

**SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN
(PUBLIC PARTICIPATION)**

January 15, 2013

7:00 p.m.

Mayor Gatsas called the meeting to order.

Mayor Gatsas called for the Pledge of Allegiance.

A moment of silence was observed.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Craig, Ludwig, Long, Roy, Osborne, Corriveau, O'Neil,
Levasseur, Shea, Katsiantonis, Shaw, Greazzo, Gamache, Arnold

Mayor Gatsas advised that the purpose of the special meeting is to give residents of Manchester the opportunity to address the Board on items of concern affecting the community; that each person will be given only one opportunity to speak; that comments shall be limited to three minutes to allow all participants the opportunity to speak and any comments must be directed to the Chair; that any resident wishing to speak come forward to the nearest microphone, clearly state their name and address when recognized, and give your comments.

Mr. Steven Maloney stated good evening, Mayor and Board. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you tonight. I am a 22-year veteran of the Manchester police department; I'm also the president of the Manchester Patrolman's Association. Recently one of my members brought to my attention an email that was posted on the Girard-At-Large radio program website. The posted email was sent by Alderman Levasseur to Police Chief David Mara at 1 o'clock in the morning on Thursday, December 27th. In the email Alderman Levasseur demanded to know the name of the officer that was seated in the gallery staring at him at a recent aldermanic meeting. Alderman Levasseur claimed that the person made physical gestures at him and needed to be physically escorted from the chambers by Chief Mara. Believing that this person was a police officer, Alderman Levasseur used this incident as an opportunity to disparage every police officer in the city. He made comments to the *Union Leader* resulting in a front page story in the Sunday news. He went so far as to state in his email, and I quote, "Who knows how far his hatred for me has pervaded throughout your department or will he talk to more officers. We all know how hotheaded a particular group of

your officers are as the reputation of your officers has been well established.” Shortly after this email was sent out it was determined that the person in the audience was in fact not a police officer a retraction was made in the *Union Leader*. Alderman Levasseur later stated on his public access TV show that the person may not have been a police officer but he still was an employee of the Manchester police department. I believe this is how Alderman Levasseur justified in his mind the negative comments he made towards all Manchester police officers. Rather than just apologize and somehow try to explain the comments he made, he instead decided to go back on his community access show on Wednesday, January 9th and called the officers of the Manchester police department, and I quote, “dopes, clowns, jerks, and buffoons.” He also called us an embarrassment to the city of Manchester. At one point his reprehensible behavior completely took hold of him, when against the better wishes of his cohost, he got down on his knees while trying to impersonate me, injecting my wife into the joke. I ask is that any way for an elected official to act toward a city employee? That is typical behavior that we see in a junior high bully. Do you think we are a joke Alderman Levasseur? Now I ask you two simple questions: Will you step down as alderman? If not, as I suspect, will you recuse yourself from any future votes related to the Manchester police department? How can you honestly make any unbiased decisions in the future related to our department? You owe an apology to every police officer in the city that risks their lives to protect your constituents. Lastly, Mayor Gatsas and the members of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, will you publicly denounce the hurtful words by Alderman Levasseur directed at the men and women of the Manchester police department, and will you publicly reaffirm the trust and respect you have for your police officers? I hope you will.

Mr. Daniel Doherty, Manchester resident, stated thank you for hearing me. My name is Daniel Doherty; I’ve been a Manchester police officer now for 4.5 years. I’m a member of the Manchester Patrolman’s Association and I am a citizen of Manchester. I want to start off by telling you all that I am not here speaking because someone else wants me to, I’m here speaking because I would like to, and I’m speaking from the heart. It was recently brought to my attention that Alderman Levasseur had some derogatory remarks for Manchester police officers. They included dopes, clowns, jerks, buffoons and also called us an embarrassment to the city. As many of you already know, within the last year I almost gave my life for the city. I wouldn’t change a thing; I’d do it again, but for someone to call me an embarrassment to the city after doing that deed, I take it personal and I think it’s very unprofessional. Throughout this experience friends and family have

been supportive for me, some of which work for police departments small, big, in-state, out-of-state, each and every one of those people have commented at one point in time about how professional the Manchester police department is and how they were there for me from start to finish. I think it was childish and adolescent of how someone that is an elected official, an attorney, to say such things about a police department and especially someone who almost gave their life for the police department and its city. Our lack of profession, according to Alderman Levasseur, is not a fact. As recent as yesterday, a verdict and sentencing came down for a violent criminal, 60 years to life. One of the remarks that Alderman Levasseur gave is that we can't solve crime, and if that is not proof, I don't know what is. I sit here tonight and I respectfully ask Alderman Levasseur to voluntarily resign as alderman, and if not, I respectfully ask that he refrain from voting on any matters to do with the police. I thank you for your time.

Mr. Richard Valenti, 303 Barrett Street, stated Mayor Gatsas and Board of Mayor and Aldermen. I would like to speak tonight as a resident of ward 1 in Manchester, a city taxpayer, and also as a police officer. My name is Richard Valenti. I found many of the words Alderman Levasseur used to judge the Manchester police department as very disrespectful and demeaning. I view this board with respect and keep my personal opinions to myself and would never show the disrespect my fellow co-workers were given to anyone, let alone from an elected official. I was born and raised here in Manchester; my father was a police officer here in the city, and my brother and I are currently Manchester police officers. My family alone has sacrificed over 30 years to the city that we love and we believe in. You can call us clowns and whatever other names you choose to, but I will enlighten you a little bit. As a cop, my father put away many sex offenders and kept them off from the city streets. I couldn't have been more proud of my father for serving this community. There are many nights I didn't even see him because he was protecting the same streets the Valenti family still patrols. I have chased down knife wielding criminals who had just sliced a victim's throat; I worked a double shift and missed saying my final good-bye to my grandmother when she died because I was serving this community. I watched my friend lay in the hospital after being shot multiple times for this city to keep a bad man off from these city streets, and I could name plenty of other examples. What does a Manchester cop do you might ask? We make a difference in our community and we do it for many years, not just a few. One of my fondest memories in my life was seeing how proud my grandmother was when I earned the Manchester police badge, a profession I chose to help others and serve my community, a profession I will do until I can't do it anymore. I could have chosen any profession, but I

chose to stay in Manchester and be a police officer knowing I can make a difference in my community. In closing, I would just like to thank you all for our new police station, and let's keep Manchester moving forward in a positive light and leave the negativity and the personal opinions out of it. Thank you.

Mr. Eric Beland, 223 St. James Avenue, stated good evening, and thank you for this opportunity to speak to all of you. I am a resident of ward 10 in Manchester. I'm a lifelong resident of this city. I went to public schools in this city, West High School, I went to St. Anselm College, and immediately upon graduating I became a member of the Manchester Police Department of which I've been a member for over 23 years. I have often said two things to people who don't live in this city that I'm proud to be a citizen of this community for the way which, while we all have our differences, we all come together and we always manage to work through our differences for the betterment of our community in a professional way. I feel what Alderman Levasseur did and said was extraordinarily unprofessional, childlike, an embarrassment to this city, an embarrassment to this board. He does not reflect well upon all of you. I have been very proud to work as a police officer in this city, I've had to speak before this board several years ago on other matters and I've always been treated with respect. People that call us names and refer to us in the way in which I don't have to repeat, everyone has done that enough, Mr. Levasseur, are usually those people we have to deal with out on the street. We arrest someone, we get spit at; we arrest someone, we get kicked; we arrest someone, we get punched; we arrest someone, we get called every name in the book; our mother, family members, and everybody is treated badly and very derogatorily referred to. I don't believe this body and an elected official of all things should act in that manner. I find it reprehensible, I find it embarrassing. I hope this board decides to do the right thing; I don't know the rules and regulations to remove a member. I request that you step down on your own because I feel it is the right thing to do for you. If not, I believe you should recuse yourself from making any votes regarding the police department in any way, shape or form because you have made it known how you feel about myself and everybody there. Thank you.

Mr. Martin Swirko, 109 Gantry Street, stated good evening, Mayor Gatsas and Aldermen. I am a resident of ward 8, a registered voter and a taxpayer in this city. I'm a 22-year decorated member of the Manchester police department, I'm also a combat veteran of the Iraq War, and my military career spans 31 years of honorable service. During my time in Iraq I was awarded the Bronze Star, the Combat Infantry Badge and many other awards, I'll say several awards. When I

earned these awards, like many of my brother and sister officers at the Manchester police department, I did so while I was a member of the Manchester police department. I'm also a proud member of the Manchester Police Patrolmen's Association. The MPPA has had to work tirelessly over the years to protect its members from political retribution that often comes when an honest police officer tries to do an honest job. I've also had the unfortunate privilege to have participated in the investigations of many heinous crimes in this city, to include the line of duty murder of Officer Michael Briggs, as well as what Judge Abramson yesterday characterized as the attempted assassination of Manchester police officer Dan Doherty. I don't normally speak of these things in public, however, tonight I felt the need to bring my credentials to the table in case someone, whether inside this chamber or outside, decide to attack me personally for the statement I'm about to make. I often watch Alderman Levasseur's TV show and I did so because he often brought up legitimate concerns and the show provides a forum to discuss and find solutions for local problems. However, some time ago, it might have been a month or more ago, I tuned in and saw the alderman talking about the head of the welfare department. After his excoriation of this department head, my recollection is that he went on to say that when he was done with the welfare department, he was coming after the health department, and after he was done with the health department, he was coming after the police department. As I recall the show, Alderman Levasseur went in to look into the camera to say that's right, I'm coming after the Manchester police department. At that time I thought this was an odd statement coming from an elected official, and I thought it was over the top. I wonder what exactly he meant by that, and I didn't get the feeling he was only threatening to get the Manchester police department in order to make it a more efficient organization, however, once I read what I believe were the slanderous statements the alderman made against a person he mistook for a Manchester police officer, I realized that this was part the alderman's plan to come after the Manchester police department. That plan apparently consisted of taking any opportunity to personally and maliciously attack and destroy the reputation of any police officer in this city whether or not he knew who that officer was. As a police officer, and as having trained, mentored, and led troops in combat, I've come to believe that the two things we have in life that no one can take away from us is our integrity and our character. I truly believe, I'm sad to say that Alderman Levasseur's correspondence with Chief Mara was an attempt to do just that to a Manchester police officer. I'm saddened that a public official in the city of Manchester would behave in such a manner. I would also note that this comes at a time when the murder of police officers in this country has increased and that the mass murder of multiple police officers in single attacks have become

common occurrences throughout the country. Mayor, I personally find the statements that the alderman had made to the chief and on his show claiming to worry that members of the MPD would unlawfully retaliate against him and his family members to be an insult to the character and the integrity of the men and women who daily place themselves in harm's way to keep the peace and to protect the citizens in this community. And I would like to remind Alderman Levasseur that despite his obvious antagonisms to the Manchester police department, he still represents me as a citizen in the city. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa Johnson, 6 Miami Court, stated good evening. I live at 6 Miami Court in Manchester, New Hampshire. First I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Manchester police department for all they do for our community and for coming out to speak their minds and to be heard. I'm here on a different subject though. As you know, last night Superintendent Brennan presented two budgets to the school board, and I'd like to encourage the board to really look at the larger budget, appropriately fund our schools. I know that looking at the tax cap numbers, I know your legal requirements around that that you want to meet, but as a taxpayer of the Manchester area and a parent that has seen what has happened in the schools this past year, I'm really hoping that we look at those numbers and we don't let that happen again this year. Looking at what I heard last night, and excuse me for not having notes, but I will go with what I remember. Looking at the tax cap budget we were looking one-time funds and they were looking at using those one-time funds to avoid any more future layoffs, which we desperately need to avoid, but I would like to see us look at getting back the teachers that we need. I know from myself speaking to my child that she used to get 45 minutes of English and 45 minutes of reading, and now she gets 50 minutes of language arts, which for my child, she needs a little bit more of that. This year has been a challenge for her; we're working with her as parents, which we have always done, but we failed her in a way that she has lost 30 minutes of teacher instruction in a subject that she needs. It is a basic subject; it's something of the core that we're losing. So again, I would encourage you to look at appropriately funding our schools, and the goal would be to move forward and to be the lead again in the state of New Hampshire, be the place that people want to go, that we don't have to come and visit you every month or every week or however it works to be. But again, please adequately fund our schools. Have a great night. Thank you.

Mr. Glenn Ouellette, 112 Auburn Street stated I think it is time that we as a city grow up. Again, we see examples of two cities. We should be one city, but we're truly not. I remember back in the 1990's when we created for the department of

recreation in specific certain sports or buildings, which was controlled by the parks department, that people be charged to attend the programs and that that money be put to improve the buildings or the parks, the lands, when it was needed. There was a time in the city when there was so much money in those funds that the money was pulled out and put somewhere else. Here is an example: The Manchester golf park off from Bridge Street and Mammoth Road; last year you had to get out of the city taxpayers a quarter of a million dollars, but looking at their account, if the money would have stayed where it was supposed to stay, you would have had that money, that quarter of a million dollars, to do what needed to be done without coming back to the taxpayers. I guess what I'm saying is that when you guys fight for something, leave the money there once you fought for it, spend it on those projects, don't take it out here and there and put it somewhere else because that hurts the city. Schools: If we lose another 41 teachers, you might as well start thinking about closing your schools, as a city we've already cut 90 classes just this last year. We increase overcrowding, but to be honest about it the amount of students coming to our schools hasn't really increased. So why a city wants to layoff, as they did last year, 16% of its teachers, when we did not lose 16% of its students, and that is very troubling. I know that we are in a money crisis; what we need to do is eliminate the waste. There is still a lot of waste in city and school government. Your Honor, you made a very good point in the last few points about West High School. It is such a good high school that actually people who are freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors go to Harvard School of Law, yet we are considering, or at least mentioning the possibility of maybe closing the school. I know for a fact that this city would never even consider bussing students from Memorial High School or Central High School to relieve some overcrowding there and bussing them to West High School, but we would consider closing West High School and bussing them all to the east side. It doesn't make any political sense. It is the same amount of cost; you still have to cross the bridge. So please when you do your budgets this year, think of the people, stop blaming the problems when we ourselves, you yourselves as boards in the last 10 years have created a lot of those problems. Thank you.

Jeff Hanson, 50 Heathrow Avenue, stated good evening everyone. I spoke last night at the school board meeting, and if you didn't watch, I'm sure you all know my face well enough to know or have a good guess of what I had to say about budgets presented last night. Tonight I'm going to tell you about a fantasy that I have. Sometimes I wonder myself if I had unlimited means how would I choose to educate my children. People with unlimited means might send their children to a private school or for the truly elite, they might send their children to an

illustrious school such as Choate, the alma mater of President John F. Kennedy, or perhaps Exeter Academy right here in New Hampshire. When you look at those schools, the tuition alone is close to \$40,000 a year and then endowments are added on top of that so the spending per student is close to \$70,000. So why would somebody of unlimited means choose to send their child to a school that spends \$70,000 on a student per year. What does that buy? It buys a student/teacher ratio of 5 or 6 to 1, it buys class sizes of 8 to 12, in Manchester we have class sizes close to or exceeding 30, a class size of 8 to 12 is a boutique class. It buys teachers with a PhD in education and a PhD in the subject that they teach. In Manchester we routinely fire our teachers. It buys teachers who are accessible 24/7 to the students because often times they live on campus with the students. In Manchester we have teachers who don't even have the time to grade the assignments. It buys laptop computers for every child; in Manchester we have computers literally from the last century. It buys state-of-the-art technology, science and communication labs; in Manchester schools struggle to provide paper and books. It buys hundreds of extracurricular activity options; in Manchester extracurricular were close to being eliminated in the middle schools last year. They buy state-of-the-art athletic facilities; in Manchester we have buildings that literally have the steps falling off the front of them. The list goes on and on. These are all the things you'll find on these institutions' websites as reasons to spend \$70,000 per year on a student's education. So it is often asked when budget discussions take place here does increased spending produce higher achievement? Not even Superintendent Brennan last night could answer that question definitively. But these private institutions think that there is some value to lower class sizes or lower student to teacher ratios, or PhD level instructors, or state-of-the-art facilities or they wouldn't list these things on their websites. So does spending \$70,000 a year to educate a student worth it? Does it make the student achieve at a higher level? I don't know, but in my fantasy I would provide my child with the opportunities that exceed my wildest dreams. I'd spend the money on my child because education is an investment in the future. But back in the real world I'm fighting tooth and nail to get my school district to spend \$10,000 a year per student just to meet state minimum standards. At this point it is only in my fantasy where the opportunities are expanding.

Jim O'Connell, 265 Prospect Street, stated good evening Mr. Mayor and members of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen. I am a resident of Manchester and I live on Prospect Street, and I'm among other things president of Citizens' for Manchester Schools and I've been before you a number of times in the past to talk to you on budgets or education in the city. Here we are at the start of a new year

and I'm hopeful, as I said at our board of school committee meeting last night, I'm hopeful that we can have a better outcome from this year's budget process than we had last year. It is hard as a citizen standing here tonight listening to the testimony and evidence offered by the many officers of the Manchester police department not to be reminded of some fundamental things. In the end we are all here, I think, and you are certainly all here I'm sure because you have the best interest of the city at heart and I think everybody in this room, and I would remind you and ask you to think about the fact that those who comment, those of us who come before you regularly, come before you because we are passionate about not just our own children but the children in the city and the city of Manchester. We should find a way to have a dialogue; we should find a way to resolve the issues before us. As I said, as we start a new year, I'm hoping we turn a new leaf and we find a way of adequately funding Manchester schools. It is going to be a difficult year; I think it's compounded by the fact that it will be an election year. I would say that we in the Citizens' of Manchester Schools organization are committed to being part of that solution; we've been working over these last number of months to find solutions to the problems. I am disappointed with the budget that was offered last night. For those of you who do not know, the budget that would not meet the tax cap offered 41 additional positions over and above what we have today, and we eliminated 95.5 teachers from our School District this past year, and we've decided that it would adequate now to replace 41 of them. I don't know what the facts are behind that, but that's what the \$160 million budget will do. The tax cap budget, which will be about \$5 million less than that, I believe, or \$4.5 million less than that, would require dramatic cuts. So I think the people of Manchester are looking to you, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, for leadership. This city less than a decade ago, or about a decade ago, was twice listed in the United States in various lists as being one of the top five desirable communities in which people would want to live. I would argue to you today that the primary reason why Manchester is not viewed in that light today is because of the issues around our educational system and the inadequate funding of it. I think we can do better; I think we should strive to do better, I think we should resolve starting with the beginning of this year that over the coming months we will find a way to make all the citizens of Manchester proud of the school system, the teachers, the students, and the people who work in that system. I urge you to look to your hearts, think about what is needed for the school system, do what is right for the city of Manchester, and the many passionate and proud citizens that have elected you into these positions. I thank you again at the start of this year for all the hard work that you do; I appreciate your efforts, and you will find at Citizens' of Manchester Schools here to help in any way we can. The last thing I would say as we approach the

time, a self-serving note, Hillside Middle School, of which I'm the president of the PTO, is having its first annual fund raiser at Derryfield on February 8th. Tickets are \$25.00, and we'd love to see any and all of you members of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen and the Mayor himself. I would encourage you to attend or buy a ticket and not attend and give the ticket to somebody else. It will be a wonderful occasion; we're looking forward to it. Thank you for your time and thank you for your hard work.

Mayor Gatsas stated we will recess this meeting, and then we'll come back to hear the final speaker.

*On motion of **Alderman Roy**, duly seconded by **Alderman Long**, it was voted to recess this meeting.*

Mayor Gatsas called the public participation meeting back to order.

Nick Want, 623 Belmont Street, stated good evening. I am here before you to talk this evening a little about what's happening in our city. As you know, I've been here before, I'm part of the Citizens' for Manchester Schools organization but primarily I'm a citizen of the city of Manchester. We are not parents to the school district, we are citizens, there are members of our organization who have no children currently in the school district and some who have never had children in the school district, that fundamentally appreciate the value of education as a core of the city. There was a fantastic meeting a week ago for the charter commission; I'd like to thank those aldermen, Alderman Long particularly, Alderman Shaw, who I saw in the audience, perhaps others were there as well, for attending that meeting, and I think you would bring and agree that it was probably one of the most constructive conversations about the value proposition of our city that we've had in a long time. At that meeting it wasn't a bunch of parents showing up and complaining, we had leaders in industry and the chamber of commerce all showing up to talk about education as a fundamental tenant and a fundamental cornerstone of foundation for this city. So as we move forward now, we are talking about the budget process early in the season here, we're not coming before you in May when things haven't had a chance to be discussed, we've put a lot of money into the infrastructure of this city, but we're missing in some of the core values that this city has. Education, our police department, fire department, the core essences of this city. All we hear about is these are expenses, expenses,

expenses. The police officers, the firemen, how many can we have, we have 115 and do we really need 115. We need to invest in this city. Last year there was no way you guys were going to override the tax cap. The first year it was coming out it is not possible, but you are the elected stewards of this city, it is your job to insure the growth of future viability of this city and gutting the education system of one of the core tenants is not the way to continue the growth of this city. So when you come up, you're going to have very difficult decisions and it's not about having X number of dollars and just how do you spend those. You guys have a difficult job, I don't deny it, and it's not easy. But that is what you were elected to do. You weren't elected to make easy decisions, you weren't elected to stand behind the tax cap and say that is all I can do, the tax is constraining me. The tax is not constraining you, and the values of this city need to be heard. That meeting for the charter commission, this whole row was filled with people who told the charter commission and were here for public comment that this city needs to change the way it does business. You guys are in a position this year, with what happened last year, to change the tone of the discussion in this city. It is your opportunity to be heard by the people that are going to be voting and addressing us all coming up in the fall. I would ask you as you sit here today, start thinking about how you're going to make sure that at a minimum, an absolute minimum, the proposed budget by the superintendent, which he said was a bare bones budget, should be the minimum budget that should be addressed for the school and education system in the city of Manchester. The tax cap budget is just not feasible; it's a number that was provided by the superintendent out of a statutory obligation that he was told to do so, so he did. It is not viable. You guys are in the position, you are the aldermen, you control the money in the city, you've been given a lot of opportunity here early on to establish and have discussion, the chairman of both boards is here and can provide the information and support. We as the Citizens' of Manchester Schools can help with this situation. We have become well established, we have key and core members who can help, and we're not just here to bang on the table every time we talk to you guys. So engage with us and ask us to help. One last thing, speaking as a citizen only, on my own personal comment; everything the Manchester police department goes through here to support and honor us and protect us is critical, and I personally want to thank them for that service and that support, and I support their call and recommendation that Alderman Levasseur should step down from his position. It is unacceptable and unconscionable and completely irresponsible for an elected official to behave in such a manner. Thank you very much.

Mayor Gatsas asked is there anyone else present wishing to speak?

*There being no one else present to speak, on motion of **Alderman O'Neil**, duly seconded by **Alderman Ludwig**, it was voted to take all comments under advisement and further to receive and file any written documentation presented.*

*There being no further business, on motion of **Alderman O'Neil**, duly seconded by **Alderman Ludwig**, it was voted to adjourn.*

A True Record. Attest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Normand". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

City Clerk