

CITY OF NORTH ADAMS
City Clerk's Office
November 16, 2016

I hereby notify that at twelve noon today the following items of business have been filed with this office and will be acted upon at the meeting in the City Council Chambers at City Hall, Tuesday evening November 22, 2016 at seven-thirty o'clock according to Section 8, Rules and Orders of the City Council.

Marilyn Gomeau
City Clerk

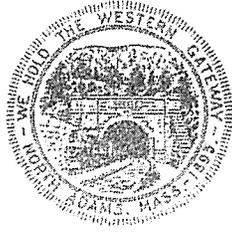
REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL
November 22, 2016

Roll Call
Moment of silent remembrance
The Pledge
Hearing of Visitors
Approval of the minutes of *November 9th*.

- 11,545-1** *An Ordinance amending Chapter Z of the Revised Ordinances of the City of North Adams entitled Zoning by adding a new section, which was referred to the Planning Board and postponed at the meeting of October 25th.*
- 11,407-1** *Communication submitted by Councilor Buddington regarding the Public Arts Commission, which was postponed at the meeting of October 25th.*
- 11,407-1a** *Report of the General Government Committee regarding the Pubic Arts Commission.*
- 11,551** *Mayor's communication #49 recommending the appointment of Gene Carlson to the Local Historic District Study Committee to replace Josh Colon.*
- 8717-35** *Mayor's communication #50 recommending a Public Hearing to set the Tax Levy for FY'17.*
- 11,552** *Communication submitted by Councilor Bona regarding a presentation from the Berkshire County Education Task Force Planning Study.*

CORRESPONDENCE

COUNCILOR & MAYOR'S CONCERNS



CITY OF NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS

Office of the Mayor
Richard J. Alcombright

November 22, 2016

#49

To: North Adams City Council

Re: Appointment to the Local Historic District Study Committee (LHDSC)

Dear Honorable Members:

It is with great confidence that I am recommending the appointment of Gene Carlson to the LHDSC to replace Josh Colon who has recently stepped down.

I respectfully request confirmation.

Sincerely,


Richard J. Alcombright
Mayor



CITY OF NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS

Office of the Mayor
Richard J. Alcombright

November 22, 2016

#50

To: North Adams City Council
Re: Property Tax Classification-Public Hearing

Dear Honorable Members:

The City Council, with the approval of the Mayor, must determine the percentages of the local tax levy to be borne by each class of real property for the fiscal year.

With that said, Chapter 369 of the Acts of 1982, requires that the City Council conduct a Public Hearing on the adoption of such percentages prior to its final determination. At this hearing, the Board of Assessors must provide all the information and relevant data to the making of such determination and the fiscal impact of the available alternatives.

Based on the above, I respectfully request that the City Council convene this mandated hearing of its body on Tuesday, December 13, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Alcombright
Mayor

General Government Committee, North Adams City Council

Nov 15, 2016 5:45 pm, City Council Chambers

Members present:

- Eric Buddington
- Robert Moulton Jr.

Others present:

- Julia Dixon (Public Arts Commission)
- Erica Manville (Public Arts Commission)
- Bill Blackmer (Public Arts Commission)
- Lisa Blackmer (City Council)
- John DeRosa (City Solicitor)

Eric Buddington chaired the meeting in the absence of Councilor Merrigan, and took minutes.

The meeting was called to order at 5:48 pm.

1 Structures of a permanent character

Should “structure of a permanent character” be broadened to include short-term artwork?

The Solicitor pointed out that the phrase “permanent character” only applies to the last item in the list. Paintings, murals, etc, are overseen by this Commission regardless of their permanence.

MOTION by Councilor Moulton: Recommend to the Council to leave 2-173 as written, except to fix spelling of the word “statue” in 2-173(b).

VOTED: in favor (unanimous).

2 Extra member in appointment schedule

The schedule for appointments in Sec 2-175 paragraph 2 lists eight appointments, though the Commission has seven members.

MOTION by Councilor Moulton: Recommend to the Council to strike the last item from the list of appointments, as suggested by the Arts Commission.

VOTED: in favor (unanimous).

3 Removal of members

The Arts Commission proposed new language in Sec 2-175 to allow removal of a Commission member for greater than 50% absence over any 12-month period.

The Solicitor indicated his opinion that state law made provisions for removal of commission members, and that this provision actually restricts the authority of the Commission. He agreed to research this and report back to the Committee with details.

Julia Dixon suggested that a specific requirements helps to set expectations for Commissioners.

MOTION by Councilor Moulton: Postpone any recommendation pending an opinion from the Solicitor.

VOTED: in favor (unanimous)

4 Short form of “Public Arts Commission”

The Arts Commission noted that “Public Arts Commission” is shortened to “Commission” at various places in the ordinance, and suggests using the long form throughout.

MOTION by Councilor Moulton: Recommend to the Council to expand “Commission” to “Public Arts Commission” throughout.

VOTED: in favor (unanimous)

5 Various advising requirements

The Public Arts Commission requested the addition of a new paragraph at the start of Sec 2-178, requiring the Commission to provide recommendations to the City on various aspects of art policies, selection, placement.

Councilor Blackmer opposed this paragraph because of its “narrative” style; specifically that it lists things that the Commission may already do, without setting any legal requirements or powers.

The Committee took no action on this item.

6 Authority to pursue grants and propose budgets

The Public Arts Commission requested language to pursue gifts and grants, the establishment of a Public Arts Fund, and to recommend its own yearly budget.

The Solicitor offered a strong opinion that the Commission can pursue grants without additional authority, and that a separate nongovernmental group would be better suited for active fundraising. Donations to the City are similar to 501(c)(3) for tax purposes.

Councilor Blackmer stated that money from grants, such as Chapter 90 funds, does not show up in the budget. She also suggested that a separate “Friends of the Arts” type organization would have more freedom to handle money, and could provide matching funds for grants given to the City.

It was suggested that grants should be coordinated across City government to avoid conflicts.

Erica Manville agreed that a “Friends of” organization would be helpful.

There was some concern that such an organization would add complexity. The Solicitor emphasized that such an organization must not mirror the membership of the Arts Commission, though some overlap of members would be acceptable.

The Solicitor also stated that the receipt and use of grants by the Public Arts Commission does not require a line item in the budget.

MOTION by Councilor Moulton: Recommend to the Council to NOT add the last two paragraphs of 2-178 as proposed by the Public Arts Commission.

VOTED: in favor (unanimous)

MOTION by Councilor Moulton: to adjourn.

VOTED: in favor (unanimous)

Adjourned at 6:44 pm.

PRÉCIS of
Berkshire County Education Task Force Planning Study,
Phase One Final Report, October 2016

Submitted by
University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute
Eliot Levine, Ph.D., Senior Research Manager

1. Introduction

On October 2016, pursuant to an agreement made in Spring 2016 with the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI), the Berkshire County Education Task Force (BCETF or “Task Force”), received a report from UMDI entitled, *Berkshire County Education Task Force Planning Study, Phase One Final Report, October 2016*. Receipt of this document constitutes completion of the first of a two-phase effort. The Phase One study was intended to review and confirm evidence that decreased enrollment, rising costs, and declining or flat revenues pose challenges to the quality of the education provided by Berkshire County’s public schools. Phase Two of the Task Force’s work will consist of developing workable and sustainable recommendations for addressing the problems identified in Phase One. After being vetted by the Task Force, those recommendations will be presented for consideration and possible action to Berkshire County’s school committees, boards of selectmen, city councils, and community at large.

The *Phase One Final Report* concludes that “the evidence reviewed and presented to UMDI clearly indicates that the quality of education in Berkshire County is being threatened by these factors [i.e., decreased enrollment, rising costs, and declining or flat revenues], with program impacts already being experienced in some districts and signs of potential program impacts over time in most districts” [*emphasis added*] (*Report*, p. 52).

2. Literature Review

As part of the Phase One work, UMDI undertook a review of the large and varied literature dealing with remodeled educational organizations, including studies of varieties of shared services and experiences with consolidated districts. Shared services are already in place in areas of Berkshire County, and sometimes prove effective programmatically and financially. Studies done of districts’ consolidation are inconclusive in identifying effective and easily replicated models.

3. Evidence

UMDI’s Phase One study examined three areas of evidence -- enrollment trends; cost and revenue trends; and educational program trends -- that could substantiate the existence of serious problems for Berkshire County’s current public education system. Sources of such evidence include: reports filed by school districts with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE); populations and fiscal studies conducted by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission; the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Revenue; data projection models based on state-wide information available to UMDI researchers; and two rounds of interviews with school district administrators, one exclusively of past or current administrators with at least 15 years of experience in Berkshire County education. Evidence of major problems, both extant and projected, can be found in each evidentiary area examined.

A. Enrollment Trends.

Past, current, and projected student enrollment vary from district to district throughout Berkshire County. Nevertheless, with the exception of the Berkshire Arts & Technology Charter School (BaRT) and Northern Berkshire Regional Vocational-Technical High School (McCann) -- each of which admits students selectively, either by a lottery of those seeking admission or on satisfaction of admission criteria, and each of which draws its students from the populations of other districts -- all jurisdictions' enrollments have declined appreciably from the 1999-2000 school year to the 2014-2015 school year. Overall, Berkshire County's public school enrollment declined 22.3% in that 15-year period. By way of contrast, student enrollment in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts declined overall by only 1.7% in the same period.

Using four different enrollment projection models (*see Report*, p. 10), the Phase One study concludes that from 2015 to 2025 the County will experience a further enrollment loss of 10.8%; and from 2025 to 2035, the anticipated loss will be an additional 6.5%. Of students enrolled in Berkshire County, the percentage of those who were low income in 2015 (34.0%) exceeded the Commonwealth's percentage overall (26.3%). Similarly, a difference was found in the County's 2015 percentage of special education students (17.7%) *vis-à-vis* the percentage of such students in Massachusetts overall (17.1%). Of note is that in each case, with both low income and special needs students, Berkshire County's percentages had been lower than the state percentages in 2005.

B. Cost & Revenue Trends.

UMDI found that from 2005 to 2015 total public school expenditures in Berkshire County grew 27%, with increases attributable in large part to negotiated compensation rates for school employees (which nevertheless has risen at a slower rate than teacher salaries have risen state-wide), employee health insurance, and special education services. The Commonwealth's Chapter 70 general aid to school districts and towns increased by 23% during that time, whereas tax levies in the County's various towns and cities rose by 49%.

Though there is wide variation among of towns and cities, and therefore among school districts, of municipalities' statutory taxing capacity, the overall tax levy as a percentage of assessed value changed from 1.31% in the period 2000-2005, to 1.19% in 2006-2010, to 1.52% in 2016. This suggests that many municipalities are utilizing a portion of their remaining taxing capacity to support their educational expenditures. Proposition 2½ override capacity likewise varies widely from town to town, with some municipalities, including those educating large percentages of County students, at or near their levy ceilings. Unused building capacity, which increases districts' per pupil costs, is extensive throughout Berkshire County.

C. Educational Program Trends.

Berkshire County's enrollment decline between the 2004-2005 and 2014-2015 school years has been accompanied by a reduction in full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers, from 1,684 to 1,429. This is consistent with reported program losses in that period in foreign languages, instructional technology, curriculum development, and librarian services. Reductions or eliminations reported have also included staff, and therefore programming, be it sections or actual subjects, in graphic arts, performing arts, music, and physical education, as well as in those noted above. Districts have reduced Advanced Placement (AP) sections, and certain

vocational offerings in comprehensive high schools (e.g., house building, culinary arts, automotive repair, and drafting) have been eliminated or reduced, as well.

What is more, school and district administrators reported that it has grown increasingly common for multiple levels of courses to be taught by one teacher in the same classroom at the same time. This cost saving measure adversely affects the quality of subject matter coverage and time for teachers to attend to the needs and abilities of individual students. Academic support services for students in need of additional or specialized subject matter assistance have also been reduced, as have guidance and school adjustment counseling services. In addition, athletics and other extra-curricular activities have been cut or reduced, as has late transportation for students wishing to participate in extra-curricular programs. This has as a consequence reduction of the opportunities for some students in large, rural districts to participate at all. The perception among those interviewed by UMDI is that the cumulative effect of these reductions and cuts has been to diminish the quality of the educational opportunities available to students in their districts.

4. Past & Future Strategies for Improving Financial Sustainability

Many Berkshire County districts currently share services with one another, or with the government of the community or communities in which they operate, or both. The needs being addressed through these arrangements include special education, health care services, personnel matters, professional development, athletics, and administrative leadership. Regional efforts, led by the Southern Berkshire Shared Services Project, as well as by a more recent, comparable effort in northern Berkshire County, are also underway.

Among cost saving steps taken by districts have been the closing of schools, cooperative purchasing for energy and supplies, and elimination of positions within districts or schools through consolidation of functions. There are currently no plans for, nor are there on-going discussions about, consolidating school districts. UMDI's Phase One study reports that "[i]ssues of educational quality are clearly paramount to many stakeholders and must be prioritized alongside financial considerations when exploring potential regionalization processes" (*Report*, p. 48).

5. Conclusions & Recommendations

UMDI's *Phase One Final Report* states that if recent economic trends in Berkshire County continue, then "there will be substantial strain on school district finances . . . [M]any districts will likely need to make changes in the services they provide . . . [including] reduc[ing] academic, extracurricular, and/or support services . . . increasing class sizes, reducing the number of sections of certain courses, offering multiple courses or course levels in a single classroom, increasing the use of on-line courses and other technology-assisted academic work, combining extracurricular activities across schools or districts, and instituting or increasing participation fees . . . [as well as taking] steps toward regionalization efforts" (*Report*, p. 53).

The *Phase One Final Report* advises moving on to Phase Two by looking closely at, and with due consideration given to the consequences of, further sharing of services and greater regionalization. ". . . [G]iven the complexity of achieving agreement regarding regionalization among even two or three districts, feasibility of super regions is a key question" (*Report*, p. 56).