

## PTAC REPORT – November 15, 2017

Vice Mayor Justin Wilson came to the meeting. (NB: He announced one day prior to the PTAC meeting that he will be running for Mayor next year.)

He started by saying that last year Council set aside a significant portion of the real estate tax increase for the schools and also started the task force. He was impressed with the task force's dedication to their task and commitment to the City. (We have also heard this from the School Board and ACPS so it is a general consensus that they weren't biased.) The task force's significant initial findings (as defined by JW):

1. We need land acquisition for school sites (and also for fire houses).
2. We need more High School capacity, but we must step back and define the vision for the school before proceeding with proposals; and
3. We need to pause/put on hold a second pre-school location.

The Council adopted budget guidance on 11/14 for the City Manager. The numbers are not pretty. We are expecting 1.3% revenue growth. That will produce an additional \$9.2 million in revenue. The schools are asking for a \$23 million increase in the operational budget - a large chunk of that is because of the new school, i.e., staffing, etc. Another chunk can be attributed to our increasing enrollment. Adding 500-600 children per year requires more resources - teachers, transportation, materials, etc.

The City also needs money, so adding our net increase of \$9 million still leaves a \$30 million gap in the budget. We're looking at a tough budget fight ahead. The City Manager's initial propose will not include a real estate tax increase (watch the 11/14 Council session to see the discussion on that issue). There is a desire not to touch the CIP money to "fix" the gaps in the operating budget. That's good news for the CIP, which desperately needs to keep the money, but not good news for the operating plan. We'll have the City Manager's budget the second or third week in February.

PTAC President asked "where are the touch points for parents to let Council know our concerns." JW replied that we should first go to the School Board to press our concerns. The ACPS/School Board budget is separate and distinct from the City's, although the City eventually incorporates funding for the schools into the City budget.

Also, (**ACTION POINT**) it is not too soon now to write to the City Manager to tell him our priorities. As part of the justification for the budget priorities set each year, the City Manager talks about what City residents feel are priorities. This is primarily from letters they receive. After the proposed budget comes out in February, that is the time to start writing to Council.

JW states that we will either have to see larger items be stricken from the budget or there will be across the board cuts. He predicts that it will be large items that will go. The non-school budget has shrunk by 4.5%, while the school budget has increased .1% (Adjusted for inflation). Only the CIP has grown significantly - both for the City and the Schools - and that is because of decades of deferment

As far as debt capacity (for raising more funds), you may recall that the City Manager did raise our debt capacity some last year. He did not want to maximize that last year. In their budget guidance, Council told the City Manager to revisit debt capacity for this year.

School Capacity: The current plan is to build swing space so that McArthur, and then other, schools can be rebuilt to add capacity. When the swing space is no longer needed, it can become a third middle school. PTAC asked why we can't use Lee Rec Center as swing - saving millions of dollars and accelerating the timeline for McArthur to be rebuilt. (Background: The City looked at that and produced a study which said it was not feasible. JW admitted that the study was skewed against the schools.) JW admits it is a failure of imagination to take the money and buy property. Says it makes more sense to

look at redevelopment sites and not on the open market. PTAC pointed out that using the task force recommendation of locating and building swing space will push the McArthur renovations out to something like 2023. PTAC asked what can be done to move that timeline earlier. JW replied that even if we had the money, we must be methodical in bringing capacity online.

JW said the City must find a way to change our revenue growth patterns. We need 6-7% per year. We've been averaging 2.9% per year. This year we are down to 1.3%.

School Board member Veronica Nolan pointed out that ACPS has 6,000 new students since 2010. As a result, we are spending \$4,000 less per student than we were in 2010. JW conceded that point and added that we are the 4th fastest growing district in the state, but the only one not building new school buildings.

JW stated we will need to be more aggressive in what we are asking of the State. The current formula used says we are a wealthy jurisdiction (based on real estate assessments) and so we get less money for schools. We have asked the State to recognize that our poverty rate is very high. 1997 was the last time the State assisted in building schools. We are asking the State to come back and assist with our capacity issues. The State revenues are better than our City. PTAC will reach out to VAPTA to see if we can weigh in with the State during their January legislative session. We need to get similarly situated jurisdictions on board with us so we can have more sway.

#### School Board Report (Veronica Nolan).

The task force saw the big picture. The report was honest and did not sugarcoat the problems. (NOTE: The task force can only offer recommendations and does not have any authority to force the City or ACPS to follow the recommendations.)

Said we have larger priorities than pre-K center. (Note: We are **not** reducing pre-k capacity, we are simply putting on hold building a standalone center which could increase capacity. Also, because of this, we are not removing pre-k students from their current locations, which we needed to do to increase elementary capacity in the schools hosting pre-k programs). Safety was the #1 concern.

1. We need to complete the gym space for the new school.
2. The HS capacity is a big problem. What will the new HS look like? Minnie Howard campus is the likely candidate for enlarging capacity. It needs to be looked at quickly, though, so we can move ahead with plans.
3. The order for elementary schools to be "fixed" is McArthur, George Mason, Cora Kelly, Maury. Everything is dependent on locating and equipping swing space so McArthur can be razed and rebuilt.
4. February will be the final report of the task force.

We have a new ACPS COO coming on board. (The former left with Dr. Crawley.) Believes the changes in leadership will assist us in heading in the right direction. PTAC raised the question about having an interim superintendent bring folks on board when a new superintendent is coming and might clean house. The School Board considered that issue, but ACPS staff said the need was too great and a COO must be hired ASAP.

The Board wants an HR audit of the Central office. Results will be public. The debacle of the hiring (and rescinding of the offer) of the new principal for the West End School was seen as a failure of HR to fully vet this potential employee. Dr. Berlin relied on their advice, and it was not a good result.

PTAC noted that the principals are being tasked with too much facilities and other non-supervisory/educational work.

**ACTION ITEM:** Write to School Board and Dr. Berlin about the CIP budget. Urge them to go forward with the CIP adopted in February regardless of the task force recommendation. Add this to letters to School Board – **“We demand that ACPS Facilities Department gets their act together.” We should not be** in a position where we are always patching broken schools. We need to be proactive with scheduled maintenance and prompt with repairs.

**Next Superintendent Chat** with Dr. Berlin is December 8th at GW. All are welcome.

January 27-28 is PTA Advocacy Day in Richmond. VAPTA is moving some of their training to this meeting. We may ask for folks to volunteer advocating for the schools with our state delegates.

I've asked PTAC if someone will be providing draft letters or talking points for us to send to the City Manager and/or the School Board & Dr. Berlin.

That's the meeting in a nutshell. Let me know if you have questions.