COMMUNICATION
DATE 2/18/2014
AGENDA ITEM # 6.05

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Burlington, VT 05401
(802) 862-1094

At their meeting of 2/18/2014 the Burlington City Council voted to waive the reading, accept this communication and place it on file.
and send copies to the Board of Finance and BSD Superintendent Collins
Attest: Lori Olivier

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2014 FEB 11 A 8:39
BURLINGTON CLERK TREASURER'S OFFICE

February 6, 2014

President Shannon and
The Burlington Board of Finance
City Hall
149 Church Street
Burlington, VT 05401

Re: Wasteful and Unnecessary Spending by the Burlington School Department

Dear President Shannon and The Burlington Board of Finance:

Net Loss in Student Enrollment in Burlington. A forty-two page report by the Burlington School Department's Infrastructure and Technology Committee dated March 15, 2012 found that from 1995 - 2012 there was an increase of three elementary students a year, a decrease of four middle grade students a year, and a net loss of two students a year in the K - 8th grades in the Burlington schools. It is interesting to note that the student enrollment statistics were on page forty-two of this forty-two page report. However, there has been a ninety percent increase in school property taxes in the last decade as this decline takes place.

1. The Burlington School Department Overlooked A Low Cost Building Expansion Plan
This report outlines, in detail, a low cost plan to install office trailers on the schools' grounds to gain space for classrooms in the schools as a solution to the perceived increase in student enrollment.

2. The Burlington School Department Promoted A High Cost Property Transfer Plan
In June of 2013, the Burlington School Department proposed selling the Ira Allen Building at 150 Colchester Avenue, leasing (selling) the Taft School, and buying St. Joseph's School because of the perceived increase in student enrollment. This proposed property transfer would cost at least $10M.

3. The Burlington School Department Understood That Deed Restrictions on The Taft School, The Ira Allen Building, and Two Other School Buildings Would Cause Issues
In a memo to this Infrastructure and Technology Committee dated March 15, 2012 the superintendent states:

We have a number of facilities with deed restrictions that limit what we can do with the school or land. I summarize these restrictions below:

Edmunds - deed, if sold money reverts back to Edmunds family
Taft - deed , either it be used for educational purposes or be given to indigent men

Flynn - deed says it must remain a school. Could not sell.
Ira Allen - the state paid for it and revenue either goes back to the state, full or pro-rated. Last conversation within 5 years, state indicated they would want $400,000.

4. The Burlington School Department Discussed Consolidating and/or Selling School Real Estate

In the minutes from the Infrastructure and Technology Committee Meeting on March 15, 2012 it appears there was a review of consolidating and/or selling school real estate.

Also discussed idea of north end elementary school and south end elementary school. Suggestion: EES [Edmunds Elementary School] *and Champlain at Champlain site. Move IAA* [Integrated Arts Academy] *to EMS* [Edmunds Middle School]. *Sell IAA. Smith and Flynn at Flynn south. SA* [Sustainable Academy] *stays where it is. Would add transportation costs. Consider buying St. Joe's. Move admin to SA building.*

One question discussed at this meeting was:
Can we sell BHS?

The Burlington School Department claims the purchase of St. Joseph's School is necessary because of the increase in student enrollment. However, the forty-two page report shows an overall decline in student enrollment. Furthermore, there has been a ninety percent increase in school property taxes in the last decade as this decline in student enrollment took place. That ninety percent tax increase is in addition to the $26 M spent on the most recent school renovations and the soon to be proposed $40 M bond for Burlington High School which seems to have hidden expenses.

It is interesting to note that the law firm advising the Burlington school department is the same law firm that advised the city of Burlington on Burlington Telecom.

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Thank you.

Sincerely,

Martha R. Lang.

cc:
Daloz, Todd, Assistant Attorney General, The State of Vermont.
Donovan, Johannah, Chair, House Education Committee, The State of Vermont.
McNeil, Colin, Attorney, The Burlington School Department.
Shannon, Joan, President, The Burlington City Council
Smith, Shap, Speaker of the House, The State of Vermont.
Weinberger, Miro, Mayor, The City of Burlington.