

CITY OF ST. JOHNS
CITY COMMISSION MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING
JANUARY 13, 2025

The special meeting of the St. Johns City Commission and St. Johns School Board was called to order by Mayor Dzurka and President Boak at 6:00 p.m. at the Clinton County Courthouse, 100 East State Street, 2nd Floor, Suite #2200, St. Johns, Michigan.

CITY COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:	Eric Hufnagel, Brad Gurski, Scott Dzurka, Chris Hyzer, Chris DeLiso
CITY COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:	None
STAFF PRESENT:	Chad Gamble, City Manager; Mindy J. Seavey, City Clerk; Kristina Kinde, City Treasurer; Justin Smith, Director of Public Services; David Kirk, Police Chief
SCHOOL DISTRICT:	Matthew Boak, Scott Darragh, Robert Watson, Alan Nelson, Christi Mansfield, Jessica Parker-Sternburgh, Brian Randolph
SCHOOL DISTRICT STAFF:	Dr. Anthony Berthiaume, Aleisha Wenzlick

Agenda

Mayor Dzurka asked if there were any additions or deletions to the agenda.

Motion by Commissioner Gurski seconded by Commissioner Hyzer that the city commission approve the agenda as presented.

YEA: Hufnagel, Gurski, Dzurka, Hyzer, DeLiso

NAY: None

Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Hufnagel seconded by Commissioner DeLiso that the city commission approve the special joint meeting minutes City Commission & Bingham Township from January 7, 2025.

YEA: Hufnagel, Gurski, Dzurka, Hyzer, DeLiso

NAY: None

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Motion carried.

Introductions of attendees were conducted.

Public Comments

School Board President Boak and Mayor Dzurka asked if there were any public comments.

There were none.

A. City Update (Fantasy Forest)

City Manager Gamble discussed:

- The Fantasy Forest 2.0 project is a significant community partnership and generational project.
 - The project started almost two years ago with community input.
 - The master plan includes a \$2.4 million design with \$694,000 in grant funds.
 - The playscape includes universal design features for accessibility.
 - The project has raised about \$1.8 million so far.
- Next Steps
 - Issue the bid for the installation of the playscape equipment and begin construction.
- The Fantasy Forest 2.0 project is progressing with community support and aims for completion with a ribbon-cutting event in late summer or early fall of 2025.

Mayor Dzurka thanked Chad, the St. Johns Area Community Fund and all supporters in the community.

B. District Update – Facilities/District Steering Committee/Potential Bond Proposal

Superintendent Berthiaume discussed:

- Opportunities.
 - The board passed a resolution last year to support the Fantasy Forest project.
- Community involvement is crucial for the bond proposal process.
 - The previous bond proposal was voted down by 109 votes in May 2024.
 - A survey received over 950 responses, and a district steering committee was formed.
 - The proposed bond is for \$99.75 million with no tax increase.
- The community showed strong support for the district's needs.

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- The bond proposal addresses outdated buildings, athletics upgrades, and security updates.
- A scientific phone survey showed overwhelming support for another bond.
- Next Steps
 - Present the bond proposal to the Board of Education for a vote - February 3, 2025, with a potential vote by the community in May 2025.

There was a discussion of:

- Refinancing saved significant funds over a long period.
 - It saved about \$8 million over 10 to 12 years.
- State funding per pupil is crucial for budgeting.
 - State funding is a little over \$9,600 per pupil.
 - No increase in per-pupil funding from last year.
- The decrease in student numbers is a statewide issue.
 - Student numbers are down by about 130 from last year.
- A significant portion of the budget is allocated to wages and benefits.
 - 82% to 83% of the budget is for staff wages and benefits.
- State funding is being redirected to community colleges and universities.
 - Over \$8 billion is allocated to community and university funding from the school aid fund.

C. Work-Based Learning

Superintendent Berthiaume and City Manager Gamble discussed work-based learning opportunities being successfully implemented through collaboration, providing diverse experiences for students:

- Collaboration provides more opportunities for students.
 - High school students working in social media for the city.
 - Internship opportunities at the police department.
- Providing diverse opportunities for students is important.
 - Opportunities in public service, police department, and trade positions.
- Expanding work-based learning is crucial for providing students with hands-on experience.
- There is a need to involve more employers in work-based learning opportunities.
- The next step is to explore opportunities with high school administration and local employers.

E. Potential Land Lab

Superintendent Berthiaume discussed:

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- They worked with Agro-Liquid on an agriculture class.
 - Over 6 months, a lot of meetings, social media and presentations.
 - Enough students requested those classes.
 - Several courses going on right now; sent students to National Convention; will be offering additional sections in regards to vet sciences.
 - Next collaboration, lease out a land lab throughout the community.
 - He thanked Justin Smith and his family.

City Manager Gamble discussed:

- It is shocking that a community with amazing roots and history in farming doesn't have a formal feeder system.
- Working relationships and generosity of Director Smith and his wife.
- Will provide a connection to students who may want future in farming.

Director Smith discussed:

- The average age of farmers is increasing, highlighting the need to involve younger generations.
 - Average age of a farmer in the U.S. is 61 years old.
 - Average American is 2.5 to 3 generations removed from agriculture.
- The program has received strong support from local businesses and community members.
 - Support from Pioneer Hybrids and local vendors.
 - Donations for equipment and resources.
 - Working on donations to cover the cost of fuel.
 - Donation of time.
 - Volunteers will harvest and truck.
 - Worked with Michigan Graphics and Signs on a sign for the location.

Superintendent Berthiaume discussed the work done in just the last year and a half:

- The Bancroft's donated a greenhouse.
- Ms. Buggia.
- Bob Craig was persistent and helped make it happen along with the Bancroft's.

D. Safe Routes to School Grant & Joint Resolution

Superintendent Berthiaume and City Manager Gamble discussed:

- A proposed Resolution for both the city and board of education.
- The Safe Routes to School grant aims to improve student safety and promote physical activity by enhancing sidewalks and connectivity between schools.
 - The grant could provide up to \$350,000 per building.

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- Surveys and audits have been conducted to assess needs.
- The process for accessing the grant is robust and involves multiple studies and surveys.
 - Walking audits were organized by Colleen Sink from the Michigan Fitness Foundation.
 - The grant is supported by the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission.
- There is no priority by building age; the focus is on safety and connectivity.
- The application process is expected to be completed by June, with a three to four-year timeline for project completion.
- The grant includes public and parochial schools, with efforts to include St. Joseph's.
- Next Steps:
 - Develop an action plan with community involvement, finalize surveys and audits, and work with architects for design.
 - Send out an RFP for the engineering and design of the project.

Motion by Commissioner Hyzer seconded by Commissioner Hufnagel that the city commission adopt Resolution #1-2025.

YEA: Hufnagel, Gurski, Dzurka, Hyzer, DeLiso

NAY: None

Motion carried.

The board of education also adopted the resolution.

F. Proposed Safe Routes to School Design & Layout RFP Discussion

City Manager Gamble thanked both boards for taking those steps.

Director Smith discussed the RFP process.

Motion by Commissioner Gurski seconded by DeLiso to direct Justin to move forward for the design and layout for the RFP for the safe routes to school.

YEA: Hufnagel, Gurski, Dzurka, Hyzer, DeLiso

NAY: None

Motion carried.

G. General Discussion on Ideas and Opportunities for Great Collaboration Between the Board and Commission (Programming, Marketing, Publication, Internships)

Superintendent Berthiaume discussed:

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- Chief Kirk and Deputy Chief Tobias: their contact, daily events or at night, emergency operations plans that we work with police department, and he can't thank the city police enough for what they do to make sure our students and staff are safe on a daily basis.
- Thanked Ms. Seavey and Ms. Wenzlick for working on the agenda.

City Manager Gamble discussed:

- The opportunity to put together the agenda and other things we have in the hopper.
- Other ideas the collective body may have for us to work together and where we may be able to go next.
- He is excited about what has happened between our meeting last March and now.

The Board of Education and City Commission discussed:

- It would be beneficial to have more communication outward to the community.
 - Something in writing, maybe a quarterly publication.
 - If there is any student interest in journalism and a way to activate that.
 - Opportunities to have curriculum in videography, infographics, marketing, and how to do interviews.
 - Michigan Virtual has built some of those curriculums.
- Wilson Center
 - Getting ready for bids for HVAC.
 - Hopefully, a year from now we will have the auditorium and gymnasium.
 - There is still a gap with teens (recreation).
- The homecoming parade is well attended and that may be an opportunity to showcase our partnership.
- Other municipalities have had citizen academies.
- We will schedule another event like this next year.
- Possibly sponsor a Student of the Month and have a student come to city commission meetings and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

BOARD COMMUNICATIONS:

Trustee Randolph said this is a great opportunity between the city and school; a lot of great ideas; safe walk is something very needed, good project.

Trustee Parker-Sternburgh said she loved the collaboration; is excited about the FFA Program and growth; and confidence levels are growing.

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Commissioner DeLiso said someone mentioned South Lansing Street and the lack of sidewalk on either side of the street on the south side of the city limits and into Bingham Township; possibly get the township involved also.

Vice President Darragh said great opportunity; Safe Routes to School is another piece to that, turning out of the high school onto Sickles Street and we need to light that up; the FFA program has been a topic the whole time he has been on the board; and it feels real and sustainable.

Commissioner Gurski discussed the FFA Program; utilization of some of the city's disciplines and trades (utility and finance department); hands on approach; and expanding upon that.

Commissioner Hyzer echoed the FFA comments, his son is in it and it is opening his eyes to other aspects out there; school to support that program is great; having students attend city meetings; job related skills people can pick up at the city; and senior interviews or career days participation.

Trustee Mansfield said it is awesome the school is having an FFA program; encouraged to see the Fantasy Forest project; and would be cool to get students into these meetings to get them interested.

Secretary Watson said he is excited about all of the projects; his kids use Fantasy Forest a lot and it is exciting; Safe Routes to School lighting was mentioned and is all about safety for our students; agriculture thing is great; and would be a big thing for us to pass the bond.

Commissioner Hufnagel said he appreciated them coming in and having our second meeting, last March was a great opportunity and ground breaking; we came up with nice projects to work on and he is excited about the progress; we still have opportunities to be proactive and he hopes we continue this; and make sure we have on our calendars another joint meeting.

Treasurer Nelson said ditto to everything everyone else said; the idea of meeting and collaborating is a great idea and he would like to do it more often; SRTS has been needed to be done for a long time; Fantasy Forest, his granddaughter asked about it; he is excited about work-based learning, he did co-op in high school; maybe get retail shops, Sparrow or automotive places involved; not everybody goes to college, and we need to get kids prepared for life.

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President Boak echoed the past comments; said tonight shows the value of partnerships, many hands make light work; FFA program, things just seem right this time and seemed to align in a very innovative way.

Mayor Dzurka thanked President Boak. He said he loved the theme of “it seemed right”; it starts with communication, which is so vital here; bringing people together; great city coupled with a great school that we are so fortunate to have here; love the idea of bringing students in to participate in some way; discussed his visit to the 3rd grade elementary class and the teacher encouraging the students to “tell them what you think”.

Adjournment

Motion by Commissioner Hyzer seconded by Commissioner Gurski that the city commission meeting be adjourned.

YEA: Hufnagel, Gurski, Dzurka, Hyzer, DeLiso

NAY: None

Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

SCOTT DZURKA, Mayor

MINDY J. SEAVEY, Clerk