

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF A SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF THE LAWRENCE CITY
COUNCIL AND LAWRENCE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, July 26, 2007

A **SPECIAL MEETING** composed of the City Council and Lawrence School Committee was held on **Thursday, July 26, 2007** at 6:15 p.m. in the Lawrence School Committee Hall, 255 Essex Street, Lawrence, MA. All members of the City Council present except for Councilor Nunzio DiMarca. All members of the Lawrence School Committee present. Council President Blanchette and Mayor Michael Sullivan presided jointly over the meeting.

Approximately Eight [8] persons were present.

A Moment of Silence was held.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

I. PROCEEDINGS REGARDING THE SELECTION OF THE
LAWRENCE REPRESENTATIVE TO THE VACANT POSITION ON
THE GREATER LAWRENCE TECHNICAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

Doc. 161/07: Consideration for the Appointment of the Lawrence Representative to the Greater Lawrence Technical School Committee

Council President Blanchette introduced the item and provided information concerning the proceedings to take place with the anticipated result of filling the vacancy appearing on the Greater Lawrence School Committee with the resignation of Daniel Fleming who had been the elected Lawrence representative to the Board. He confirmed that the opinion of City Attorney Charles Boddy had been sought and obtained in order to follow the process in a lawful manner. Council President Blanchette thanked Mayor Michael Sullivan for his participation as “joint chairman” of the panel and commented that the presentment of this matter is the first time in Lawrence history that the Lawrence

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City Council and Lawrence School Committee have been assembled in joint session for to select a replacement for the Lawrence member of the Greater Lawrence School Committee.

Upon being recognized, Mayor Michael Sullivan offered a statement of introduction to the Lawrence City Council and Lawrence School Committee Members present and also recognized Mr. Leo Lamontagne, a current member of the Greater Lawrence School Committee, who is in attendance in the audience.

Council President resumed his comments and informed the members of the panel that there were two candidates who had submitted letters stating their interest in being selected as the Lawrence representative to the Greater Lawrence School Committee: (1) Ellen W. Gilbert of 50 Chickering Street in Lawrence, MA, and (2) Pamela J. Neilon of 52 Crestwood Circle in Lawrence, MA. Council President Blanchette informed the panel that both candidates would be allowed to make an opening statement and questions would then be posed to each of the candidates from the panel as recognized by the Chair. He stated that questions posed would be presented to one candidate and then the other in alternating fashion which to fairly allow one candidate to answer the question first while the other candidate would respond first to the following question.

Upon being recognized Councilor Alvarez-Rodriguez asked the Chair if nine votes were required to be selected. Council President Blanchette informed the panel that the City Attorney was consulted on the matter and has opined that nine votes of the sixteen panel members [comprising of nine Members of the City Council and seven members of the School Committee] were necessary to be selected.

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Upon being recognized, Councilor Gosselin asked if there was a way to avert the selection proceedings to permit both candidates to proceed to the nomination stage of this year's election process so that the electorate does not lose the opportunity to choose both candidates which may occur if one of the candidates is selected through the current process. Council President Blanchette responded by informing the panel that the process is the result of the contractual involvement the City of Lawrence maintains with the Greater Lawrence School District created in 1962 and that it is the duty of the chosen elected representative to follow the manner of filling the existing vacancy as ratified by the City of Lawrence through the Members of the Lawrence City Council at that time.

School Committee Member Vittoriosio commented that the vacancy that exists on the Greater Lawrence School Committee should not be allowed to continue because the voice of a Lawrence representative was necessary to be heard concerning the many important matters that will arise before classes begin in the fall. He stated that the lack of a Lawrence representative will leave the Lawrence students and their parents without sufficient input on all matters that may be addressed if the position is not filled immediately.

Upon no further comment offered by any member of the panel, Council President Blanchette informed the panel members that as a result of a random process, Pamela Neilon was chosen to offer her opening statement first.

Upon being recognized, Pamela Neilon introduced herself to the panel members and provided her opening statement.

Upon conclusion of Ms. Neilon, Ellen W. Gilbert introduced herself and provided

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her opening statement before the panel members.

Upon conclusion of both candidates offering their “opening statement”, Council President Blanchette opened the proceedings for questions and comment by the panel members.

Upon being recognized, Mayor Sullivan commented upon the historic nature of the proceedings and that there is no time in the political history of Lawrence where the Lawrence City Council and Lawrence School Committee have met in joint session for this or any other purpose. Mayor Sullivan then proceeded by asking the candidates to comment on they would assure the school would proceed in the “right direction” through their efforts with the new administration and how they might interact with other elected officials in an important and meaningful manner.

1. Ellen Gilbert: Ellen Gilbert stated that that she was confident that she would be able to work well with the new administration and that she believes the School Committee should work to support the Superintendent and other School Committee Members in order to establish and meet stated education goals. She stated that she would also reach out to other School Boards in other cities and towns for solutions and ideas.

2. Pamela Neilon: Pamela Neilon stated that she would be supportive of initiative that are of some priority to the Superintendent. She praised the Greater Lawrence Vocational School Committee and Lawrence School Committee for developing two school systems that the children of the Lawrence Community can attend and obtain a quality education.

Upon being recognized, School Committee Member Vittorioso commented that
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the students at the Greater Lawrence Technical High School are expected to excel in a trade and in academics in the same forty weeks that other students in other schools are trained only in academic fields. He stated that it may benefit students who apply to Greater Lawrence Technical High School to be allowed the opportunity to visit the school for one or two days while they are still in the eighth grade to allow prospective students and their parents to gain a first hand understanding of the course and trade offerings. He stated further that he would like to see the individual selected to improve parental outreach to expose students to a variety of opportunities that exist at the school. He stated that graduates of Greater Lawrence often do not follow the trade area of their training and that employment often is more available and lucrative in other disciplines.

Upon being recognized, School Committee Member Cruz asked the candidates to explain who they would be representing since they were not “elected” by the people.

1. Pamela Neilon: Pamela Neilon stated that she would be representing the interests of the students and commented that she would be seeking election to the position in the fall regardless of the outcome of the selection process.

2. Ellen Gilbert: Ellen Gilbert stated that she will be representing the community and that she would also be seeking to be elected in the fall regardless of the outcome of the selection process.

Upon being recognized, Councilor Alvarez-Rodriguez asked the candidates how they felt about publicly funded education and how to pursue representation of student in an economically disadvantaged community.

1. Ellen Gilbert: Ellen Gilbert stated that she believes she would be

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representing the community and explained that many of the children in the Greater Lawrence Schools as well as the Lawrence Schools are from economically disadvantaged families.

2. Pamela Neilon: Pamela Neilon stated that the City and its students are in need of more resources and more funding for programs that provide students with a valued and meaningful education to improve their lives.

Councilor Alvarez-Rodriguez asked the candidates for their ideas how The Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational School could better identify students who may be academically included as opposed to labor or industrial pursuits.

1. Pamela Neilon: Pamela Neilon stated that students should not be forced into any particular area of education. She stated that students should be allowed to determine the course of instruction they would prefer with the assistance and guidance of their parents.

2. Ellen Gilbert: Ellen Gilbert stated that in the past special needs students were assigned to Culinary Arts classes. She stated that a course of instruction for students should be determined through individual educational assessment and plans developed with guidance.

Councilor Alvarez-Rodriguez stated that she believes the “Individual Educational Plan” process is not working and that students are being properly guided to their fullest potential. She stated that the problem should be addressed by the School Committee Members at the Greater Lawrence Technical High School.

1. Ellen Gilbert: Ellen Gilbert agrees and pointed out further that there are

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additional evaluation methods available to assess potential career interests. She stated that specific accountability of the School Board Members and staff is necessary.

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Councilor Alvarez-Rodriguez commented that these problems are not unique to Lawrence.

Upon being recognized, Councilor Silva expressed her dissatisfaction with the placement of special education students in the Culinary Arts classes. She commented on issues concerning funding of educational offerings at the Greater Lawrence Technical School. She stated that special needs students are typically “forgotten” in the educational process where they should be rewarded. She asked the candidates to explain how they would hold administrators accountable for their actions if selected to fill the vacancy.

1. Ellen Gilbert: Ellen Gilbert stated that she would hold the administrator or proper personnel responsible for any discrepancies discovered through financial review.

2. Pamela Neilon: Pamela Neilon stated that she has no problem bringing any matter to the attention of the Superintendent. She stated that the mission of the school is to educate students attending and that any financial discrepancy or malfeasance takes away from that purpose without justification or reason.

Upon being recognized, Councilor Kolofos recounted the history of the development of the Greater Lawrence Technical School as a Regional High School. He stated that Members of the School Board would often serve for twenty or twenty-five years in the past. He asked both candidates to explain why they would like to be selected to fill the vacancy.

1. Pamela Neilon: Pamela Neilon informed the panel that she although she is

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retired and her children are grown, she loves kids and wants to remain involved with the

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community.

2. Ellen Gilbert: Ellen Gilbert stated that she loves Lawrence and that her expertise is in education and medicine. She stated that she believes if selected it would give her an opportunity to give to the community and would allow her to make Lawrence a better place.

Councilor Kolofoles pointed out that it was approximately forty-seven years since the agreement was entered to establish the Greater Lawrence Regional Vocational School District. He asked both candidates if they would attempt to update the terms of the agreement in any way.

1. Ellen Gilbert: Ellen Gilbert stated that she could not answer the question at the present time and that she would review the matter after a year to determine if it was necessary to amend the agreement.

2. Pamela Neilon: Pamela Neilon stated that she believes the State Legislature would have to approve any change to the existing agreement.

Upon being recognized, Councilor Gosselin commended the Greater Lawrence Students for their achievements. She also praised the teachers for their commitment to the students and education. She stated that there is a Student Council but she didn't think it was very active. She commented that the Greater Lawrence School Committee meetings should be televised and that there should be some involvement with the Student Council through one of its representatives. She stated that student involvement with the school government would provide a valuable learning tool for the students and a

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tremendous method of obtaining insight for the School Committee Members. She asked the

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candidates for selection to comment on these matters.

1. Pamela Neilon: Pamela Neilon agreed that the student body should be involved with the governance of the school and supports the idea. She stated that she does not oppose televising the School Committee meetings.

2. Ellen Gilbert: Ellen Gilbert informed the panel that there are student representatives who already attend the School Committee meetings. She stated that she believes that Andover Cable may be the outfit who would be able to televise the meetings [possibly on Ch. 8] because the school is in Andover.

Upon being recognized, Lawrence School Committee Member Peter Larocque asked the candidates to discuss what they believe should be the relationship between the parents and school committee members.

1. Ellen Gilbert: Ellen Gilbert Neilon stated that she believes parents should be able to have quick and easy access to School Committee members as elected officials.

2. Pamela Neilon: Pamela Neilon stated that the School Committee members are public officials and should always be accessible to the parents. She also stated that the School Committee should establish contact through outreach to the parents.

Upon being recognized, Councilor Gonzalez thanked both candidates for their participation and offering to serve the community.

Upon being recognized, Councilor Parolisi stated that he believes the difference between the two candidates is that Ms. Neilon is an experienced former member of the Lawrence City Council. He also stated that he has come to know Ms. Neilon through her

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public service and stated that she is fair, tough, and accessible. He concluded by stating he supports Ms. Neilon for the position.

Upon no further questions by the panel to the candidates, Council President Blanchette commended the candidates for their participation in the process and for presenting themselves to the panel. He commented on the importance of the proceedings to assure continued representation from Lawrence on the Greater Lawrence School Committee under the circumstances presented.

After a brief inquiry concerning the manner in which the approval process will proceed posed by Councilor Alvarez-Rodriguez, Councilor Blanchette commenced the proceedings by instructing City Clerk Maloney to call the roll by calling upon each panel member to announce their vote.

Upon a roll call vote of the panel by the City Clerk, Pamela Neilon was selected to fill the vacant position upon the following vote:

RIGHT ▼	VOTE FOR:	ABSENT	ABSTAIN	PRESENT
Sch Cmt Greg Morris [GM]	PAM NEILON			
Sch Cmt Omaira Mejia [OM]	PAM NEILON			
Sch Cmt Peter Larocque [PL]	PAM NEILON			
Sch Cmt Martina Cruz [MC]	PAM NEILON			
Sch Cmt James Vittorioso [JV]	PAM NEILON			
Sch Cmt Patricia C. Sanchez [PS]	PAM NEILON			
Counc. Marie Gosselin [MG]	PAM NEILON			
Counc. Jorge Gonzalez [JG]	ELLEN GILBERT			
Counc. Joseph Parolisi [JP]	PAM NEILON			
Counc. Nunzio DiMarca [ND]		X		
Counc. Nicholas Kolofoles [NK]	ELLEN GILBERT			
Counc. Nilka Alvarez-Rodriguez [AR]	PAM NEILON			
Counc. Grisel Silva [GS]	ELLEN GILBERT			
Counc. Vice Pres. Gil Frechette [GF]	PAM NEILON			
Mayor Michael Sullivan [MS]	PAM NEILON			
Counc. Pres. Patrick Blanchette [PB]	PAM NEILON			
TOTALS				

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TOTALS: Pamela Neilon = 12 votes; Ellen W. Gilbert = 3 votes; 1 = Absent;
0 = Abstain; 0 = Present

Upon conclusion of the roll call vote, Council President Blanchette announced the results and declared Pamela Neilon as the elected representative from Lawrence to serve on the Greater Lawrence Technical School Committee having received 12 favorable votes from the panel with 3 votes being cast in favor of Ellen W. Gilbert. City Clerk Maloney proceeded to administer the Oath of Office to Pamela Neilon to install her as the Lawrence representative of the Greater Lawrence Technical School Committee.

Council President Blanchette and Mayor Sullivan, as Co-Chairmen of the panel, thanked the candidates for their interest and participation, thanked the panel for their deliberation on the matter, and congratulated Pamela Neilon on her accomplishment and new position as the Lawrence representative to the Greater Lawrence Technical School Committee.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon Motion of Lawrence School Committee Member James Vittorioso as seconded by Lawrence School Committee Member Gregory Morris, the panel members present voted unanimously to Adjourn.

ADJOURNED
(7:43p.m.)

Attest:

William J. Maloney
City Clerk