

Draft Minutes

STATE OF CONNECTICUT MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW BOARD (MARB)

SPECIAL MEETING of the MARB Hartford Committee

Date: Thursday, September 20, 2018
Time: 10:00 AM to 12:30 PM
Location: Hartford City Hall, Mayor's Green Conference Room, Suite 100, 550 Main St., Hartford, CT

Members in Attendance: Mark Waxenberg, Bill Cochran, Bob White

Other MARB Representatives: Bob Dakers, Riju Das, Julian Freund

Hartford City Representatives: Mayor Luke Bronin, Melissa McCaw, Leigh-Ann Rawls, Council President Gwendolyn James, Council Member James Sanchez, Treasurer Cloud, Council Member Wildaliz Bermudez

Hartford Public Schools: Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, David Fleig, Natasha Banks,

I. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM.

II. Review and Approval of Minutes from August 10, 2018 Meeting:

Mr. Cochran made a motion, seconded by Mr. Waxenberg, to approve the minutes of the August 10 meeting. Approved unanimously.

III. Review and Discussion of City's 9/14/18 June 2018 and July 2018 Monthly Financial Report.

This item was moved to a later portion of the agenda in order to accommodate Board of Education staff and City Council members in attendance for item number IV.

IV. Review, Discussion and Possible Action re Issues/Responses to Follow-Up Items from August 10, 2018 Meeting:

1) Dr. Torres-Rodriguez and Mr. Fleig provided a breakdown of the total 4,628 enrolled special education students, and discussed the drivers of rising special education costs, particularly the costs of special education tuition for outplacements. Special education placements require extensive service delivery, with costs, at times, potentially reaching six figures. Committee members and Board of Education staff discussed the possibility of engaging a consultant to explore opportunities for bringing outplaced students back in-district and for working cooperatively with the State Dept. of Education to develop more cost-effective service delivery. Dr. Torres-Rodriguez noted that previous studies have determined over-identification of special needs to be a contributing factor for Hartford schools. Mr. Waxenberg indicated that MARB may be able to dedicate resources toward a consultant and study of Special Education services.

2) Board of Education staff provided follow-up data concerning the number of employees enrolled in the HDHP/HSA plan and the number required to take furlough days. Mayor Bronin added that as bargaining unit contracts are negotiated, the City is shifting toward the HDHP/HSA plan with higher employee premium shares.

3) The committee had been provided a copy of the MOU between Hartford Public Schools and Achievement First Hartford Academy. Mr. Waxenberg raised a number of questions regarding the nature of the agreement, its legality and potential impact on the MBR. Dr. Torres-Rodriguez indicated that the Board of Education has already retained a legal firm able to review the agreement. The committee discussed Mr. Waxenberg's recommendation to add questions from the MARB members to the scope of the legal review of the MOU.

4) The committee discussed Mr. Waxenberg's recommended action to authorize MARB funding, as needed, for Segal, both the BOE's and the MARB's health consultant, to review health insurance options and opportunities for savings, such as participation in the State Partnership Plan.

5) Mr. Waxenberg indicated, that based on the Committee's discussions, that he will be offering motions at the October 4, 2018 MARB meeting regarding the actions described in items 1), 3) and 4) above.

5) City Treasurer Adam Cloud presented background information on the City's and Board of Education's existing defined contribution (DC) retirement plans. A proposal was recently made that would offer non-bargaining unit new hires DC-only retirement options. That proposal is now being considered as one component of a plan that would consolidate administration of the City's and Board of Education's other DC plans within the Treasurer's Office. This would entail an RFP process and would require approval by the Common Council. Council President Gwendolyn James indicated that the Common Council has not voted against the proposal, but has been doing its diligence in regard to this regard.

III. Review and Discussion of City's 9/14/18 June 2018 and July 2018 Monthly Financial Report.
Ms. McCaw provided an overview of the City's financial reports for June 2018 and July 2018.

V. Review, Discussion and Possible Action: City Revenue and Expenditure Opportunities re Five-Year Recovery Plan

Mayor Bronin and Ms. McCaw outlined a list of potential revenue enhancements and expenditure savings initiatives. Multiple development projects, with tax base implications, are at various stages of progress. The City is also planning tax deed sales and taking other steps to enhance collections. New proposed development fees have been approved and other fees are under review for possible adjustment. Operational savings from service sharing between the City and Board of Education are under consideration. Evaluation of these and other operational efficiencies may require assistance from consultants, with potential MARB participation and funding in this regard. These initiatives will be discussed at future meetings. The City is in the process of conducting a dependent eligibility audit of its health insurance benefits and is also seeking strategies for reducing workers compensation costs.