,000 for electrical upgrade and they would like/do need additional space. He pointed out the existing space has not been painted for 13 years. Everyone agreed RCTV is a valuable resource, but there are serious space constraints everywhere and everyone wants more space as the enrollment is estimated to rise from 750 students to 900. He said there is no space near the performing arts center and requested that Mr. Ball keep Mr. Nathan (the BOE's TV liaison) in the loop concerning franchise agreements and space issues. Mr. Zahm said he hoped sometime the City and the BOE could move on to broadcasting, directly to the web.

Mr. Zahm suggested that a cable franchise deal with Verizon should not be concluded until such time as the Verizon box-at-sidewalk-level issue is resolved.

5. Shared services and Spring Clean-up

The Board noted the list of services shared between the City and the BOE. Since the last meeting a common assessment and tax billing system has been established and emergency operations have been integrated. A summary of other services includes: vehicle fueling; salting school lots, sign making, backup help, IMA agreements in Recreation, IMA agreements in Financial services and cable television operations.

The Spring Clean-up will take place, as usual, on Earth Day and continues to be a cooperative venture between school children (doing community service); DPW and the Rye Nature Center. It is especially important this Spring because of the flooding and cleanup should extend as far south as Milton Harbor.

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6. Other Items Not on the Agenda

Commissioner Connors gave an update on the weather and conditions predicted for the Nor'easter expected on Sunday-Monday. He said they had done a lot of advance preparation work and hoped for the best, but would be ready to do all they can, should it be necessary.

Mr. Cady reported conversations about the Durland Scout Center are still in a fluid state as the BOE is still looking for alternatives to the pool and to the space for the Alternative School.

Mr. Cady noted with disappointment that the tennis courts at Disbrow Park are still out of commission, greatly affecting the JV tennis program. Recreation Superintendent Bill Rodriguez said it will require a formal bid to get them fixed and playable.

Mr. Zahm said it is important that these two Boards get together more often – perhaps every six months, or even quarterly. The Mayor agreed, saying perhaps they should meet in early summer to discuss the Trail Ways/School Safety report expected by Memorial Day

Mayor Otis made a motion, seconded by Councilman Hennes, at 10:50 a.m. to adjourn to Executive Session to discuss matters of litigation.

The regular meeting reconvened at 11:25 A.M.

7. Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss, Mayor Otis made a motion, seconded by Mr. Culyer to adjourn the Joint Session: of the City Council and the Board of Education at 11:26 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan A. Morison
City Clerk

Edward J. Shine
Superintendent of Schools