

TO: Charter Review Committee
FR: Greenfield Resident, Retired Superintendent of Schools
DA: October 16, 2020
RE: Comments on Greenfield's City Charter

I hope something in these comments is helpful. Please let me know if I can be helpful in any way.

1. Section 5:2, page 19: Where it uses "its" in sentence about school committee publishing "its" budget, replace "its" with "the School Committee's" budget. A new interpretation was advanced that the budget published for public review was the superintendent's budget. For several years the school committee did not see or review the superintendent's budget until after it was sent to the news for publication.
If the expectation is that a published school district budget is the draft budget approved by the school committee for publication, then make this expectation explicit in the charter.
2. Page 21, Interdepartmental Transfers.
Make it clear that transfers from the school department's budget need school committee authorization.
Currently all requests for school district funding are in writing and there is school committee authorization through the warrant process.
But it was not this way—money was just transferred out of the school committee's budget without the sc's or superintendent's awareness. This wasn't devious in any way; charter wording allowed this practice. Add a few words...like "as endorsed by the school committee."
3. Section 4:2, page 17. Power of the School Committee Chairperson is Overstated
Current Charter Wording: The chairperson appoints members of all standing and special committees.
Suggested: The chairperson appoints members of all standing and special committees, **subject to school committee approval.**
Comment: School Committee policy on chairperson duties for at least two decades requires school committee endorsement of the chair's recommendation.

Excerpt from GPS Policy on Duties of Chairperson: "...appoint subcommittees, subject to Committee approval, and make chairperson assignments."
4. Other Comment on Standing Committees.
After several years of discussion, Greenfield's school committee policy on subcommittees still does not list any standing subcommittee. The last debate was whether or not the charge of a standing subcommittee should be clarified and in the policy. That wasn't resolved, either.
If having a standing subcommittee on budget, policy, program, and/or personnel is going to waiver from year to year based on politics, opinion, or turnover of members, I recommend the basic committees a school committee is expected to have be in the city charter.

I believe the basic, needed, ongoing, standing subcommittees for school systems are:

- *Budget and Finance, to stay abreast of and advise the school committee on the details and matters of budget and school finance, including grants, revenue, transfers, and capital needs,
- *Policy, to stay abreast of and advise the school committee on details and matters of the school district governance by policy system and its policies, e.g. recommendations for policy study, development, review, amendment, or rescission,
- *Personnel. GPS probably gives out 350-450 1099s. To stay abreast of and advise the school committee on matters of personnel, including but not limited to recruitment, induction, supervision, collective bargaining, concerns, needs, and trends.

I recommend that the school district's and city's committees on Ways and Means/Budget and Finance meet together frequently enough to have a relationship and talk about issues at hand and of common interest. I think these shared discussions around questions and strategies for city-wide financial stability should be warned public meetings.

Also, my experience has been that it seems difficult for the city and school committee to collaborate on personnel, except where required, as with insurance discussions. This is not uncommon as I recall from several times studying where this collaboration exists and has worked in Massachusetts. Maybe the charter could provide impetus and

structure for city and school district personnel subcommittees or their designees to meet together for purposes of sharing information and potential collaboration on practice and programs.

Case in point—when reviewing Family Medical Leave policy, I met with the city’s then HR director to look at the city’s Family Medical Leave policy. Both city and school have to comply with the same law. The policies were different but not for any reason I could see except both city and school district developed the policy for themselves. Both were out of date. Both needed reworking. Both required review of the Family Medical Leave provisions. It seems wasted energy for both school and city to separately research and rewrite the same compliance policy.

Another example: The guideline for main offices being opened or closed for inclement weather is different sometimes. Is there a reason or should there be a city agreement? Or is there agreement who employees call about retirement or health insurance (it is the same program for all employees). If school and city talked together even minimally regarding personnel and guidelines, maybe efficiencies could be found and agreed—like putting health insurance information on a website page for all Greenfield’s employees to use as a resource. Or a common guideline on something that is not school or city specific. This collaboration probably will not consistently happen for various reasons unless the charter builds in an expectation of occasional shared communication in the best interests of the city (without making a new layer of structure that is cumbersome).

Something like:

“The School Committee determines the standing and special committees needed to fulfill its duties and obligations, provided that at least there are standing committees for Budget and Finance, Policy, and Personnel. To foster information sharing and collaborative problem-solving, the chairpersons shall assure that quarterly or more frequent joint meetings are scheduled with the comparable city committee.”

And something like this be on the city side as well related to its standing committees.

5. School Committee Powers and Duties.

School Committee control of all school buildings and grounds needs to be worked into the charter. This issue of authority to make decisions about school buildings and grounds in my consistent experience is confused on both sides. A school committee must know what is happening to its buildings and grounds, control who is on them and when, who is putting in or modifying structures, etc. The city has programs and professional personnel which are terrific and definitely improve the school buildings and grounds; however, the school committee has to know what is proposed because it is responsible. The confusion is whether or not the school committee has to even be advised about proposed changes to school buildings and grounds.

Mass General Law, Chapter 43, Section 33a: School committee; powers and duties

Section 33. *Except as otherwise provided in this chapter and subject to any laws which limit the amount of money that may be appropriated in any city for school purposes, **the school committee**, in addition to the powers and duties conferred and imposed by law on school committees, may provide, when necessary, temporary accommodations for school purposes, may make all repairs, the expenditures for which are made from the regular appropriation for the school department, **shall have control of all school buildings and grounds connected therewith** and shall make all reasonable rules and regulations, consistent with law, for the management of the public schools of the city and for conducting the business of the committee.*

Excerpt from City of Fall River Charter, where this issue is addressed in charter wording. I have highlighted the words I recommend be included in a charter revision.

SECTION 4-5 SCHOOL COMMITTEE POWERS AND DUTIES.

The school committee shall have all powers which are conferred on school committees by the General Laws and the additional powers and duties provided by charter, ordinance or otherwise and not inconsistent with the General Laws. The powers and duties of the school committee shall include:

(a)

selecting and removing a superintendent of the schools who shall be charged with the administration of the school system, subject only to policy guidelines and directives adopted by the school committee and, upon the recommendation of the superintendent, to establish and appoint assistant or associate superintendents as authorized by the General Laws;

(b)

making all reasonable policies, rules and regulations for the management of the public school system and for conducting the business of the school committee as deemed necessary or desirable; and

(c)

adopting and overseeing the administration of an annual operating budget for the school department, subject to appropriation by the city council; provided, however, that the school committee shall have general charge and superintendence of all school buildings and grounds and shall furnish all school buildings with proper fixtures, furniture and equipment; provided further, that the school committee shall provide ordinary maintenance of all school buildings and grounds, unless a central municipal maintenance department, which may include maintenance of school buildings and grounds, is established; provided further, that whenever the school committee shall determine that additional classrooms are necessary to meet the educational needs of the community, at least 1 member of the school committee, or a designee of the school committee, shall serve on the agency, board or committee for the planning or construction of the new, remodeled or renovated school building.