

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
REGULAR MEETING
JUNE 8, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Rev. John Olson, Co-chair, Alfredo Castillo, Co-Chair (arrived at 7:00 PM), Jose Casco, Scott Burns, Nessah Smith, Aidee Nieves (arrived at 7:25 PM).

STAFF: Mrs. Anne Gribbon, Coordinator of Volunteer Services for the City of Bridgeport.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Olson called the meeting to order at 6:47 PM. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 10, 2016

This agenda item was not addressed.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION WITH COMMITTEE MEMBERS CONCERNING
FUTURE PLANS FOR THE COMMITTEE**

Co-Chair Olson introduced Mrs. Gribbon and stated that he had talked to his Co-Chair about inviting Mrs. Gribbon regarding the possibility of her work becoming a mission or goal of the Committee, basically developing and encouraging volunteers to work with students in the Bridgeport schools. Co-Chair Olson stated that Mrs. Gribbon is the head of the School Volunteer Association to which Mrs. Gribbon responded that it gets a bit messy and she would like to explain. She explained that she is employed by the Board of Education as the Coordinator of Volunteer Services, and what makes it messy is that there is also an organization called The School Volunteer Association of Bridgeport, a non-profit 501-C3, which has been promoting volunteerism in the Bridgeport Schools for 49 years. Mrs. Gribbon noted that, as a charity, The School Volunteer Association can get grants which the Bridgeport Board of Education cannot obtain. Mrs. Gribbon stated that the two organizations work together in close partnership with the Bridgeport Board of Education.

Co-Chair Olson asked Mrs. Gribbon how long she has had this job. Mrs. Gribbon answered for thirteen years. She stated that the purpose of the School Volunteer Associations to promote volunteerism with the schools, the hallmark event of the program being the Annual Read Aloud Day. She said that, last year, 600 volunteers for Kindergarten through 6th Grade were recruited for the Read-Aloud Day. Mrs. Gribbon distributed an Annual Report to the Committee members and stated that it was a great day for literacy. The books at Read Aloud Day are left the school libraries and Mrs. Gribbon stated that it is the best recruitment for volunteers because they come once, have a great experience, and then want to come back, adding that it is better than asking for a long-term commitment up front from the volunteers.

Co-Chair Olson asked whether Mrs. Gribbon's department is recruiting volunteers during the year because they come once to the Read Aloud Day. Mrs. Gribbon answered in the affirmative and she said it is the best day for Public Relations in Bridgeport because it changes peoples' impression of Bridgeport when they see the bright faces, the learning that is going on, and the great questions the students ask. From there, Mrs. Gribbon stated that she can then get the volunteers to return weekly, or bi-weekly, or monthly. Through Read-Aloud Day, one book per month is donated to school libraries with a total of 10,000 books per year, and she stated that this past year, the program and 572 volunteers who came on a regular basis, mentioning that Co-chair Olson is one of these volunteers. Mrs. Gribbon stated that the program is about literacy, but the volunteers bring their life experience to the classroom and form relationship with the children. She stated that it is a big operation to organize all this which also means having the volunteers interact with the classroom teacher to create a schedule.

Council Member Casco asked Mrs. Gribbon whether her office is at the Parent Center on Boston Avenue to which Mrs. Gribbon answered in the affirmative. Council Member Casco asked how long Mrs. Gribbon had been there to which Mrs. Gribbon answered that it had been about two-and-a-half or three years. Council Member Casco asked whether parents come to ask for help. Council Member Castillo arrived at the meeting. Mrs. Gribbon answered that parents did come for help, but that space is a problem. She said that people think the space is only used by three people in the office, but she said more space is needed for books and volunteers. Council Member Casco asked why the non-profit 501-C3 cannot have its own space, further asking why the non-profit does not raise the money to have its own space. Mrs. Gribbon said that it was possible but that the non-profit is not really equipped to raise that kind of money. Mrs. Gribbon said that because she is an employee of the Board of Education, the non-profit gets the space from the Board of Education.

Council Member Casco asked what is being done to help students with language problems. Mrs. Gribbon responded that there is an ongoing reading and enrichment portion of the program, and there are "book buddies" who may work with children for fifteen minutes at a time. Also, there are tutors who tutor in math or reading. She said that there were 145 tutors this year, but that the tutors are not educators, just people like those at the meeting who want to help students with their academics. They may work with an individual, or a group or a class and receive no training, just materials. The tutors work with the classroom teacher and Mrs. Gribbon said that about 5,000 books a year are given by tutors to their students to build the students' home libraries.

Mrs. Gribbon discussed the role of mentors in the literacy program. She stated, that, during lunch time, the mentor works one-on-one with a student so as not to interfere with the student's or volunteer's daily schedule. After a background check, mentors receive a short training program and are asked to remain with their students for two years for a lasting impact. During the two years, such activities take place as trips arranged away from school, and an end-of-the-year dinner.

Council Member Casco asked whether the literacy program only has books for first grade to which Mrs. Gribbon responded that the program provides books from pre-Kindergarten through 6th grade. Council Member Casco asked how the books are obtained. Mrs. Gribbon said that she orders the majority of books from Scholastic, but she said that donations also provide books. Council Member Casco asked whether the books are purchased through the Board of Education

to which Mrs. Gribbon answered that they are purchased through the 501 and that she would soon be writing the grants for this.

Mrs. Gribbon stated that another part of her job is the Board of Education's Business, School and Community Partnership Program whereby, according to last year's Partnership Report, nearly all schools in Bridgeport have some kind of a partnership which could be a business or a church. These partnerships can bring benefits to the school such as volunteers, programs and donations. As an example of this, Mrs. Gribbon stated that employees from a community bank may volunteer to teach students about saving money. Mrs. Gribbon said that some are robust partnerships and some are weak attachments, but there are a variety of things that happen through the partnerships. She also stated that, in the past, there have been businesses, such as Health Net, which have been very active in volunteering, but which were bought out which impacted the volunteers' availability and dedication. She added that, due to companies leaving the area, it can be difficult to maintain a partnership or funding as the case of GE. Mrs. Gribbon provided other examples of strong partnerships such as the American Association of University Women, Aquarion and Sikorsky.

Co-Chair Olson asked Mrs. Gribbon whether she had many city employees to which Mrs. Gribbon answered that there were very few. Co-Chair Olson asked about police and fire. Mrs. Gribbon stated that there are not too many policemen and firemen, and that the Chief has to get behind the program to encourage more policemen and firemen to volunteer. Mrs. Gribbon suggested there could be a rotating schedule in these departments since it is often difficult to find time during the school day.

Council Member Burns asked how Mrs. Gribbon pairs up the businesses with the schools. Mrs. Gribbon answered that sometimes they are paired due to location, but that the interests of the mentors are also a factor. Co-Chair Olson asked how many schools there are in Bridgeport and Mrs. Gribbon answered that she thought there were 28, but was not quite sure.

Council Member Casco asked whether there are any high school student volunteers to which Mrs. Gribbon answered in the negative since the program runs during the school day. Council Member Casco asked about after school hours. Mrs. Gribbon said that she had no connection to the after-school programs and does not place volunteers there, but she will make recommendations to the after-school programs in the event that anyone should want to volunteer after school. Council Member Casco said that a lot of students have nothing to do after school and they have to be kept busy.

Co-Chair Olson asked about volunteers in the high school to which Mrs. Gribbon answered there were none. She said that calculus volunteering had been tried after school, but students did not show up. She said that the strength lies more in the elementary schools and that the literacy program tries to do a lot, organizing between seven and eight hundred volunteers during the school year. Co-Chair Olson asked whether Mrs. Gribbon could use more volunteers. She said certainly it is important to have more volunteers in order to grow the program, but she sees the need to focus on maintaining the program. She talked about the importance of establishing regular volunteers like the 120 people who come from outside Bridgeport from Darien, Westport, Weston, Wilton, for example.

Co-chair Olson asked how the Committee could help. Mrs. Gribbon answered that any

connection in the community that the Members might have, coming to Read Aloud Day for the experience, informing companies they deal with about the community partnership program, and building relationships with police and fire departments are all things which would provide support.

Co-Chair Olson asked if there were any questions, and Council Member Castillo asked if there was a summer volunteering to which Mrs. Gribbon answered that the program was school-based. She added that she also has 30 college students from Fairfield University who volunteer, but that it is difficult to get college students involved on a regular basis.

Mrs. Gribbon said that the literacy program has experienced a lot of good successes because the volunteers bring many aspects to their volunteering and the love it, often telling her they get more out of it than the students. Co-Chair Olson asked about the ratio of men to women volunteers to which Mrs. Gribbon answered that there were more women, but that she would like more men to join.

Council Member Burns asked what Mrs. Gribbon sees as her needs. Volunteers and companies is what she answered, and continued that on the bottom of the Board of Education website is the Volunteer Association for anyone who wants to donate money. Co-chair said that maybe they could help recruit for that first big day to which Mrs. Gribbon added a suggestion that the City Council do Read Aloud Day, going as a group to schools and possibly choosing the school that is in their own district. Council Member Castillo said that he had done a Read Aloud at Discovery for a bilingual group. Mrs. Gribbon said that they do not have bilingual books for the most part, but the bilingual volunteers can be placed in bilingual classrooms.

Co-chair Olson then said that the question is whether the committee Members see this as a possible goal for the Committee. He said it is a very positive goal, and that there are twenty City Council Members who all have families. Council Member Burns added that, even though there is such a large need for volunteers in Bridgeport, this would be a good target for recruiting volunteers. Council Member Castillo remarked that it was during school hours and people are working to which Mrs. Gribbon agreed that it is a problem.

Aidee Nieves arrived at the meeting.

Co-Chair Olson asked where the Committee goes from here. Council Member Castillo interjected that he wanted to volunteer. Mrs. Gribbon said that a letter will be send out when Read aloud Day comes. Co-Chair Olson said that he would like to see the Committee have one goal in the coming year, but he said that it did not mean that other business could not be brought up at the meeting. He said if they meet in July, they could make a plan and set goals, stating again that he was for it, it was do-able and that it would be successful. He said they needed successes and that no one hears about the good things.

**** COUNCIL MEMBERS BURNS MOVED TO APPROVE THE GOAL OF THE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE TO ACTIVELY STRIVE TO SUPPORT THE VOLUNTEER SERVICES ASSOCIATION.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER NIEVES SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Co-Chair Olson asked if there was any further discussion. Council Member Nieves answered

that there was and it related to the email from Kadisha Coates. Council Member Nieves said that Lighthouse will affect all of the Committee Members. She said there is no spot at Marin and that they are changing the Lighthouse program. Council Member Nieves read the email from Kadisha Coates, a Board of Education person and temporarily sat on the Board. The email stated that Lighthouse funds are being removed. She said that this is very harmful to Bridgeport families because summer programs will be closed, taking away the safety aspect and the continuation of summer reading for Bridgeport children. She said that Lighthouse is a nationally-recognized program and she wants to speak to the Board of Education. She said that parents have been calling her with their concerns.

Council Member Burns said that he saw Tammy who told him that the Board of Education had a deficit in generational costs and was, therefore, closing Lighthouse. He said the City provides the location sites for Lighthouse, but cannot afford the overhead costs anymore and wants Lighthouse to pay \$500,000 more for their program. He said that Mayor Ganim suggested splitting up money from the Youth Employment Fund and giving it to schools, but Council Member Burns added that he would have a problem with the pursuit of this plan.

Council Member Castillo brought up the Wakeman Boys and Girls Club which received \$1.4 million for Southport. He said that a total of \$2.8 million was given to Southport, and that they should go and get that money and give it to the Orcutt Street Boys Club to renovate the building.

Co-Chair Olson asked what the Committee could do. Council Member Castillo said that they had already signed off on this, adding they all did. Council Member Nieves said they need to look at the changes that the constituents will go through, mentioning that there are already latch-key children and there will be more without Lighthouse. Co-Chair Olson said that he did not know what to do. Council Member Casco said that Council Member Castillo's plan is good, but it is long-term. Council Member Castillo added that the Juvenile Facility is closing and that it would be a perfect building for the Boys and Girls Club. He said that they could go step-by-step and can save some kinds, adding that it could provide summer employment for kids and volunteers. Council Member Casco remarked that the facility should be used for something better. Council Member Castillo continued that renovating this facility could become headquarters for summer programs which would be put in place. Co-Chair Olson asked if they could get the money, and Council Member Castillo answered in the affirmative.

Council Member Casco passed out a budget draft to the Members stating that there is no increase in the budget. He said they should go to the budget meeting and he asked whether this problem was different than other problems. Council Member Nieves referred to Mayor Ganim, and then talked about the Lighthouse and how long it has been in existence, with Council Member Casco interjecting that the Board of Education will lose federal funds due to the Lighthouse problem. Council Member Casco then asked if Committee Members should go to the Mayor and talk to him. Council Member Smith reminded the Committee that there is an open-house meeting with the Mayor Ganim every Monday at 5:00. Co-Chair Olson suggested that they should all go and talk to him. Council Member Casco requested that the Members attend the Board of Education meeting after they go to the Mayor's open-house because the Board has been talking about budget cuts for language classes. Council Member Burns remarked that the meeting with the Mayor is good, but that this is a Board of Education issue. Co-Chair Castillo said perhaps the Mayor can find the money. Council Member Nieves added the possibility of the City footing the bill for the facilities. Council Member Burns said he thought the meeting with the Mayor is a

waste of time. Council Member Nieves asked about raises for Board Members and perhaps a cut could be recommended. Council Member Castillo suggested another possibility which was to go to the State Representatives to get the funds. Council Member Nieves reiterated the risk of losing federal funds if Lighthouse guidelines are not met. Council Member Smith said that those people at the 5:00 meeting on Mondays are the ones who made the cut.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.
** COUNCIL MEMBER NIEVES SECONDED THE MOTION.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nerina Kagan
Telesco Secretarial Services