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Special Meeting

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Agency: Akron Board of Education

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Summary

- The Joint Board of Review between Akron Public Schools and the City of Akron had not met since August 2022. This board focuses on the budget that was used to restore or rebuild many schools in Akron into [Community Learning Centers](#) (CLCs). The board has not met in almost three years and the turnover in staff led to some confusion during this meeting. There is \$18 million remaining and confusion over how it can be used. An outline of the financial issue can be found in this [article](#). The APS response to the remaining CLC funds can be found [here](#).
- Despite the huge improvements to the schools, challenges have slowed access to the CLCs for the community. However, in the last year, more progress has been made to update policies to provide more access to the community, as outlined in this [article](#).
- The sixth and final segment of the agreement between APS and the city will be completed in 2033 when the bonds and debt are paid off. In the meantime, the Joint Board of Review needs to oversee community access to the CLCs (including a citizen advisory committee), decide what to do with the money that has not been spent, and continue paying off the debt associated with the building projects. It is unclear whether the unspent money can be used for the new construction of

Pfeiffer and North High School, if it needs to go to improvements for existing CLCs, or if it can be used to pay off debt associated with the building projects.

Follow-Up Questions

- While both APS and the city designated someone to answer questions, it was unclear who would guarantee more regular meetings be set up going forward. Who is going to be responsible for the Joint Board of Review?
- What does the JBOR need to do to find out how they can use the funds?
- Is APS hoping to use the remaining funds to help build North High and Pfeiffer to turn them into CLCs?
- Currently, North High is used partially as a CLC. What happens if it is not a CLC moving forward? Would the community not be allowed to use it if it is not a CLC?

Notes

- The livestream of the meeting can be found [here](#).
- The agenda can be found on the [Akron Public Schools'](#) board documents [website](#). Go to the “meetings” tab and select the meeting date. The agenda and minutes can be found there.
- APS [board members](#) present:
 - Carla Jackson, president
 - Bruce Alexander, vice president
 - Diana Autry
 - Summer Hall (not present)
 - Rene Molenaur
 - Gregory Harrison
 - Barbara Sykes (not present)
- Joint Board of Review roll call (five members present)
 - [Shammas Malik](#), mayor of Akron
 - [Margo Sommerville](#), president of City Council
 - [Steve Fricker](#), finance director for the City of Akron
 - [Eufrancia Lash](#), director of neighborhood assistance
 - [Phil Lombardo](#), City Council member and budget chair
- The meeting started at 10 a.m., led by Jackson with roll call and the Pledge of Allegiance.
 - Superintendent [Michael Robinson](#) was present as well as CFO Stephen

Thompson, along with several APS district staff and City of Akron staff.

- Approval of Aug. 22, 2022, meeting minutes
 - Moved by Malik, seconded by Sommerville
- Citizens Monitoring Committee Reports
 - Malik asked if there is an active citizens' monitoring committee. Jackson said she wasn't aware of one.
 - Malik said the board should have several meetings over the next few months to get information and ideas on the table, get on the same page, and move forward.
 - Alexander said the board should stick to the agenda today and work on the agendas moving forward.
- Update on building projects
 - Jackson said this board has an agreement until 2033. The original agreement is based on CLCs and new building projects.
 - Fricker said the joint agreement is until 2033 because the debt should be paid off at that time. The city currently pays more than \$20 million in debt service to the bonds each year. There is \$18 million in reserve funds put in place. This is set up for bond holders in case there is ever a drop in income tax so the bonds can still be paid back. This money should not be touched.
 - Two separate remaining funds of \$18 million:
 - Bond proceeds currently in the custody of APS.
 - Reserve fund to protect the city. This is a pledge to the bond holders to protect the city in case of economic downturn.
 - Harrison asked for all of this information to be in writing. Harrison would like the financial information and the city's viewpoint.
 - Sommerville said the board needs to be educated, so these matters won't be solved today. The board is not even sure how the funds are allowed to be used. CLCs have to be accessible to Akron residents. Sommerville also shared a concern about APS schools being decommissioned and left vacant.
 - Malik agreed the information needs to be shared in writing in both directions. The CLC agreement is very complex. There is a need to review the agreement, consult lawyers and make sure any decisions are adhering to the agreement.
- The 004-LFI Funds: Remaining funds that APS has for CLC capital building.
 - Thompson said there is \$18 million in the remaining fund. He expressed concern because the federal government only lets you borrow so much money that is left to sit, and this money has been sitting for a while. It is unclear who can use it or how it can be used. Currently the remaining

projects are not set up to be CLCs. Construction costs are rising, and any delay in decision-making would be costly for APS. The last segment of the agreement with the city is Segment 6. Final dollar amounts will be shown when Segment 6 closes. Thompson also added that APS has budgeted to demolish the Miller South building once the new school is built.

- Harrison said the board should not be concerned about the \$18 million held in reserve by the city since it is for the bond holders. APS still has two buildings that need to be completed, and the citizens of Akron have voted for North to be rebuilt. The original agreement was to provide safe, dry, warm schools for students and community members. Harrison also expressed concern about the cost of construction going up quickly. He asked for a speedy resolution.
- Jackson asked why Pfeiffer and North are not part of the agreement and if they could be added. She asked if the remaining funds could be used for current CLCs or used to help with the new building projects.
- Malik asked if it is in our community's interest for the new builds to be CLCs.
- Jackson said according to the agreement the money can be used for capital improvements or debt payments.
- Harrison said the original agreement included CLCs, but he did not mention particular schools. The original purpose was to build schools, so it would be logical for us to continue to use the money in that way, he said.
- Harrison and Malik wanted more information about how the money could be used and what it would take to make the schools into CLCs.
- Molenaur wanted to know if the city legal team and expertise could help APS draft options for how the money could legally be used.
- Alexander recommended the leadership get together to see how the funds can be managed and used.
- Community access to CLCs
 - Autry spoke about how the community still doesn't have access to the CLCs. There is a need to increase access to the CLCs for community groups, she said, and this will help offset the costs of the buildings.
 - Malik spoke about the expectations vs. reality of how these facilities are currently being used. He asked Richelle Wardell to come speak about what her group has been working on.
 - [Wardell](#), the Education and Health Strategist for the City of Akron, spoke about an informal CLC advisory committee that has been working on building out the policies and procedures for community

usage of the CLCs. [Debra Foulk](#), other APS staff, the [Youth Success Summit](#), and the city have all worked together to create a handbook and streamline operations. The biggest challenge is insurance coverage.

- Harrison said it is great when the city and school board come together, but there is a missed opportunity to involve the public through a citizen committee as outlined by the agreement. Harrison was also concerned about organizations that do not have resources and are not formally organized as nonprofits as they don't have access to these buildings.
- Jackson said there is a committee, it just needs to be formalized.
- Malik said three things that need to be addressed before the next meeting:
 - Information and finances need to be shared between APS and the city in both directions.
 - The group needs to dig into the contract to know what is permitted and not permitted expenditure of the remaining funds.
 - The board needs to formalize the citizens' advisory group for CLC access.
- Next board meeting:
 - Malik asked to get ongoing board meetings set up, potentially every other month.
 - Malik suggested Wardell be the point person to direct questions and share information.
 - Robinson suggested [Angela Carter](#), APS chief of staff, to be the contact person for APS.
 - Molenaur suggested meeting the first Friday morning of every month.
 - The board will deliberate their next meeting time later.
- Adjournment from the Joint Board of Review: 11:28 a.m.
- Adjournment for the Special APS Board meeting: 11:29 a.m.