

**SPECIAL OF THE BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN
(PUBLIC HEARING ON THE FY24 BUDGET)**

March 21, 2023 at 6:30 PM

Mayor Craig called the meeting to order.

Mayor Craig called for the Pledge of Allegiance, this function being led by Bill Blais.

A moment of silence was observed.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Cavanaugh, Stewart, Long, Fajardo, T. Sapienza, Trisciani,
Levasseur, Heath, E. Sapienza, Burkush, Barry, Gamache, George-Kelly

Mayor Craig advised that the purpose of the special meeting is a public hearing to receive comments on the proposed Fiscal Year 2024 municipal budget and the proposed Community Improvement Program for the Fiscal Year 2024 period in accordance with the procedures established in RSA 44:10 and in satisfaction of any other local, state or federal law that may apply.

Mayor Craig noted that the Clerk shall present the resolutions, the subject of which contain all of the appropriations as proposed, after which a brief presentation may be made and public comments will be heard.

The Clerk presented the proposed Resolutions:

"Appropriating to the Parking Fund the sum of \$5,259,137 from parking revenues for the Fiscal Year 2024."

"Appropriating the sum of \$20,681,387 from Sewer User Rental Charges to the Environmental Protection Division for the Fiscal Year 2024."

"Appropriating to the Manchester Airport Authority the sum of \$41,664,536 from Special Airport Revenue Funds for the Fiscal Year 2024."

"Appropriating to the Manchester Transit Authority the sum of \$1,594,761 for the Fiscal Year 2024."

“Appropriating to the Manchester School District the sum of \$191,759,220 for the Fiscal Year 2024.”

“Appropriating all Incremental Meals and Rooms Tax Revenue Received by the City in the Fiscal Year 2024 and held in the Civic Center Fund, for the payment of the City’s Obligations in Said Fiscal Year under the Financing Agreement.”

“Appropriating to the Manchester School Food and Nutrition Services Program the sum of \$5,819,971 from School Food and Nutrition Services Revenues for the Fiscal Year 2024.”

“Raising Monies and Making Appropriations of \$177,283,166 for the Fiscal Year 2024.”

“Appropriating to the Central Business Service District the sum of \$258,000 from Central Business Service District Funds for the Fiscal Year 2024.”

“Resolution ‘Approving the Community Improvement Program for Fiscal Year 2024, Raising and Appropriating Monies Therefore, and Authorizing Implementation of Said Program.”

Mayor Craig advised that the meeting shall be open to public comments; each person when recognized shall come to the nearest microphone and state their name and address in a clear and loud voice for the record; each person shall be given one opportunity to speak and comments shall be limited to three minutes to allow all participants the opportunity to speak; residents and taxpayers shall be called upon first followed by all others; and once all present have been allowed to speak should there be a topic not discussed those wishing to speak a second time shall be provided the opportunity to do so.

Sandra Wenzell, 65 Bath Street, stated:

I am a crossing guard at Elm and Queen City Avenue. I work 10 hours a week and have a lot of trouble at the intersection with people running the red lights, turning right on red; school buses, businesses and people in general taking a left hand turn on a red light. It is a little ridiculous. There are signs on the ground that it is a school zone and there are working lights. We do have a light that is not working at the moment. It is supposed to glow red indicating no turn on red and what are they doing? It has not been fixed. They say it is fixed but it isn’t glowing red. I work there every day and I go through the same thing every day. I work for the Manchester School District.

Mark DiCampo, 65 Bath Street, stated:

The only comment that I have is I think the city streets and the potholes need to be improved. Where Sandra stands, there is a pothole that keeps opening up and she has to walk out in the crosswalk and turn around. She could fall and hurt herself seriously over there. The light that she is talking about is facing south on Elm Street instead of west because they are making turns on the west hand side to the right going north or going straight across. I used to be a crossing guard there myself and they are not stopping. She almost got hit a couple of times. The police see the people go through red lights and they don't do anything. I asked the Police Department one time about it and they said oh it wasn't an emergency so we aren't enforcing that as much. I asked why. I told them that someone could get hit in that situation and they said we don't have the manpower or the officer may have been on a call. If he was on a call, he would have his lights on. He wasn't on a call and people in front of him were taking right-hand turns on red and nothing was done. The potholes are getting really terrible. I know that we have a budget problem in the city and I understand that. When there is no parking on the streets during a snow emergency, there were no cars being towed on our side of the street. I don't know about the other parts of the city but nothing was being towed on our side. We have Families in Transition and they park there all the time and are not getting ticketed. That is the best I can say. I am sorry if I sound like I am being a little abrupt but that is the way I feel and I believe the children and the people come first. I went to see Alderman Burkush one time but was not able to speak to him about the light. We have been having problems there. I almost got hit a couple of times when I was on West Baker Street and Elm Street. They just go right through. They don't stop and don't bother to stop. I think that is an issue that should be looked at with all due respect.

Julie Turner, 285 Ray Street, stated:

I am here this evening to speak as a taxpayer in Manchester and as a parent of three students in the Manchester school district. I would like to encourage you to appropriate the full \$191,759,220 to the Manchester school district for the upcoming fiscal year. As many of you know, according to the NH Department of Education, the average pupil spending in our state hovers around \$19,400. Our surrounding towns are spending the

following: Salem-\$17,982, Londonderry-\$19,679, Concord-\$19,773, Bow-\$17,026, Nashua-\$16,772 and Goffstown-\$16,028. On this list of 77 NH school districts, Manchester is at the bottom with a per pupil spending of \$15,043. We can do better. Our town may rank the least in spending but our students are not the least deserving. In actuality, I am here tonight to ask you to be a bit brave. I am here this evening to ask you to find the courage to pass the budget of \$192,967,794. This would allow the Manchester school district to fund needs such as the multi-lingual program director, student advocacy group supports and investments in our Cleartouch and Chromebook technologies, as well as a much needed increase in salary to our multi-lingual program director. I believe many of you want to fully fund our district and tonight I am asking you to make a courageous move to go beyond the tax cap and approve the \$192,967,794 for our district. This would allow our baseline for next year's budget to be in a better position when we are assessing what items need to be permanent once our ESSER funds are fully spent. In the two years I have sat on the school board, I have seen and experienced real change for the better. We have been intentional with our staffing in order to keep our class sizes low, we have purchased new, rigorous curriculum, we have expanded purposeful professional development opportunities for our teachers, we have increased our starting salary for new teachers, we have increased our graduation requirements, we have created a new, more equitable program of studies for our high school students, we have implemented multi-tiered systems of support, and we have solidified a new cleaning contract that will pay a minimum of \$15 to our Aramark workers, we have rebranded our district and launched a new district communication platform, we have hired a Chief Equity Officer and an Equity & Inclusion Project Manager. The list of accomplishments goes on but in summary I am very, very proud of the work that the Manchester school district has done and when they say they are committed to supporting schools and students, they mean it. The monies that the Board of Mayor and Aldermen approved last year were well spent and I am proud of the growth we have made. In closing, please help us to continue this forward momentum. We can grow our learners by keeping our class sizes low, grow our educators by improving our contracts to provide better teacher recruitment and retention and grow our systems by continuing our cycles of technology investment. There is palpable change happening in Manchester and with your support we can continue. Thank you.

Lisa Howe, 24 Greenfield Street, stated:

I am a resident of Manchester, a taxpayer and a parent of two students – one at Webster and one at Hillside. I am asking you to please appropriate the needs based budget of the school district of \$192,967,794 or at a minimum at least the full tax cap compliant request of \$191,759,220. My experience with schools in Manchester, and especially the teachers and other staff, has been overwhelmingly positive. Our teachers and staff go above and beyond to provide a top education to our students. However, their ability and efforts are limited by the extremely limited funding they receive. As Julie just mentioned, Manchester ranks the lowest in our state on per pupil spending. It is disappointing and it sends a message that kids and families aren't a priority and it limits the ability of our schools to provide a great education. By fully funding the budget, you can make sure that schools and students have the supplies they need and can invest in school facilities. Manchester is long overdue to invest in a long-term facilities plan and needs the funding to do so but I am also talking about basic building renovations. You can insure reasonable class sizes and invest in supports for special education and other at risk populations. You can invest in great teachers and staff by increasing minimum salaries and professional development. I see the thoughtful investments being made in our district in schools every day. They are making smart investments in curriculum. When my kids tell me what they are learning, I am consistently impressed. Today I had the opportunity to watch my younger daughter as she performed with the Webster School orchestra, band and chorus. They are investing in technology and human resources and teacher training. They are stretching each dollar as far as possible to invest in our kids and I ask you to do the same. I often get asked about raising my kids in Manchester. I believe our schools can be great and I hope you do too and will fully invest the funding needed for them to be so. Thank you very much.

Melissa Stevens, 48 W. Clarke Street, stated:

I am here as a long-standing resident of Manchester and a taxpayer and parent of three children currently at the elementary educational level with my oldest embarking in middle school in the fall. I have seen growth and change in the years my children have

been enrolled in the district. A few of the improvements include encouraging small class sizes, expanding curriculums and improving salaries throughout the district. It has made a huge impact. As my young family beings a new chapter, I would like to see the additional changes in the city in regards to education. The allocated funds as spoken about would drive education in the direction that the tax payers of Manchester desire and to continue to grow alongside our neighboring towns and districts such as Bow, Goffstown, Concord and Nashua who all spend more per pupil according to the NH Department of Education. We have so much to offer to our community members and families. Why should our students come last? Yes, this request to pass the budget would go beyond the tax cap but we would be able to expand advocacy programs, invest in technologies to better service our students and community and be able to provide more competitive wages to our overworked and tremendously dedicated staff. Why would we choose not to? The changes today will directly affect the future of our students and, therefore, our community. The isolated topics I mentioned previously should also include the badly needed renovations for the faltering infrastructure of the educational establishments that have been serving our community for decades. Thriving students can become leaders in their community. If we deny our students the opportunity, we fail. Let's help support our students and strengthen our beloved community. Thank you for your time.

Laura Schneider, 2454 Elm Street, stated:

I am a Manchester taxpayer and a mother to three children in the school district. I came here tonight to ask the Board of Mayor and Aldermen to appropriate the full tax cap compliant, \$191,759,220 to the Manchester school district. Before tonight's meeting, I reviewed the data released by the NH Department of Education which shows that the average statewide cost per pupil is, as Julie mentioned, \$19,399.97. In comparison to that statewide average, Manchester's cost per pupil is \$15,043.73. That is suggesting that our school district has to do more with less, our teachers have to do more with less and our kids are asked to do more with less. I believe in public education and I believe that our kids deserve a fully-funded school system that can grow to meet their needs. Our kids deserve up-to-date facilities, robust curriculum, smaller class sizes and educators that stay with the district. I choose to raise my children in Manchester and I

believe that we can invest responsibly in our education system but fiscal responsibility is not the only responsibility we have. We have a responsibility to invest in the future of our children, especially to make up for the learning losses sustained during the Covid-19 shutdowns. You represent all of us, the voters and taxpayers of the city, and as your constituent and neighbor I ask you to please pass the full budget presented by the Manchester school district. Thank you.

Jason Bonilla, 463 Central Street, stated:

I am here as a community leader of color. I know that we love to talk about the rich diversity that we have here in Manchester, NH having the most racially diverse school district in the state of NH. We have over 80 languages spoken in our district. Now we have to insure that we back that up with funding, hard money; funding that will not expire. The last thing we want to do is tie funding, especially for the BIOPIC community, to ESSER funding. Overall, budgets as we all know as a city reflect our values and it is time that we are more proactive in insuring that this budget and future budgets reflect our city and our schools most importantly. I have been proud of the work that we have done at the district level. I am thankful for the great work that the administration has done and overall we have made amazing history. We are making history as we speak within the school district and I have been proud to be a part of this. Let's insure that we fund it. Thank you.

Leslie Want, 623 Belmont Street, stated:

I have been a resident of Manchester for over 30 years and taxpayer. First of all, I want to thank all of you for the work you have done to help the homeless in our community find shelter and housing this past year. The measure of a community is how well we treat those that are less fortunate among us. I am proud of the progress that this Board has made with this most difficult issue. While progress has been made for those that are adults, now we must keep in our hearts and minds the future adults of this city. They are in our middle schools, high schools and yes even elementary schools. We must insure that they have every opportunity for good mental health and are prepared to get meaningful employment to earn a living wage so they don't become homeless individuals living day-to-day without the dignity we all deserve. We all know the best

way to prevent homelessness is with a good education so you can get a skilled job and earn a living wage. The students in our city right now have suffered from residual effects of the pandemic both academically and socio-emotionally. We need to support them to the very best of our ability. The Board of School Committee has proposed a tax cap budget as we are required to do by the city charter. The superintendent has also provided you with an additional needs budget which more accurately reflects what is needed to help our students maintain their mental health and achieve academic success. In conclusion, homelessness is a solvable problem for the future if you remember that Manchester's future adults are today's elementary, middle and high school students. They need your help so they can be productive and healthy members of our community. You have done a great deal to help the less fortunate adults in our community. Please pass the additional needs budget to insure that our students get the chance to help contribute to the future prosperity of our city. Thank you.

Sean Parr, 244 Sagamore Street, stated:

I am a taxpayer and parent of two children – one at Smyth Road and one at Hillside. I am also the Ward 2 representative on the Board of School Committee. Tonight I am speaking on my own behalf in support of this budget. With regard to the portion of the budget related to the Manchester school district, this is a lean budget and one with an eye towards the future working to lower class sizes, raise salaries for better recruitment and retention of our teachers and staff, auditing and improving our systems district-wide and planning for our long-term facilities vision. This budget takes steps in all these directions while the district also wisely shepherds ESSER funding in ways to help children fill learning gaps where we can and apply for external grants whenever possible. We are advocating for Manchester's students in every way we can; in the classroom, in planning for the district's future, in advocating at the state level and here advocating to our city officials. Our students need and deserve the best we can do within the limits of the tax cap and state funding. This budget represents that effort but of course our district needs even more support. As many parents have already spoken about, the latest data from the NH Department of Education has Manchester at the bottom in its per pupil spending. We spend over \$4,000 less per student than the average in NH. With 12,319 students, we would need an additional \$53 million just in

order to bring our spending up to the average NH level. This is the definition of chronic underfunding. So yes we do have a funding challenge but having worked with Dr. Gillis, her administration and my fellow board members, I know this budget takes significant steps in the right direction and I am in full support of it. I ask that you support it as well. Thank you.

Jim O'Connell, 265 Prospect Street, stated:

I just wanted to briefly say that I want to be associated with the remarks that have been offered here tonight but people who have spoken, I think, very well to the point on why we need this budget. It is a responsible budget. I am very proud of the work that has been done by our current administration and by my fellow board members. We have been very diligent in the way that monies have been spent and I am proud of the fact that we were able to effectively raise salaries for our workers in the city to \$15/hour which was done within the current budget. It took a lot of engineering to make that happen. We have also increased the salaries for starting teachers in the City of Manchester. We were significantly below comparable towns so we had difficulty hiring and retaining qualified teachers. I would ask you to support this budget. I would ask you to fund the needs budget. The last thing I would say is that it has been mentioned a number of times the fact that Manchester is the least well-funded school system in terms of per capita spending. When the numbers that were given regarding the average in the state being \$19,000+, I would like to emphasize that is an average and the \$53 million that School Committee Member Parr spoke of is for the average. I think any reasonable person looking at student population in Manchester would recognize that the needs of our students are not the average needs of the state of NH. We have homelessness and opiate addiction and mental health needs and socio-economic needs and diversity needs and we are an urban area so our students are not average in terms of their requirements. So when we talk about \$53 million as what is needed to get to the average, can you imagine what it would take to get us to be the highest funded district in the state? I appreciate all of the work that you do and are doing and I would ask you to support the budget. Thank you.

Christopher Potter, 470 Silver Street, stated:

I represent Ward 7 on the Board of School Committee. I would like to give you some additional context on the school budget and ask you to approve it. The FY24 school budget is tax cap compliant and fiscally responsible. It continues the improvement in our school system with additional teachers, more competitive salaries, expanded and improved professional development, increased AP and Honors offerings, expanded athletics especially for middle and elementary schools, a Fine Arts & Culture Director restored, and in CIP new school buses, playgrounds and deferred maintenance. This is just some of what is in there. We managed this despite a significant decrease in state aid and I want to ask for your help to help students and taxpayers at the same time by advocating in Concord for a fix to the state adequacy aid formula; a system where equalized property value per pupil determines education funding. It is fundamentally inequitable and steals from the future of Manchester every year that it persists. Talk to Alderwoman Heath if you have any questions. This budget offsets the state aid decrease and increased costs that we are facing for energy, benefits, retirement and salaries using \$3 million from our healthcare expendable trust since it would be over the maximum next year as we add to it this year, as well as requesting the full tax cap increase. We are only tapping into the trust because there is nothing here to cut. It is a very lean budget and nothing is wasted. I want to say that the funding isn't an end in itself. We don't want to get up to \$19,000 per pupil just to be average. We need to improve our facilities and bring down class sizes and give kids the individualized instruction they need to stay on grade level. I also want to recognize that we have existing inequities in our district, especially for English language learners, special education students, students of color and students from low income families. This budget is designed to begin addressing those to the greatest extent that we can this year. Overall, this budget improves instruction and begins and continues to address the inequities that exist. It is important for all of us, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen and the Board of School Committee, to pass it so that we can continue this work and support our students; the future of our city. Thank you.

Mayor Craig advised that all wishing to speak having been heard, the comments presented shall be taken under consideration with actions by the Board.

*This being a special meeting, no further business can be presented and on motion of **Alderman Cavanaugh**, duly seconded by **Alderman Long**, it was voted to adjourn.*

A True Record. Attest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Normand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

City Clerk