

WINCHESTER COMMON COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2009
MINUTES
5:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Councilor Michael Butler, Evan Clark, Milt McInturff, Les Veach and John Willingham; Vice-President Art Major; Mayor Elizabeth Minor; President Jeff Buettner. (8)

ABSENT: Councilor John Hill. (1)

President Buettner called the joint meeting of the Common Council and the Winchester School Board to order at 5:37 p.m.

Items for Discussion:

City Manager Brannon Godfrey stated the outcome of the Council Retreat was a new mission statement and vision, defined core services and updated goals. In regards to education, the goals are to raise the education level in the city and to have a prepared work force. The specific criteria for the goals are to have 100% participation in the Virginia Workplace Readiness Certificate Program, increase the graduation rate, and increase the number of citizens with a post high school education.

President Buettner stated after looking at the State versus Winchester, the thought was we need improvement to become a community of choice and we need to change the approach to make those improvements happen. Our first goal is to meet with all of the boards and commissions. However, education impacts them all so we need to determine how to get both bodies to work towards these goals.

School Board Chairman Barry Deuel stated the board shares the vision and welcomes the opportunity to work with Council.

Superintendent Dennis Kellison stated all three goals represent what the schools are working on and their desire as well. He presented data comparing Winchester to school systems throughout the state and stated Winchester's disadvantage is the growing population of disadvantaged students. The schools are trying to have specialized services for these students but that affects the cost. To increase the education level, staff is trying to beef up the dual enrollment classes and work related classes. Eighty-nine percent of the students graduate with an advanced studies or standard diploma. Winchester's current graduation rate is 69.8% and the state rate is 81.3%. Staff has procedural problems that needed to be resolved with tracking where the student went after leaving the schools. Staff is looking at ways to get the dropped students plugged back into the system. The summer graduates and GEDs are counted in the No Child Left Behind graduation rate but not in the State rate. Staff is working on getting students more technical training but he asked for feedback on if Council expects the Workplace Readiness Certificate to be graduation requirement or not.

Chairman Deuel opened the floor for discussion.

Councilor Willingham stated Council is holding themselves accountable to these goals. Every graduate should receive the Workplace Readiness Certificate not just those going to college. He suggested the schools look at the success received in Virginia Beach from using the program. Councilor Willingham stated he would like to see expansion on the current programs that are designed to take students from Handley to the work place so the median income will also increase.

Superintendent Kellison stated that some of their business partnerships are well defined but some are not and staff needs to figure out ways to open those doors.

Councilor Veach suggested looking at smaller businesses in town to develop apprenticeships as well.

President Buettner stated not all students take the college path. Not all bright students have an interest in college but they still need vo-tech skills to receive a better income.

Superintendent Kellison stated the focus has been to prepare students academically to give them a choice and to be successful. The downside of staying so focused throughout their senior year is they miss out on other opportunities.

School Board Member Randy Bryant stated there is a need for career technical education but the school can't lose sight of the federal mandates and requirements. The real test is how to blend all of the aspects together. It becomes difficult when the mandates go up and the levels of disadvantaged children go up. He suggested housing is also looked at.

President Buettner stated housing is also one of the goals set by Council.

Councilor Butler stated he agrees jobs have to be for the 21st century but the medical industry will demand 21st century skills too. Students need to be found and prepared towards those jobs. Other systems have merged technical training with academics and have students working in the community. The right path to achieve this needs to be found.

Chairman Deuel stated the schools are trying to take the same steps as well.

Vice-President Major stated citizens have the perception that the average level students do not get the best service, only the gifted or challenged student do. He asked how we can correct that perception. Council wants a system that will produce employable students. The mission is to attract better paying jobs and have the housing market to attract companies. He stated the community does not hear what is being done for the average students.

Superintendent Kellison stated he would argue that it is the thrust of the entire program. Schools do not want an average kindergarten student to be an average graduate. The goal is to challenge that student to be better than average. Advanced Placement is not only the

high end students. It is the average students that have stretched themselves. Advanced Placement classes represent the most challenging curriculum offered academically.

Councilor Butler stated trying to put students where they don't want to be is not doing them a service. The schools need to cultivate them to where they will be successful. Council's goals go directly to having people who want to stay in the community, have jobs that pay well, and want to contribute. We want to see jobs for those students.

Board Member Jeff Webber stated the schools make the students as good as they can be so they can have the choice.

Councilor Willingham stated education is a huge investment. He asked how a path could be found for the students who don't go away to college and still increase the incomes.

Mr. Bryant stated the real question is how to provide the citizens the best quality of life, not education. The best way is to accelerate the students. The schools job is to provide the best academic structure. How to keep them here is more than education, it's a quality of life issue. We need more recreational venues.

Vice-President Major agreed and stated Council set other goals to help in those areas. The School Board Members are the experts in education and Council is asking for their feedback.

School Board Member John Bishop stated he has also seen the perception and thinks there is more that can be done as far as the technical training.

Chairman Deuel invited the Councilors to look at the current programs at the high school to see the great things that are happening and what they are doing.

Councilor Clark suggested better marketing is needed to inform citizens of the good that is currently being done.

Adjournment:

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Kari J. Van Diest
Deputy Clerk of Council