

**BRIDGETON CITY COUNCIL & BRIDGETON BOARD OF EDUCATION
JOINT MEETING MINUTES
March 28, 2023**

A Special meeting of the Bridgeton City Council was held jointly with the Bridgeton Board of Education on Tuesday, March 28, 2023 5:30 p.m., at the City of Bridgeton Police and Municipal Court Complex, 330 Fayette Street, Bridgeton, New Jersey in Council Chambers.

The meeting was called to order by Council President Bethea.

The Statement of Meeting Notice was read by Municipal Clerk, Nichole Almanza;

Notice of this Meeting of the City Council of the City of Bridgeton, as required by N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., the "Open Public Meetings Act", has been provided by a Public Advertisement in the South Jersey Times, The Daily Journal on February 11, 2023, March 12, 2023 and March 14, 2023 and on the City Website setting forth the date, time and place of this meeting of the Bridgeton City Council.

The Mission Statement of the Bridgeton Public School District was read by School Business Administrator and Board Secretary, Nicole M. Albanese;

The Mission of the Bridgeton Public School District is to provide multiple pathways for all students to attain the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and meet the needs of our diverse student population. All students will be provided with the opportunity and resources to succeed through the creation of state-of-the-art safe learning environments, which will ultimately enable all students to graduate from high school and become productive members of a global community.

Invocation and Flag Salute was led by Mayor Kelly.

The following answered to roll call:

Councilwoman Rosemary DeQuinzio
Councilman J. Curtis Edwards
Councilman David Gonzalez
Councilwoman Marian King
Council President Edward Bethea

Also in attendance:

Mayor Albert Kelly	Administrator Kevin Rabago
Solicitor Michele Gibson	Municipal Clerk Nichole Almanza

Ms. Nicole Albanese requested a roll call of members; having only four members present, it was determined that the Board did not have a quorum of its members and adjourned their meeting.

City Solicitor, Michele Gibson indicated that due to the Board of Education not having a quorum present, that the meeting cannot be held as it was planned. Discussion ensued and it was determined to have the present board members sign in as Public Portion participants to be able to voice their concerns and remarks to Council.

Council President Bethea asked for a motion to change the agenda to allow Public Portion prior to Items for Discussion. The motion was made by Councilman Gonzalez and seconded by Councilman Edwards. The motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC PORTION:

Council President Bethea opened the meeting to the public for anyone desiring to be heard. It was motioned by Councilwoman King and seconded by Councilman Edwards the public portion be opened.

Andrea Gillis (Bridgeton, NJ address provided) discussed the Cumberland County Vo-Tech and how students are selected to attend the school. She explained that once they take the test, they are not provided any test results. She continued they are just told they have been selected or waitlisted. Ms. Gillis stated that the school is too small and does not allow enough students to attend.

Ms. Gillis suggested that nighttime adult learning classes be brought back to the area.

Ms. Gillis spoke of safety concerns regarding school bus drop offs on Laning Street and Laurel Street as students should actually be dropped off at Cohansey Street and Laurel Street. She stated that she has spoken with the bus driver but they indicate that there are no issues.

Ms. Gillis spoke of recent vandalizing of vehicles in Bridgeton where people are breaking windows and doors and stealing items.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley, President of the Board of Education discussed the selection process of the Vo-Tech and explained that it is not transparent with how many kids from each district get it or how the selection process actually works.

Dr. Keith Miles, Superintendent of Schools explained that they are provided an admissions list which shows about an average of 30 Bridgeton students.

Ms. Markida Taylor, Board Member, discussed hearing that Fairfield was allotted 6 spots and was curious if Bridgeton had a number as well.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley discussed a trade school in Elmer and suggested that Bridgeton look into bringing something into the City.

Ms. Markida Taylor spoke of a previously discussed articulation agreement with Rowan College for downtown Bridgeton.

Council President Bethea expressed his frustrations with the selection process of the Cumberland County Tech School. He agreed that they need to be more transparent and that it also needs to be fair and proportioned at the school.

Ms. Dionne Edwards, Board Member, discussed conversations held with the school for her child as to what they can do to prepare for the test and she was not provided any information.

Councilman Gonzalez discussed attending school in New York and explained that they always offered trade classes within the school to spark the interest in students.

Councilwoman King suggested that the City gets its own trade school or even look at another location for Vo-Tech classes.

Councilwoman DeQuinzio shared her agreement with Councilwoman King's comments. She described working with the Boys and Girls Club and seeing student's excitement of taking the exam and then the frustration and disappointment of being turned down.

Councilman Edwards explained he feels that it is a great school but it does have issues when it comes to being selected as a student. He also agreed that scores and acceptance should be transparent.

Council President Bethea discussed how years ago the schools were able to provide Vo-Tech classes to interested students.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley explained that it was a half day of in school and half day at Vo-Tech where the students were transported to and from.

Mayor Kelly discussed when he was in school that the vocational classes were actually held at the jail.

Council President Bethea suggested that if this is not working then maybe the Board of Education should look into bringing everything back in-house. He added that there are a lot of other options for students after high school other than college.

Dr. Keith Miles explained that with the expansion project they are looking to bring back some of these trade classes such as culinary and cosmetology. He also explained that they are looking to going back to traditional middle schools in the future which would provide the space to bring some of these classes back.

Ms. Markida Taylor discussed the wooded property located next to the High School and suggested building a middle school there.

Councilwoman King explained that she reached out to the Business Administrator for some information about this property and was told that the property is held with Green Acres. She continued that an application can be submitted with the worse case scenario being that it is turned away.

Business Administrator, Kevin Rabago discussed the restrictions provided by Green Acres and explained that when you take acres away from Green Acres you have to basically swap them with other equivalent property. He added that a public referendum may also be needed.

Councilwoman King suggested that we still try for the application as it would be a benefit for all.

Councilman Gonzalez discussed a previously held agreement with Rowan College where professors would come in and teach at the schools. He also suggested regarding out to various unions regarding apprenticeship programs.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley discussed college partnerships and asked if there were any updates on a satellite college being brought into the City.

Mayor Kelly explained that he has had meeting with Rowan College of South Jersey regarding transitioning non-credit programs into the City and stated he has another meeting with them tomorrow.

Business Administrator, Kevin Rabago explained that the City has applied for approval to use Urban Enterprise Zone funding for purchase 14-16 E. Commerce Street for the hopes that a campus can be placed there.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley suggested more trade classes be brought into that location as well.

Councilwoman King asked questions regarding the possible use of the schools in the evening hours such as 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. where classes can be held without the need to use this funding.

Discussions were held by multiple members of the Board and Council as to what would be needed to move forward with using the high school after hours rather than purchasing buildings. Business Administrator, Kevin Rabago stated he can provide the proposed information to Mr. Keating and see that there is a condition added that the City has preference.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley expressed her disappointment with the looks of some of the downtown storefronts. She stated that we need to change what people think we are. She suggested having competitions with the store that are open regarding their storefronts. Ms. Markida Taylor agreed and suggested that students may be able to decorate them.

Councilwoman King explained that a lot of the empty storefronts are privately owned and it is hard to get them to do anything unless there is some type of actual violation. She stated that she like the idea of having students helping decorate storefronts as a type of competition.

Council President Bethea stated that he was previously the President of Main Streets and they used to hold competitions of window displays and also had a façade program. Both Councilman Gonzalez and Councilwoman DeQuinzio provided some information regarding Main Streets.

Business Administrator, Kevin Rabago explained that the City recently hired a UEZ Coordinator who has met with Main Street to collaborate. He continued that she will also be meeting with store owners to provide information regarding funding.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley discussed the cameras that are located within the park and asked if something was to happen, how does the police department have access to the cameras.

Police Chief Michael Gaimari explained that remote access and taping is available to the Police Department as needed.

Chief Gaimari stated that he recently met with some of the schools regarding training for school shootings and would like to make a committee that can meet and discuss safety concerns. He suggested there being a master key for the Police Department to have access in the instance that an emergency is happening. He also suggested that directional signs and hallway names be placed to help Police get where there need to be.

Chief Gaimari also discussed the need of the schools upgrading their radio systems so they can speak with the Police Department and discussed how this is being handled right now. He also explained that the schools have “dead zones” that can be an easy fix.

Chief Gaimari suggested that the schools put together a Reunification Site for a centralized location meet up spot. He explained that most other schools have them in place utilizing other schools as their meet up location.

Mrs. Dionne Edwards suggested the current security guards have some training with the City of Bridgeton Police Department so everyone can be on the same page.

Council President Bethea asked status of cameras at other schools in the City. Ms. Nicole Albanese stated that the high school recently updated and Buckshutem Road School is upgrading now. She added that Quarter Mile Lane is next on the list for a camera upgrade.

Council President Bethea stated that this topic is the main reason why having this meeting is so important. He continued that these types of meetings need to continue and hope that this information is shared with the Board Members there were not in attendance.

Councilman Edwards spoke of the importance of Shared Services within our City. He provided the City Clerk with news article about Shared Services Agreements and the cost savings that can come with them.

Business Administrator, Kevin Rabago explained that we do have a couple Shared Services Agreements with the school such as crossing guard costs, park maintenance and the playing fields.

Ms. Nicole Albanese explained that the City maintenance and road crews often help as well. She also explained that with the recent construction being done on the high school, they have the license holders come to the City to get the permits rather than the Board of Education because the later would not have to pay the costs.

Mrs. Dionne Edwards and Ms. Nicole Albanese discussed the bus maintenance whereas Sheppard Bus Services helps with this.

Business Administrator, Kevin Rabago stated that the City does not have a lift available at this time but it is something that they are looking to have in the future. He suggested that an agreement take place if and when the City is able to get said lift.

Ms. Nicole Albanese stated that they are also looking for a place for school bus driving training to take place.

Councilwoman King thanked the district for their cooperation putting together the Markquese Bell celebration. She stated that she was happy that everyone pulled together and got it done.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley discussed the need of a recreation center being placed locally. She explained that her children often have to go out of the city for activities such as indoor soccer, hockey and basketball. She discussed what a great benefit having a recreation center would be for the children in the city.

Council President Bethea stated that he would like to also see recreation in school and after school. He discussed having the buildings open after school hours for things such as homework help and sports. He added that this resource is dramatically underutilized.

Councilman Edwards stated that he has attended a couple different meetings in hopes of bringing some sort of recreation center into the City. He continued that it is a long way from being able to be done and they would need partnerships to get it accomplished.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley suggested that there be some sort of shared City calendar. She explained there are a lot of events that take place within the City and most people don't know about them until they are done and over with.

Chief Gaimari explained that Hopewell Township used to provide a "reverse call" service whereas parents would receive a recorded phone call that would provide school and county activities to each household.

Councilman Edwards stated that he wishes that Council and Board of Education meeting were not held on the same days that way all can attend both.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley discussed funding that came from the Prosecutor's Office regarding gangs.

Chief Gaimari explained that these funds used to be provided, however, he is not sure that they still do.

Council President Bethea suggested a discussion can be held with the Prosecutor's Office regarding petitioning to use resources in our area.

Chief Gaimari provided information about the program "Youth Stat" where violent youth are identified and they are provided treatment and counseling.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley asked information regarding a "Ride with Me" program. Chief Gaimari explained the "Arrive Together" where a mental health professional is brought to certain calls. He continued that as of yet they have not addressed the use of this with the schools.

Mrs. Dionne Edwards suggested programs for Anti-Gangs and trauma and mental health for the schools.

Chief Gaimari stated that there is a Youth Tip Program where if a traumatic experience involved a student, the school is notified as a heads up.

Councilman Gonzalez discussed the need for counselors to be trained regarding human trafficking and explained that a lot of the kids feel unsafe to speak about these items in school. He continued that the school should be a safe haven for children and their families.

Dr. Keith Miles explained that Gateway also provided additional mental health counseling support at schools.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley discussed the various vacant properties that are in deplorable conditions.

Business Administrator, Kevin Rabago explained that with bail reform it makes it a lot harder to get things done in the Courts. He added that Code Enforcement does issue summons and violations.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley suggested an Underground Railroad Tour be put together in the City for a way to bring people in and promote the City.

Mayor Kelly stated that this has been done in the past and is something that he is currently working on again. He stated that Goultdtown is the oldest Black community in America and would love for it to be recognized.

Ms. Erica Williams-Mosley suggested that this could be a great field trip event for the school district. She also suggested that it could be a big City event where individuals could dress up and provide the tour.

Mayor Kelly discussed funding that is available for the Black Preservation Trail and stated that Cumberland County should be included on this.

Council President Bethea stated that there are a lot of historical cemeteries that need service such as cutting back brush. He added that these need to be taking care of so they can be marked for future generations to visit.

With no one else desiring to be heard, it was moved by Councilwoman DeQuinzio and seconded by Councilman Gonzalez the public portion be closed, which motion was carried. Council President Bethea closed the public portion of the meeting.

Council President Bethea called upon Mayor and Council for Closing Remarks:

Mayor Kelly – Thanked all for attending the meeting tonight and stated he is looking forward to the next one.

Councilwoman DeQuinzio – Stated that she was not sure what to expect tonight when she saw the agenda but felt it was a great meeting. She thanked all that attended.

Councilwoman King – Shared her agreement that this meeting was a great meeting and that it should happen more often.

Councilman Gonzalez- Thanked all that attended the meeting and stated that it shows that they care for the City and community just by showing up.

Councilman Edwards – Thanked all who attended and explained that they were here for the same reasons – the City and its residents.

Councilman Edwards suggested the next meeting discussions can be held regarding midget football, stadium issues, uniforms and grants. He also suggested speaking about shortage of crossing guards and where more are needed for the safety of the children.

Council President Bethea – Expressed his agreement with his colleagues' comments.

Council President Bethea explained that the City has reached out before about having a couple of joint meetings like the one tonight but they never happen. He continued that this is important for the Board and City to do and it was a missed opportunity by the ones who did not attend tonight.

Council President Bethea stated that he is working on Workforce Development and discussed recently meeting with a couple unions regarding apprenticeship programs.

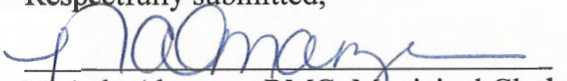
Council President Bethea thanked all that attended tonight. He thanked Council for the full attendance. He thanked Ms. Nicole Albanese and Dr. Keith Miles for attending. He thanked all City officials who attended as well.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, it was moved by Councilman Gonzalez and seconded by Councilman Edwards to adjourn the meeting which motion carried unanimously.

Council President Bethea adjourned the meeting which ended at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Nichole Almanza, RMC, Municipal Clerk

APPROVED


Edward Bethea, Council President

Date Approved: 4/4/2023