

**CITY OF NORWALK
EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 4, 2010**

ATTENDANCE: Betsy Bain, Chair; Linda Wilock, Youth Services Director; Hyla Crane, Stepping Stones Museum; Cathy DeCesare, United Way Coastal Fairfield County; Dona Ditrio, Community Representative; Adele Gordon, Norwalk Smiles Director; Dr. Sally Grose, Community Representative; George Hensinger, Community Representative; Curtis Law, Norwalk Housing Authority Executive Director; Ligia Masilamani, Family & Children's Agency Maternal Child Program Director; Marie-Angie Nicolas, NCC Parent Representative; Mary Oster, Naramake Family Resource Center Director; Joan Parris, NCC Early Childhood Program Director; Rovitta Paul, The Children's Playhouse Preschool Director; Lynn Sadlon Moritz, Fox Run Family Resource Center Director; Victoria Schilling, Norwalk Health Department Coordinator; Jo-Ann Stabler, NEON/Head Start Early Childhood Director

STAFF: Barbara Smart, Rosalie Witt

OTHERS: Sonja Ahuja, Graustein Memorial Fund; Nancy Owens, Room to Grow Providers; Joyce Abate, Carousel, Mary Windt, Under One Roof, Mary Caldwell

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bain called the meeting to order at 9:38 a.m. Ms. Bain said that she was turning over the chairman of this particular meeting to Ms. DeCesare because she would like to make a motion of approval regarding the proposed structure.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

A. Discussion of School Readiness Administrative Funds

Ms. DeCesare said that she understood that the providers had a meeting yesterday and opened the floor to comments about the provider discussion. One suggestion was that the Council look at the \$25,000 and reduce all the programs accordingly. Ms. Smart said that Ms. Adams had spoken with her and that Ms. Adams had some suggestions about this.

Mr. Hensinger asked for clarification on what the purpose of the \$25,000 was. Ms. Wilock said that she personally thought it would cover basically the same items such as bookkeeping and other tasks. Ms. Bain said that the funds would be coming from the School Readiness Program and for the staff support. Mr. Hensinger asked if this would include the monitoring of the program. He also said that he understood it was a no bid contract. Ms. Bain said that the portion of funding for monitoring had been decreasing over the years as staff salaries and other costs went up. Ms. Bain then went on to explain the history of the monitoring position and how it developed over the years. Ms. Wilock said that originally, CES was paying for the position, but over the years, the State reduced and then cut the funding. Ms. DeCesare said that she thought Mr. Hensinger was asking how the funds could be spent more economically. Mr. Hensinger agreed.

**** MS. DITRIO THAT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL APPROVES THE USE OF THE \$25,000 FOR THE SCHOOL READINESS FUND FOR THE ASSOCIATED COSTS AND WILL CONSIDER THE SUGGESTIONS OF THE PROVIDERS IN THE ALLOCATION OF THE FUNDING.**

**** MR. LAW SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

B. Discussion of Management Structure

**** MS. BAIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE ORGANIZATION CHART THAT HAS BEEN DEVELOPED BY THE SUBCOMMITTEE AS SUBMITTED.**

**** DR. GROSE SECONDED.**

Ms. Schilling then read the following statement into the record:

“Good Morning! I am speaking from my perspective as Coordinator and co-chair of the Norwalk Healthy Families Collaborative Health Partners Committee of the Council, and member of the Management Structure Committee. I encourage us all to keep our primary focus today, and as we moved forward, on the well-being of children (from the pre-natal period to age 8), sustaining and strengthening our quality School Readiness and family support programs, moving ahead with implementing the Early Childhood Action Plan strategies, evaluating our progress and developing the next 2-3 year plan, base on that evaluation. The NECC has so many excellent early childhood programs in place, School Readiness, Brookside, Brighter Futures, to name a few, and we are very fortunate and excited to have the opportunity to establish the Child FIRST program in Norwalk, to support the healthy development of Norwalk’s most vulnerable babies and young children. I would like to encourage us all to keep the NECC vision, as stated in Snapshots of Success, first and foremost, “Norwalk children, birth to 8, are healthy, ready to learn, and

succeed in school and in life.” What I had planned to say was that Linda will now present the Structure Committee’s report and resolution, which are the result of many hours of hard, sustained and successful deliberations.”

Ms. Wilock said that she and Mr. Law had a meeting with the Mayor earlier in the day. Mr. Law said that the Mayor had indicated he had met with Ms. Bain months ago that he believed that the Early Childhood Coordinator would report to him. Mr. Law said that he was not happy with the amount of time and effort spent working on the structure of the Early Childhood Council only to be told that the City had made the decision already. He said that the proposed structure before the Council was incorrect because the Early Childhood Council staff would report directly to the Mayor. Ms. Schilling said that if a decision had been already made, Ms. Bain should have reported this to the Council. Ms. DeCesare said that if this is what has occurred, then the Council needs to consider it. Mr. Law said that the Mayor had said he would be more than happy to come to the meeting. Several people suggested that someone check to see if the Mayor was available to attend the meeting.

Ms. Bain said that she had known that the Mayor had made this decision, she would not have brought up the conversation at the January 13th meeting. There were discussions and alternative decisions were considered. She said that she had not heard anything definitive until this past Tuesday. Part of the purpose plan was to get the Council members’ approval to start discussions with the school system for clarification on the staff positions. She said that if the Council felt that that her position and her actions were unacceptable, she was willing to step down as chair. Ms. Wilock said that during the meeting with the Mayor earlier, it was the first time she had heard that there were discussions with the Personnel Department about this issue.

Ms. Budrawich said that she had attended one of the meeting, and after the discussion, she had left that meeting with no indication as to the fact that a decision had been made. Dr. Grose said that she was present at the Structure Committee meetings, and the group felt that there was something blocking progress. Dr. Grose said that she had some questions about why the Mayor made this decision, who was involved in the decision and what prompted this.

Mr. Hensinger asked Ms. Bain if she recommended that the Early Childhood Coordinator report to him. Ms. Bain then reviewed the key points of the discussions with the Council and mentioned that having the Coordinator report to the Mayor had been mentioned. The discussion then moved whether or not the Office of Early Childhood Education had been discussed at the January meeting.

Mr. Law said that when he spoke with the Mayor about this, the Mayor told him and Mr. Haselkamp that the position of the Early Childhood would be reporting to him before the

Mayor had even seen the structure of the Council. Ms. Budrawich suggested that the Council vote on their proposed structure and then bring that to the Mayor.

Ms. DeCesare said that she thought it would be important to have the reasons why the Council objected to having the Early Childhood Coordinator report to the Mayor. Ms. Sadlon said that she saw age discrimination because the staff member who had been working on Early Childhood had her position eliminated and then a new position was created. She said that she personally did not want to be part of pushing people out to pasture.

Ms. Schilling said that Ms. Bain and others had taken it upon themselves to go to the Mayor without notifying with the rest of the Council. Ms. Schilling said that there was no written policy or procedures about this and this should be done for the future. She said that this was disrespectful to people's time and work to have this done in this manner. This was not a democratic process.

Mr. Hensinger said that he had always been an advocate of the Early Childhood, but he did not want to arrive at this point in this manner and felt that the process was broken.

Ms. DeCesare said that the Council could put on the record that this was their recommendation and let the Mayor decide how he will handle it.

It was pointed out that half of the people present were part of the Structure Committee and it would help to hear from those who were not on the Structure Committee.

Ms. Ditrio expressed some concerns regarding the Steering Committee and that several of the members appeared to be paid positions. This could lead to the employees making decisions for the Council. She thought that one of the goals was moving back toward having the members of the Council dictating the direction of the program. Ms. Wilock said that she could speak to the bylaws and gave a brief overview of those bylaws to the Council members. She indicated that several of those listed positions were paid employee but they were not paid from Early Childhood Council. Ms. Ditrio said that this brought the Council back to the employees deciding for the Council. Ms. Ditrio said that the bylaws need to be looked at. Discussion followed about the various positions on the Steering Committee.

Mr. Hensinger pointed out that there had been lengthy discussion about the structure, but little discussion about the Steering Committee. He suggested that the box remain, but read that it would be determined since the bylaws would trump the decision made by the Council regarding who was on the Steering Committee.

Ms. Bain said that she would like to hear some thoughts on how the Council would tackle some of the issues and the roles and responsibility of the various positions. Ms. DeCesare said that she appreciated this but would like to hold that for a moment.

Ms. Sadlon said that there was some discussion about the fact that Parent Coordinator was not included in the chart. She then explained her understanding of the term “Parent Coordinator” and said that she believed the term should have been “Family Support Coordinator”. She said that the Family Support would be Goal 3 and the Health Coordinator would be Goal 2. Discussion followed.

Ms. DeCesare asked if the Structure Committee discussion had considered whether the current committee structure was the best support for the Council. Ms. Schilling said that there had been discussion and a complicated chart developed, but it was not included in the current proposal.

Ms. DeCesare said that in the January 13th meeting there had been a discussion on the Brighter Futures program and there was no funding from the Early Childhood funds for the program. Ms. Budrawich said that there never had been any funding from the Early Childhood program for Brighter Futures. Ms. Sadlon said that the program was a strategy for Goal 1, but the Early Childhood Council never had any leadership or funding in the program. When asked, Ms. Budrawich said that the programs were independent of the Council. Discussion followed about the strategies that the Council has and how the programs that support the strategies are linked to the Council. Ms. Bain said that there was never an intent to tell the programs that support the strategies how to run their programs or take ownership of the programs.

RECESS

A recess was called at 10:45 a.m. the Council reconvened at 10:55 a.m.

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE WITH THE DISCUSSED CHANGES TO THE STEERING COMMITTEE, HEALTH COORDINATOR, AND ONE TYPOGRAPHICAL CORRECTIONS ON THE SR PROVIDERS PASSED WITH FIFTEEN IN FAVOR (BAIN, CRANE, DECESARE, DITRIO, GORDON, GROSE, HENSINGER, LAW, MASILAMANI, OSTER, PARRIS, PAUL, SADLON, SCHILLING AND STABLER) – AND THREE ABSTENTIONS (WILOCK, NICOLAS AND BUDRAWICH)**

Ms. Ditrio asked how the City and the School District would advertise the positions. Ms. Wilock reviewed the details of how the City advertises and interviews the candidates. Ms. Ditrio asked about whether the Council member would be able to participate in the interviews. Ms. Budrawich said that there had been Council Members involved in the

past. Ms. Ditrio pointed out that people do not normally check websites. Ms. DeCesare said that she would like to have this put forward for further discussion.

Ms. Schilling said that she would like to see the Structure Committee approach the Mayor with the new structure. Ms. Bain said that she felt she would not be comfortable being part of this. Mr. Law, Mr. Hensinger and Ms. Ditrio will speak to the Mayor as soon as possible and report back to the full Council. Discussion followed about how this issue would be approached.

C. Approval to Submit Graustein Grant based on decision on management structure

Ms. DeCesare said that the deadline for this grant was February 26th. Ms. Bain said that the grant application requires the signatures of the Mayor, the Superintendent of Schools, the Health Department and the Early Childhood Council for submission. Discussion about which options should be selected followed.

Ms. Ahuja said that what she was hearing from the discussion was that the Mayor was very invested in the Early Childhood Council and he supports the concept. She said that she believed that the Council was already 80% down the pathway. The ideas that were raised today included the community support of the plan and the idea that the Council was looking at a birth to 8 agenda, which are the kinds of items that the Council will need to be clear about on the application.

Ms. Schilling said that her understand of the Discovery initiative was that Graustein Fund supports the communities in developing their path. She said that she heard it was okay to be moving towards the Office of Early Childhood rather than having arrived. Ms. Ahuja agreed and said that there are issues, but it would be important to deal with them because they have come to the surface. This is where many collaborative have problems. It will be important to have the various voices acknowledged as time goes on.

Ms. Ahuja said that many of the issues she was hearing were from the self-assessment that the Council did back in August or September. It would be good to revisit the assessment. She also asked the Council members to consider what the eight elements of the plan really mean. One piece is oversight and accountability and the second part was the financing.

Ms. Sadlon asked who had the self-assessment information. Ms. Wilock said that she believed she had a copy. Copies will be sent to all Council members.

The discussion then moved to who would write the grant. Ms. Peniston wrote the grant application last year. Ms. Wilock said that she had planned to write the grant, but a few days ago, she had stepped back because of other considerations. Ms. Ditrio said that she

did not recall any meeting where someone had said there was no one to write the grant. Ms. Budrawich recounted her recollection of various conversations that took place at a Steering Committee retreat in July and the Structure Committee meetings where it was pointed out that Ms. Peniston was no longer available to write the grant. Ms. Wilock pointed out that the Graustein RFP had not arrived until two days after the January meeting. At the second Structure Committee meeting, Ms. Wilock said that this had been discussed. Ms. Bain said that when Ms. Peniston's position was cut, she had spoken with Ms. Pytlesky, the City grant writer, who had graciously offered to help. She said that the Council had not needed Ms. Pytlesky's assistance before, but might need her assistance now.

**** MS. SADLON MOVED HAVE COPIES OF THE GRANT APPLICATION FORWARDED TO COUNCIL MEMBERS WHEN IT IS NEAR COMPLETION TO INSURE TRANSPARENCY.**

The discussion moved forward without a second or a vote being taken.

Ms. Wilock said that there were a number of issues that needed to be resolved before the grant could be written. Asking for an extension was also briefly discussed.

**** MS. BAIN MOVED THAT THE COUNCIL AUTHORIZE HER TO SIGN THE GRANT APPLICATION, WHICH WILL BE SUBJECT TO RATIFICATION BY THE COUNCIL AT THE MARCH MEETING.**

**** MS. DITRIO SECONDED.**

Ms. Sadlon said that Ms. Caldwell, who is a free lance grant writer, was present in the room. Ms. Caldwell said that she was not a free lance grant writer per say, but had worked on grant applications in the past.

**** THE MOTION TO AUTHORIZE MS. BAIN TO SIGN THE GRANT APPLICATION, WHICH WILL BE SUBJECT TO RATIFICATION BY THE COUNCIL AT THE MARCH MEETING PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. PARRIS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. HENSINGER SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

City of Norwalk
Early Childhood Council
Special Meeting
February 4, 2010
Page 7

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

