

LEWISTON CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP AGENDA

Tuesday, November 27, 2012

City Council Chambers

6:00 p.m. Workshop

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Moment of Silence.

TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED WITH THE STATE LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION

1. Protect/Restore Municipal Revenue Sharing
2. Protect Local Tax Base/Alternative Revenues
3. General Purpose Aid to Education
4. Waiver of Minimum Required Local Share for Schools
5. Chapter 33 Restraint and Seclusion Rules for Schools
6. No New Initiatives
7. Virtual Charter Schools
8. General Assistance/Welfare
9. Infrastructure Investments
10. Turnpike Toll Structure
11. Any other Items of Interest

LEWISTON CITY COUNCIL
MEETING WITH STATE LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION
November 27, 2012
6:00 P.M.

1. Protect/Restore Municipal Revenue Sharing

Historically, municipalities received 5.1% of state sales and income taxes. Beginning with the last administration, revenue sharing has been raided to help balance the state budget. Two years ago, the City lost \$1.5 million in revenue sharing; last year, that grew to \$1.8 million. This year, it will be almost \$2 million. If fully funded, this \$2 million would reduce our property tax rate by \$1.06.

2. Protect Local Tax Base/Alternative Revenues

Resist any effort to further diminish local tax base through expanded exemptions and involving the property tax or reductions in the auto excise tax. Support efforts to expand local revenue options.

3. General Purpose Aid to Education

Protect current allocation and work to develop plan to achieve 55% funding level as approved by state-wide referendum.

4. Waiver of Minimum Required Local Share for Schools

The State funding formula sets a required minimum local share that must be raised to support public education. As a result of the recession and funding limitations, many school districts in Maine, including Lewiston, have fallen below that minimum but have been protected by a waiver authorized by the legislature. Without this waiver, schools falling below the required local share are harshly penalized through reductions in state support. The School Department will present data showing the impact on Lewiston should the waiver simply be allowed to expire or if it is phased out over a period of years. We need to discuss the appropriate course of action going forward -- to seek continuation of the waiver or to support a phase in period of over time. Immediate re-imposition of the minimum would be a disaster for Lewiston and would result in layoffs and significant program cuts even as we continue to experience enrollment growth.

5. Chapter 33 Restraint and Seclusion Rules for Schools

We are attempting to get the rules reopened as they have been found to be detrimental to maintaining an optimum classroom environment and have led to unnecessary destruction of school property. Among other changes, we seek to (1) broaden the acceptable use of restraint to include the prevention of destruction of property in excess of some amount, say \$1,000; and (2) broaden the acceptable use of restraint to include preventing learning from stopping for all others in a class when the teacher, without risk of bodily harm to the student, is able to guide the offending student to his/her seat or another place.

6. No new initiatives

The last Legislature passed four significant pieces of legislation affecting local education. Other than tweaking these, legislators need to know that school districts cannot take on any more initiatives if they are to do anything well. Similarly, municipalities are struggling to comply with existing demands and mandates. We ask you to oppose any additional mandates at a time when we are under considerable fiscal stress.

7. Virtual Charter Schools

Such schools will have a material impact on school finances as they will attract homeschoolers for which we do not presently receive subsidy. Also, a virtual school experience is counter to what many see as the appropriate school experience - working in groups, dealing with students from different backgrounds, etc.

8. General Assistance/Welfare

The City's General Assistance Program has been impacted by the recession, imposition of a 60 month limit on the State/Federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, the status of asylum seekers who are eligible for General Assistance benefits but not for state/federal programs and who often face a lengthy delay in obtaining the right to work, and the reduction in state reimbursement from 50/90 to 50/85. The legislature established a working group charged with reducing General Assistance costs by at least \$500,000. It is not clear that this group will reach a consensus to achieve this goal. The City is willing to work with the state in an effort to control GA costs; however, we strongly oppose any efforts to further transfer the cost of this program to communities, especially those communities that serve large general assistance populations.

Similarly, benchmarking and evaluation systems should be put in place to measure the effectiveness of DHS in assisting its clients toward economic independence. Where barriers exist under current regulations, the State should work to address and overcome them. When the State's TANF program does not achieve the goal of economic independence, that failure impacts our General Assistance Program.

9. Infrastructure Investments

For Maine and Lewiston to grow and prosper, we must have a robust infrastructure in such areas as transportation and utility systems. While we appreciate concern over the level of state indebtedness, we also know that improved infrastructure supports both short and long term job growth. In addition, today's economic environment often results in very competitive pricing for such projects.

10. Turnpike Toll Structure

The toll structure on the Turnpike disadvantages our area and must be addressed. We need to continue to work toward toll equity. At the same time, other less expensive commuter options must be explored/expanded including Go Maine and the possibility of establishing commuter bus service from LA to Portland.

11. Any Other Items of Interest