



CITY OF NOVI
Finance and Administration Committee Meeting
November 21, 2024, 5:30 p.m.
Novi Special Conference Room | Novi Civic Center | 45175 Ten Mile Road
(248) 347-0445

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Mayor Fischer, Council Members Casey, Staudt

STAFF LIAISON: Victor Cardenas, City Manager
Carl Johnson, CFO

ALSO PRESENT: Ben Mainka, Novi Community School District Superintendent of Schools
Paul Cook, President, Novi Community School District Board of Education
Willy Mena, Secretary, Novi Community School District Board of Education
Betsy Beaudoin, Trustee, Novi Community School District Board of Education
Jeff Muck, PRCS Director
Dan Commer, Planner
Katherine Oppermann, Recording Secretary

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: Casey; Seconded: Staudt; Approved 3:0

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – October 28, 2024

Motion: Casey; Seconded: Staudt; Approved 3:0

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

1. Capital Project Planning Collaboration
with Novi Community School District Capital Projects Committee (CPC)
Ben Mainka, Superintendent of Schools
Willy Mena, Secretary, Board of Education
Betsy Beaudoin, Trustee, Board of Education

Mayor Fischer thanked Superintendent Mainka and the Novi Community School District (NCSD) Board of Education members for joining to collaborate with the Committee and City staff. While all our partnerships with the local school districts are important, NCSD is the only one entirely encapsulated in the City of Novi so that all students and families served by the school district are also served by the City. He then turned the conversation over to City Manager Cardenas, who introduced the Novi Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Mr. Cardenas spoke about many of the upcoming projects, with a special focus on those that would affect NCSD such as roads. He also noted that he and Mr. Mainka have been working closely together on anything pertaining to the schools and that they are looking forward to potential future improvements (such as the parking lot).

Mr. Mainka concurred, stating that, in the part, the relationship between NSCD and the City of Novi hasn't always been as communicative but that he and Victor have been working to improve that collaborative spirit. Going forward, in addition to their own meetings, they're looking forward to periodically bringing together these governing bodies (Novi City Council and the NCSD Board of Education) to work together. He thinks that a better habit of getting together will improve and strengthen the relationship between the two entities even further.

Mayor Fischer then asked the School Board members for their input. Trustee Beaudoin stated that she had previously spoken with Mayor Pro Tem Casey about getting the Council and School Board together to ensure better transparency and to make sure that they are replicating efforts. Secretary Mena noted that he was hoping to discuss individual projects during the meeting. School Board President Cook said that they were looking to see what curriculums and buildings will be needed in the next 5 – 10 years. He wants the best for the community to for Novi Community School District to continue to be a draw for families. Trustee Beaudoin also briefly mentioned NCSD's plan for an activity center and how they are planning to have a bond proposal for it in the near future.

Mayor Pro Tem Casey appreciates the opportunity to continue dialogue with the NSCD, especially when it comes to sharing "big picture" plans. She believes that there will be many insights to share between the two groups, including those that will be discovered by the Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee as they work on the Community Strategic Plan.

Councilmember Staudt spoke on his long time serving on the City Council and that, in his past experience NCSD had made many promises and few deliveries. Though he did note that he appreciates Mr. Mainka and the Board delivering on the finalization of the long-running Bosco land exchange. He also talked about the potential of both the School Board and City proposing bonds to voters in the near future. He appreciates that they are different entities with a great deal of crossover as well as some differing priorities. But, with that said, it is his opinion that the proposal from the City regrading the Public Safety department is more foundation and important. Without an excellent Police Department the district wouldn't be the same. He is however, open to hearing from the NCSD. Councilmember noted that he wants more coordination on recreational programming between the schools and the City Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services (PRCS) department. He concluded by recognizing that, with Mr. Mainka as Superintendent and the current school board the working relationship between the entities has been better, this gives him hope.

Mayor Fischer agreed, stating that this is the best relationship they've had with the School District in all his time on City Council.

Mr. Mainka appreciates Councilmember Staudt's perspective. He's very excited about their current school board, they have an excellent team that works well despite and because of their differing viewpoints. He agrees that having a great Public Safety, PRCS, and City Administration are all part of being a top school district.

Regarding the Activity Center, he has been talking with student families and the school board and all expect an excellent, well-equipped facility. Mr. Mainka also spoke briefly about the changes to budget that were brought on by the Covid pandemic price influx, which impacted many of the plans that were made in 2019. He is very glad that they have been able to complete planned projects and still have funds available for an activity center, if not as much as they were initially hoping for. It is because of this, in part, that they will be proposing the upcoming bond. Community, Student, and programmer meetings have been had and there is a substantial high school project in addition to the activity center (plus various small repair and renovation projects). Additionally, there is a large discrepancy between Orchard Hills and the other district elementary schools which will need to be addressed.

Councilmember Staudt asked if the District had a Sinking Fund. Mr. Mainka replied yes, but their hands are tied as to what it can be used for. The sinking fund cannot be used to pay for new things and likewise, the bond cannot be used for repairs. He illustrated this by stating that the sinking fund would go to repair an old boiler, and the parts needed but that a whole new boiler would come from the bond.

Mr. Mainka also spoke on how dated the current school pool is, not at all on par with other area communities and that they have had chemical issues. Currently, the City does not have access to the school pool for programming since it is housed and accessed entirely from within the High school (for safety reasons). A new natatorium would offer the opportunity to the community for things like a warm water therapy pool and PRCS programming. The structure behind/in-front of it could offer other opportunities like an indoor track. He thinks that the City could potentially help with staffing and administration for such a facility. He also noted other potential future items like: a new tennis facility, an energy agreement with the City, better opportunities for tennis/pickleball, ITC park opportunities, reconfiguration of the current parking lot and entrances, additional turf fields, etc. Currently they have no asks of the City, they just want to make them aware of opportunities.

Councilmember Staudt spoke further on the bond competition issue. He thinks that the school bond is for "Wants" versus City Public Safety "needs" and that ultimately in a competition between the two that the City may lose out. He stated that he was shocked to hear that the school would be going for a bond in 2025, the same year planned for the City bond. He will be very disappointed if the City doesn't benefit in a "pool vs. police department" issue. It is his opinion that the fairer opportunity would be for the school to delay their bond by 6 months.

Mr. Mainka stated that he does not disagree that a Police Station is very important. But he thinks that the NCSD could use their communication channels to promote the Public Safety Bond. Regarding the date of the bonds, the school has a rolling bond for reasons of operations and cash flow. It is necessary to them to perform a "baton toss" to ensure continued smooth operations. To delay their bond would also slow construction and push back school projects since the infusion of new cash flow is necessary.

Trustee Beaudoin agreed that the School Board's intention over the last two years has been for the bond to go forward in 2025. She also thinks that this discussion speaks to the importance of meetings like this one and for coordination for the two entities.

Mayor Fischer recognizes the advantage of asking for the bond, the City is also making similar calculations for their ballot initiatives. Of the transformational projects currently under discussion the Public Safety facilities are the most pressing. As the Library will likely be going forward in 2026, he has been pushing for the 2025 August ballot though City Council has still not completely determined their funding mechanism. The CIP would also be a necessary renewal in the near future and, in necessary, the ask could be increased to include the Public Safety facilities and other projects.

Trustee Beaudoin noted that they will need to figure out the timeline, potentially in a separate meeting between Superintendent Mainka and City Manager Cardenas. She wonders if there might be a way to collaboratively fund projects.

Councilmember Staudt asked for clarification of when the "Field House" project moved to an "Activity Center" project. Mr. Mainka responded that, in the last school bond, it was qualified as an activity center but was not clearly defined. An "activity center" can mean different things to different people. School Board President Cook confirmed that the school district has always used the "activity center" terminology as it leaves more open opportunity semantically than "field house" which is limited more to sports.

Mayor Fischer spoke on the various City discussions that have been had on a community center/rec center/senior center. The shape varies but he recognizes the need expressed by residents. He also added that the community always wants such a facility until the dollar discussion starts. He appreciates the out-of-the-box thinking for a separate facility to mitigate school security concerns. He's encouraged and open to the discussion but doesn't want to keep the group too long beyond the hour on this occasion.

Mr. Mainka agreed that it is beneficial to discuss these projects and thinks that having a crossover presence of the School Board on City Committees would be good. He also thinks that there are opportunities to collaborate and have the City at school meetings. Mayor Fischer stated that this Committee (Finance & Administration) is the right elected body to continue having these discussions and noted that they can go to the school as well to meet. Mr. Mainka said that they would be happy to host.

Councilmember Staudt asked how far the NCSD would be willing to go to support the City Public Safety Bond. Mr. Mainka said that they would be happy and willing to go as far as is legally permitted to help. He thinks that, given what he knows of the community and parents, they would be supportive of a Public Safety bond/millage. The school could send out an informational item to students/parents, host a forum with the Police Department to speak to the parent body, etc.

Trustee Beaudoin was curious about what the plans for future use of the current Police Department building/land would be. Mayor Fischer said that this has been a topic of discussion. He does not think the building is very usable for other purposes and will likely need to be torn down. A determination for the space use still needs to be made. Trustee Beaudoin thinks a lot could come from these conversations and also noted that it is a huge benefit to the schools to have the Police Department nearby. Mr. Mainka noted that they could consider a Police Field office.

The group spoke a bit further about potential collaborative uses for the activity center/ natatorium. Mayor Fischer thinks that there are a lot of interesting "nuggets" as to what can be done. As school plans get closer to finalization, they can talk more about the City's ability to fund/assist on projects. They must balance their priorities, but all that has been brought up is very worthy of discussion. He asked staff to look through past surveys to examine specific community asks.

As the Parks Commission meeting was planned to start shortly at 7:00pm and would involve some NCSD student initiatives it was decided to adjourn the meeting.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS - none

ADJOURNMENT: 6:49 p.m.

Motion: Fischer; Seconded: Casey; Approved 3:0