

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

March 19, 2013

7:00 p.m.

Mayor Gatsas called the meeting to order.

Mayor Gatsas called Alderman Greazzo and Alderman Gamache forward to introduce the two students from Gossler Park School to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Alderman Greazzo stated I am honored to introduce Ciara Tisbert, a Ward 10 resident and student from Gossler Park Elementary School to lead us in the pledge this evening. Thank you for joining us.

Alderman Gamache stated I am honored to introduce Ward 11 resident and student from Gossler Park Elementary School, Ashlleynette Olivier, to lead us in the pledge this evening.

Alderman Craig stated I would like to recognize Lori Upham the principal of Gossler Park School as well.

Mayor Gatsas called for a moment of silence and Alderman Roy asked that everyone keep the family of Marty Glennon in their thoughts. They lost their mother, Eleanor, this week.

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 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 their comments.

Jim O'Connell, 265 Prospect Street, stated:

I thank you for the opportunity to speak before you again. Tonight I am here as I usually am to talk about the upcoming budget in the City of Manchester. I watched with great interest last night the session with Dr. Brennan and I was encouraged by the questions that were asked by aldermen in their apparent effort to understand the budget and what it would mean for the students in this City and for the City. I would hope that you would continue in that vein and probe exactly what it means. My offering for you tonight is to point out something that is a very simple truth. As I sat watching there were many times when I would have liked to jump in and with all humility I would still like to have jumped in and offered a greater explanation of some items. To keep it simple the School Board has seen fit to send you two budgets. The fact is that neither of those two budgets actually address the question as to how much money is needed by the school system in the City of Manchester to run a reasonable school system next year. One budget is a tax cap budget, which is an arbitrary number and it will not meet the needs of the schools and I think you would be hard pressed to find anybody to say that this would meet the needs of our schools. The second number that you have been given, that \$159 million number, has been described by Dr. Brennan as a school qualification budget. What that budget claims to do is to insure that our high school students will not be in classes greater than 30 so we would hope to meet the minimum state standards. That is what that budget would do. It amazes me in a city like Manchester where we should have the ambition to have a good school system, perhaps even a great school system one day, but nobody has

asked in this city for Dr. Brennan or the administration to present a number or asked the question how much does the City of Manchester need to run an adequate education for the children of Manchester. I am not trying to play games with the word adequate. What would a normal school district need to run? Perhaps you would never want to act on that number but I think it is surprising that none of you would ask. I would suggest that one of you should ask that question: how much would we need to run and then use the adjective you want to describe just the very minimal or a reasonable or an okay or whatever adjective you would like and find out what that number is. I think it would be wrong to proceed without knowing that number. Very quickly, as the President of the PTO at Hillside Middle School I would like to express my gratitude and the gratitude of the parents and teachers and students of Hillside for all of you and for the businesses in Manchester and you, mayor and others who supported our first annual fundraiser last Friday night. We succeeded in raising \$32,000 for science and technology for Hillside Middle School and that should be seen by all of you. I express my gratitude on behalf of those people and they are grateful. I think you should interpret it as the fact that the community and the parents and businesses are interested and willing to put their money where their mouth is and support education in this City. Thank you for the additional time.

Bill Huguen, 210 Morning Glory Drive, stated:

I am here to speak tonight as a different voice. I don't think I have ever spoken before in front of the board as another voice and somebody who cares about the City and the students we have. I do want to thank you for your service. You do spend a huge amount of time away from your families in service to the City and it is this service that I am here tonight to ask you to really think about when you choose to support a budget. I am not sure exactly what goes on politically behind-the-scenes in the City but I am sure it is very difficult to make decisions that will make a majority of the people happy. It seems to me that if you employ common sense, a level head, respect for one another, a love for the City and the people in it, it would be easy to choose the most appropriate budget. I am

proud to be a lifelong resident of Manchester and a product of the public school system. To address an issue that has been raised many times in other meetings, I am here as a return on an investment that was made by those who once sat in your seat some 30 years ago. Although I am cautious to compare myself or my children to a product or a future profit, I understand your focus on maximizing the benefits of our tax dollars. When I say our tax dollars I say that as an investor in Manchester and the future of our City. I have twin sons entering high school next year and a son going into the fifth grade so I have a vested interest in the budget that you support. I do not want this to be about me though; I want it to be about the 15,000 plus students in our schools system. A good number of my sons' classmates are choosing to move out of the City out of fear of where our school system is going. What I am asking you to do is understand that we need to aim high in providing for our students. We all need to focus on what is in the best interest of our students. The teachers need to be realistic and this board needs to be realistic in what they are asking for. Each side needs to be willing to sacrifice a bit to insure our students get what they need to stay competitive in today's world. So I ask you to employ the characteristics mentioned above when making the decision to fully fund what is needed, not just to meet the minimum standards but to exceed these standards and be the educational model of our state. Do not worry about being popular and do not worry about re-election; worry about our future and what is right for our students in the City. Thank you.

Leslie Want, 623 Belmont Street, stated:

I have spoken in front of you many times before. I just want to say that I know that all of you got in this game because you wanted to help this City. I don't believe that any of you had any alternative motive or purpose other than that and I think you need to go back to those moments when you first decided to become an alderman and remember why am I doing this and why am I here. I am looking out for the best in Manchester and I think you need to remember that and not at any point ever say to yourself this is an election year and what is popular with the voters and what is going to get me re-elected. I know

you all have the City's best interest at heart. What I just passed out to you I also passed out to the Board of School Committee with one slight change. On the front it shows you the median assessed property value and what it would be additional, above and beyond the tax cap, to not fully fund education but fund it to minimum state standards. What I did was I sent the copy I gave to the School Board to Mr. Sanders, the financial officer for the City of Manchester and I asked him what he thought of the numbers that I presented to the School Board and he gave me an excellent suggestion. I had used the property value of \$156,000, which I took off of the real estate website, Trulia. In fact, what is more appropriate to use is the assessed value for properties, which is what the Tax Office uses so I went back and took his numbers and redid them according to his suggestion. You will see there if you figure out how much it would cost the average taxpayer in Manchester additionally, above and beyond the tax cap, it is an additional \$.24 per day or actually less than \$.24 per day or an extra \$85.06 a year per household. That is all it is. It is not this huge casm that it was last year. It is \$85.06. I know that there are people out there on fixed incomes. I know there are elderly people who cannot afford that \$85.06 and so I would ask you to consider the tax cap the enemy of the City right now. I would ask you to consider overriding it and in that override include a clause that would allow for those people; a hardship clause for people who cannot afford that extra \$85.06 a year or less than a cup of coffee a week per household. I would ask you to put that in there so we don't have to worry about any of our taxpayers being overburdened. You have these papers and also in there I have given you some information about the tax cap and information about the state administrative rules. I cut and pasted them right off the website so you can read those. If you haven't read them yet I think you should because they are supposed to hold the full force of the law; the same as the tax cap. Thank you very much for your time and your service.

Glenn R.J. Ouellette, 112 Auburn Street, stated:

Let's make one thing perfectly clear; the tax cap is not our enemy, the government is. This year alone from the State of New Hampshire you have to pay \$4.5 million more for pensions that the state used to pay. They downshifted it to the local level. That was not the tax cap. You are losing \$800,000 or 8% on the America bonds. Government did that, the sequestration, not the tax cap. Five million dollars a year on Yarger Decker, a program that we can no longer afford as a City... It needs to be replaced but none of you on this board or at least most of you on this board do not have the political will to make the right decisions. Last year, Your Honor, you renegotiated the City employee contracts. Yarger Decker was never mentioned. It was kicked down the road one more time for two more years. This has been going on for too many years. If anything, the tax cap eliminates some of the waste. There is nothing wrong with overriding the tax cap when there is a good reason for it. The school system needs an appropriate amount this year to get back on their feet because we have been cutting the schools for years and there is only so much you can cut. So that would be appropriate for a one year thing. Remember, Nashua has had a tax cap for 12 years now and they are still surviving. In Franklin they have had one for over 20 years and they are still surviving. The federal government has been downshifting. One more thing about the State of New Hampshire this year, they created this bill that by 2015 all tests will be done electronically. It is a mandate. Are they giving us any money to buy the computers? No, they are not. The state many years ago passed a mandate for special education that would fund at least 41%. That was 20 or 30 years ago. They fund between 20% and 21%. We need to tell our state and federal government that enough is enough. You can't put it all to the local level. That is not sharing. That is adding an expense. People still pay their state taxes and their federal income taxes, yet they are downshifting and we are paying the extra. I would like to say one more time that the tax cap is not our enemy. If anything, it is our friend. It makes sure that some of the waste or the wish list will go away. There is still a lot of wasteful spending in this City. Remember the \$3.2 million you loaned to the schools? You talk about maybe forgiving it but you won't forgive at 1%. The difference

is \$232,000 more. You are going to forgive the whole loan probably but you won't forgive 1%? It doesn't make any sense. The last thing I want to say is it took me five weeks to get a blue barrel to recycle in this City, actually five months. It has been almost two months now and they still haven't picked it up. We have not educated the 23 tenants in that apartment building and now the regular garbage people are picking up the recyclables because the barrel is overloaded. If we can't fix a simple thing like picking up the recycling on time what can we fix?

Nick Want, 623 Belmont Street, stated:

I again have spoken before you many times and we have been working and trying to collaborate for the last year or so. It is a shame that we are missing a large number of the aldermen here. I am not sure what is going on with the discussions but they aren't here for the public comment portion. We are now at a point where we have to make some difficult decisions. The School Board, unfortunately, presented two budgets to you. They should have presented just one budget. The tax cap budget as explained in the meeting last night has been reviewed previously and is in name only as presented by the superintendent's three pages it meets truly the requirement of a tax cap budget as stipulated by the mayor who is chairman of the School Board. It does not meet the requirements for adequately and appropriately funding the education in this City, which per the Charter Commission, which has been ongoing, is a fundamental requirement for the strength and future growth of this City. One of the things we talk about with our tax base and our taxes, if you look at your tax statement we pay 32% for City taxes. So 32% of what our tax dollars are go to City schools. There is a state portion and county portion but every city in the State of New Hampshire pays that. We are, out of the 270 school districts, 266th in the state in funding our schools. There are 265 school districts and cities that apportion more to their schools as a percentage of the tax revenue than the City of Manchester. We are, in the City of Manchester, the ninth lowest tax burden in the entire United States. That is something to be proud of. I am fiscally prudent myself but there is a point where you can be fiscally irresponsible and we are at that point right now.

The school budget as proposed is absolutely a bare bones budget at the \$159 million and change. That is an absolute minimalist budget. It is barely adequate. As stipulated earlier, the amount of change in taxes that is required is about \$85, which is less than \$.24 per day which translates to less than a cup of coffee per household. We aren't talking per person in a household; we are talking per household per week. So the question is do you believe that your constituents don't think that the City is worth it? It isn't even about the education of the students. It is really about the value of the City and what the City will be worth in the future. Again, as you look at the opportunities that are ahead of us, I implore you to make that difficult decision as it may seem to be but really a straight forward and simple decision to vote for the future of the City of Manchester. Thank you. On a last note, for all of the people in the City who are interested in understanding more about the truth there is a meeting at Hillside Middle School this Thursday at 7 p.m. and we hope to see everyone there.

*There being none one else present wishing to speak, on motion of **Alderman O'Neil**, duly seconded by **Alderman Corriveau**, it was voted to take all comments under advisement and further to receive and file any written documentation presented.*

Mayor Gatsas called Dona Blais forward, along with Chief Burkush. I am not too sure we have had anybody at the City longer than 39 years. I could be wrong but I don't know if they have been here for the last three years since we have been giving out proclamations. We have a very dedicated employee here and I know that everybody at the Fire Department is going to miss her. We have a resolution:

The City of Manchester: A Resolution

Be it known that the Office of the Mayor extends its gratitude to Dona Blais in recognition of 39 years of dedicated service to the City of Manchester and;

Be it further known that the Office of the Mayor extends its best wishes for continued success and that this resolution be duly signed by the Mayor of Manchester.

s/Theodore Gatsas

Mr. James Burkush, Fire Chief, stated we are going to miss Dona.

Ms. Dona Blais stated it has been 39 years as of April 1. I started in 1974 at the Finance Department. I went from Amoskeag Bank, which is now Citizens right across the street and came over here and worked on the second floor. I have had seven jobs in three different departments and I really loved the school department but my heart is going to always be at the Fire Department. I have had three chiefs that I have worked for. I really loved Wilson School. I had 350 kids that I was a mother to as a social worker and everything else but when I went to the Fire Department my husband said that I was definitely going back to Wilson because I cried for three weeks but now I think that I have 243 children and my kids are just a little bit bigger. I am going home. I have five grandsons living with me. I have seven grandsons and a great grandson that is living with me so I will be taking care of my boys for awhile.

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

A True Record. Attest.



Assistant City Clerk