CITY OF NORWALK
EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 13, 2010

ATTENDANCE: Betsy Bain, Chair; Linda Wilock, Youth Services; Mary Budrawich, Early Childhood Specialist; Lauriston Avery, Five Mile River Nursery School; Cathy DeCesare, United Way Coastal Fairfield County; Dona Ditrio, Community Representative; Barbara Fitzpatrick, Star Rubino Center; Adele Gordon, Norwalk Smiles; Dr. Sally Grose, Community Representative; Sherelle Harris, Norwalk Public Library; Curtis Law, Norwalk Housing Authority; Ligia Masilamani, Family and Children's Agency; Marie Angie Nicolas, Norwalk Community College Parent Representative; Joan Parris, NCC Early Childhood Program; Rovitta Paul, The Children's Playhouse; Lynn Sadlon, Fox Run Resource Center; Victoria Schilling, Norwalk Health Department; Jeanne Taylor-Hard, Parent Representative; Jo-Ann Stabler, NEON Child Development

STAFF: Barbara Smart, NECC; Rosalie Witt NECC

OTHERS: Akisha Cassermone, ECC Parent Circles Coordinator; Nancy Owens, Room to Grow; Anthony Allison, NCF; Marria Sentero, NEON Child Development

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bain called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m.

APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER MINUTES

The following corrections were made:

Page 1, under **ATTENDANCE**: please add "Victoria Schilling, Norwalk Health Department"

Page 1, under **OTHERS**: please removed "Victoria Schilling, NHFC"

Page 3, under **United Way Grants,** line 1: please change "Ms. Dices are" to Ms. DeCesare"

Page 3, **MOTION**: please change the following from:

**** MS. SCHILLING THEN MOVED THAT THE NORWALK EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL AUTHORIZE BETSY BAIN TO SIGN A LETTER SUPPORTING MFCGC'S APPLICATION TO REPLICATE THE CHILD FIRST PROGRAM IN NORWALK.**
**** MS. BAIN SECONDED.**

TO:

**** MS. SCHILLING THEN MOVED THAT THE NORWALK EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL AUTHORIZE BETSY BAIN TO SIGN A LETTER SUPPORTING MFCGC'S APPLICATION TO REPLICATE THE CHILD FIRST PROGRAM IN NORWALK.**
**** MS. PARRIS SECONDED.**

Page 7, under **OTHER UPDATES**, paragraph 4, please change the following from:

> Ms. Sadlon said that because Family Resource Centers are part of the three strategies, their funding has been reduced.

TO:

> Ms. Sadlon said that Family Resource Centers serve the three goals of the Council and that their funding has been reduced.

Page 7, under **OTHER UPDATES**, paragraph 5, please change the following from:
> "a plan in place so that when opportunities" to " a plan in place so that when opportunities arise they can be utilized."

**** DR. GROSE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 18, 2009 AS CORRECTED.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

GOOD NEWS

Ms. Shilling said that she would like to thank the Council for their support for the Replications of the Child First grant. The application had been submitted on December 11 and the grant funding has been awarded. She reviewed the details of the grant with the Council. Intensive training will be provided to all Child First sites. Ms. Bain said this fit in perfectly with Goal Two of the Action Plan and this may have positioned the application well. Discussion followed.

Ms. DeCesare said that the speed that the Council was able to move on this issue indicated that there was cooperation among the various agencies. Ms. Shilling thanked the all the various agencies involved.

Ms. Ditrio requested that the other items be tabled and that the Council move to the Management Structure. Ms. Bain said she would just like to announce that the School Readiness Fund may receive an additional $25,000 from the State for administrative costs. The Council then moved to the Discussion of the Future Management Structure.

DISCUSSION – Future Management Structure

Ms. Bain reviewed the structure of the discussion and said that Ms. Ahuja from Graustein Memorial Fund would be taking notes of the questions, which would be handled first. Comments and concerns would follow after the questions are addressed.

Ms. Bain reviewed the previous management plan discussions and reminded everyone that the City budget process was underway. Last year, the District budget had a significant impact on the Early Childhood Council. There are several factors that will affect the upcoming budget. Ms. Wilock said that she had discussed potential changes in her job description with Mr. Hamilton. Ms. Budrawich will be retiring in June and transition will be important. Another issue is the Brighter Future and Brookside program need to move forward now. The Graustein Memorial Fund will be issuing an RFP in the near future. Ms. Bain reiterated the potential for the use of the $25,000 for administration for the School Readiness Grant. The Mayor and the Interim Superintendent have asked the various councils and committees to provide them with management plans. Ms. Bain said that with the changes, as Chair, she was now performing some tasks that had formerly done by the staff. She said that she would not be able to maintain this level of involvement in the future.

Ms. Budrawich then reviewed the information contained in a handout diagram, including the various committees and their purposes. Ms. Budrawich then reviewed the various staff responsibilities prior to the last round of budget reductions. There were 4 full time employees along with .4 full time employees as outline on page 2 of the yellow handout. She then reviewed the various positions that were unfunded and the responsibilities associated with those positions. These cuts basically equaled one full time employee. The Early Childhood Instruction Specialist will continue.

Ms. Budrawich said that there had been numerous discussions regarding goals that the Council would like to achieve, but it would be important to plan how the Council would achieve these goals. Following the elimination of the Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, discussion began about how to manage the goals, priorities and programs in the current economic situation. Ms. Budrawich said that the Council had four full time employees and would like to retain all four positions. One of them will be the Early Childhood Instructional Specialist, which has a salary around $110,000. The School Readiness Assistant is expected to remain untouched as a Board of Education employee, although the position is supervised by the Youth Service Director, a City position.

Ms. Budrawich then reviewed the proposed Coordinator position and the restructuring of the responsibilities that fell between the cracks with the staff reductions. Currently, there is $40,000 in the budget committed by the City. However, it is early in the budget process. Another possibility in terms of locating the remaining amount for the salary, for funding may be from the Graustein Grant. A third possibility would be to use the $25,000 from the School Readiness funding. Ms. Budrawich said that she did not know how much the benefits would cost. She pointed out that it is never comfortable to build something with grant funding. However, there needs to be a commitment from the City that when the economic improves, the City will take over the financial responsible.

Ms. Budrawich then reviewed the two programs, Brighter Futures, and the Brookside program. Going forward, the program manager for Brighter Futures, the current manager will not be continuing. Ms. Budrawich said that Brookside would need a better structure to allow it to receive accreditation. Ms. Budrawich then asked the Council to consider allowing her to undertake the private fund-raising for Brighter Futures and Brookside. Ms. Budrawich explained that conversations have already taken place with potential funding sources regarding longer terms funding for the Coordinator position. Interest has been expressed.

Ms. Bain then turned the meeting over to Ms. Ahuja to conduct as a disinterested facilitator.

• It was asked whether the Council received any funding for managing Brighter Futures. Ms. Budrawich said that currently the Council does not receive funds from the program.

• It was asked how Brighter Futures different from other programs and how the fees are collected. Ms. Budrawich explained that Brighter Futures is a six week summer program for transition to kindergarten for those who have not had a previous pre-school experience. This includes bus transportation and breakfast. This is not a school readiness program.

The Brookside program is similar to the School Readiness program. Ms. Budrawich then reviewed the details of the School Readiness types of programs. Brookside receives a combination of School Readiness funds and private funding and therefore must receive accreditation. The fees are funneled back into the program. The teachers and paraprofessionals are union positions.

• Ms. DeCesare said that as one of the funders present, she felt it would be important to have a robust management plan and that the conversation should focus on the total program. When asked if there was a timeline in place, Ms. Bain said that there were a number of programs that needed decisions made soon. It would be important to have a sense of the Council by the end of the meeting. The Graustein RFP will be issued by January 15th and then there will be a six week window to submit applications.

• It was noted that there was a major shift in the responsibilities for the Instructional Specialists. Ms. Budrawich said that the job description had not differed from the job description she had applied for, other than the additional of Brighter Futures. It was commented that it appeared that the position was becoming more and more of a leadership position. She suggested that the Council consider use of consultants.

• When the BOE budget goes before the BET, the parents will be out in force to support the legally required programs for K-12. All the supporters of Early Childhood should consider attending those meetings to express support for the Early Childhood programs.

• It was stated that there were some significant differences between the Brookside program and the other Early Childhood programs regarding having a director on site and must generate their income from their fees. Concerns about the parity of the programs were expressed.

Ms. Bain said that ultimately, she felt that a position was needed to manage the overall proposal. Ms. Ahuja agreed and said that she felt that it would be important to acknowledge the overall aspect, but recognize that some of the programs would need to be re-examined.

The discussion then moved to the impact of these restructuring changes on the Youth Services. Ms. Budrawich explained that in the effort to retain the four full time positions from the past, the Youth Service portion of the program was not included. One proposal was to combine the proposed Youth Children's Services with the Early Childhood Program Manager. Ms. Bain said that one issue would be that City employees cannot manage school programs.

• It was pointed out that the major focus and funding of the Council had been on School Readiness and that in the intervening time, the Council has expanded its scope. Pulling back to focus on School Readiness first may be necessary. The providers that have been involved from the beginning need the Council's support.

• The next question focused on the structure of the Graustein Fund. Ms. Ahuja explained that the fund has a structure of up to $50,000 for the first two years, and then a decreasing scale for the amount for the following years. Ms. Ahuja reviewed the details of this and explained that there is a requirement of matching funds from the community. However, when the Fund awards funding, it is a firm commitment.

• It was also stated that there were a small group in the Council who would like the opportunity to draft an alternative plan. Ms. Bain said that originally, her hope was that Council members would have gotten back to her before the meeting, because the Council is not scheduled to meet again until March. Scheduling a special meeting was suggested.

When Ms. Ahuja was asked if she felt that a discussion was actually taking place. Ms. Ahuja said that her understanding of Ms. Bain's original structure was to have people express their questions, and concerns and then come back to deal with the various issues.

• Clarification regarding the various positions' accountability was then requested.

• Another question was raised as to why Brookside was included in this proposal.

• The fact that the Council had grown over the years was pointed out and the fact that the Council was now being asked to do more with less was expressed.

• It was pointed out that there were a number of groups that are already involved in parent engagement and that it might be beneficial to have those groups at the table to reach out to the parents.

• When Ms. Budrawich retires, the Council will lose a significant amount of institutional knowledge. It will be important to preserve the institutional knowledge.

• The Brookside program provides a valuable program for those families who want a partial day program. However, it is a Norwalk School position and the District should be responsible for the Director. It was then suggested that perhaps the position could be split into two positions. Ms. Budrawich explained that the job might have union implications.

• A question was asked regarding the history of the proposed plan. Ms. Bain and Ms. Budrawich then reviewed the events leading up to the 2010-2015 Early Childhood Plan. Ms. Bain pointed out the proposed plan was a starting point for the Council.

• It was suggested that a Special Meeting be scheduled so that the various concerns be addressed before the Graustein Grant application deadline. Concerns about the Norwalk Health Families Collaboration initiative moving forward and being sustained, along with the work being done on children's dental work, providing information about HUSKY and various other health services for the Norwalk residents were raised. It was also suggested that perhaps an interim management plan be created that would build towards a plan with new staff. It would be important to have another opportunity to discuss these issues further.

• Concerns were voiced about the financing were raised and whether or not there was a fall back plan.

• It was pointed out that the positions were presented as isolated items and the relationship with the other departments is critical. Having specific hierarchy laid out would be critical.

• While it would important to have an office of Early Childhood in Norwalk, at this time, it might not be appropriate. It was then suggested that it might be better as a part of Youth Services, which would establish services from birth to 18 to provide continuity.

• Issues about the students in the Norwalk Public Schools who fail needs to be addressed and the community needs to take responsibility for this.

• Having input from all the stakeholders would be important.

• Currently, the action plan is from 2007-2010 and currently the Council is just in the very early portion of 2010. Sharing the different visions will be important and discussing these various goals and coordinating the work, which needs to continue.

Ms. Ahuja said that planning for follow up and whether an additional meeting needs to be scheduled.

When asked what Ms. Bain expected from the discussion, Ms. Bain explained that she hoped people would realize the complexity of the Action Plan. It would also be important to remember that the paid staff were either employees of the City or the School District and that the employers could direct them at will. She would like to see a team working together that could focus on the issues. The Council is a policy setters, and advisors. The Council can not do the work.

The discussion then moved to what the City's direction was for the Early Childhood Council and the events leading to the current situation. Ms. Bain said that having someone who was staff that was 100% devoted to Early Childhood. Ms. Ahuja pointed out that the staff would be doing the work on the Council and responsible to but not employed by either to the District or to the City. There is a balancing act between the direct supervisor, such as the Mayor, Superintendent, or others, and what the Council requires. There may be priorities but there are also urgencies that have to be addressed.

Ms. Budrawich said that she was hearing that it would be important to have a Special Meeting so that a group could take the proposed plan and work on an alternative. Discussion then followed about who would be part of the working group who would have to recognize the constraints of the timeline.

There was a brief discussion about Brighter Futures and Brookside. Ms. Bain pointed out that this was part of the Norwalk Public Schools.

Ms. Bain suggested a meeting on Wednesday, January 20th from 1-4 p.m., location to be announced. Ms. Smart will notify the members and will schedule the room. The Special Early Childhood Council will be on February 4th from 9:30-11:30 a.m. February 5th will be the snow date.

UPDATES – GRANTS

A. School Readiness Grant
B. Quality Enhancement Grant
C. Graustein Grant
D. United Way
E. Monitoring Update

There was no additional information on any of the grants that had not already been discussed.

OTHER UPDATES (As Time Permits)

There were no additional updates.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no additional announcements.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Bain adjourned meeting at 12:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services