



Office of Mayor Miro Weinberger

January 21, 2014

Jeanne Collins, Superintendent
Burlington School District
150 Colchester Avenue
Burlington, VT 05401

Dear Jeanne,

I spoke with City Attorney Eileen Blackwood and Brian Lowe of my office following last Thursday's meeting about the Taft School with representatives from the Burlington School District (BSD) and the University of Vermont (UVM).

I understand you are interested in moving the discussion of the Taft School transaction to the Board of Finance on February 3, 2014 and subsequently to the City Council and that you would like my assistance in securing these approvals. To that end, I would like to share several thoughts:

- To fulfill the City Council's Charter responsibility to approve any sale or long-term lease of City property, we need you to submit documentation justifying the \$1.6 million UVM payment for the 80-year lease plus an option for an additional 80 years.
- The City Attorney is reviewing the lease we received last week and will have further comment shortly. It is likely that the City will need an MOU with the BSD to address several elements of that agreement.
- At this point, based on your past presentations, in the eyes of the City Council the Taft School transaction is directly tied to the BSD's plans regarding the St. Joseph's School, and I do not see an easy way to separate the transactions. If separation is necessary to meet UVM's deadlines, you will need to think through the argument for separation carefully as it will raise many questions.
- My sense is that there is currently significant concern about the St. Joseph's School purchase due, in large part, to the fact that the BSD has not yet offered the public a clear, specific explanation of its plans for St. Joseph's.
- My sense from our meeting (with Victor Prussack) last week is that, while you still have some refinement to do, BSD is starting to articulate a compelling reason to pursue the purchase. The proposal we discussed, however, envisions a significant public process before the St. Joseph's School option is exercised.
- The timeline for a public process does not reconcile with the early February timeline you have targeted for approval of the Taft transaction and may create a potential serious problem with Board of Finance and City Council approval.
- My experience is that the City Council applies considerable scrutiny to municipal property transactions in and around the downtown – more so, in general, than with any other type of decision. The Council likely will be uncomfortable signing off on a transaction that has substantial unanswered questions.

Personally, I remain generally interested in the three-site transaction you propose. I see potential benefits to the community flowing from this plan and would like to be supportive of BSD and UVM in accomplishing their goals in a timely manner.

However, if I am going to place the BSD property transactions on a Board of Finance agenda, I must have a better understanding of your St. Joseph's plans. If BSD feels February 3 is too tight to develop these plans to a point where they are ready for public discussion, I would be open to calling a special meeting of the Board of Finance on February 10 (which would allow Council deliberation on February 18).

Also, in the interest of clarity and because I see many of these issues as inter-related, I want to be clear that I am still very interested in hearing a formal response from you and your board regarding five cost control proposals I made at the January 13 City Council meeting:

- A joint effort to develop a consolidated, coordinated 10-year capital plan for the City and BSD;
- An agreement to cooperate on a management consultant study that would explore centralization of some City and BSD financial functions under the responsibility of the CAO's office;
- An agreement to explore regional municipal and education savings with at least the cities of Winooski and South Burlington;
- An agreement to meaningfully engage the City's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) throughout the BSD's FY16 budget formulation process; and
- An agreement not to seek a Charter Change regarding bonding.

I am prepared to make these five initiatives a central focus of my CAO's Office in 2014 and hope you and your board will be partners in each of these efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Weinberger', written in a cursive style.

Miro Weinberger
Mayor