The October 21, 2015 City-School Liaison Committee meeting was called to order at 5:35 pm by City Manager Wally Bobkiewicz. Introductions were made and Mr. Bobkiewicz welcomed everyone. A quorum was present.

Approval of May 6, 2015 Meeting Minutes
The minutes of the May 6, 2015 meeting were approved as submitted.

Update on Cradle to Career (C2C)
Sheila Merry expressed appreciation to the Committee for its support and distributed a list of current C2C partners. She stated that there are 150 individuals and 40 organizations actively working with C2C. Their initial focus is on community literacy. She explained that it will take efforts by the whole community to have an impact on literacy. Ms. Merry passed out an organizational chart and gave some examples of the projects the action teams are working on.
D65/City Parking Issues
The City is looking to solve the issues. The parking problems around Dewey School are currently being addressed. Discussions with faculty, parents, and neighbors regarding parking will make parking and the daily in-out more successful. Discussions are ongoing. The City will do what is needed to get the right people involved to get it done. Superintendent Goren noted that there are 16 schools with lots of cars, buses, etc. They are working well. Mr. Bobkiewicz also wants to stress need to keep safe routes to school cleared of snow.

School Safety Update
Deputy Chief Pickett reported that the day-to-day operations are going well, except for the incident in September. Police focus on ETHS at 3:30 pm.

Perry Polinski who manages the City’s 911 Center is working on a proposal whereby school officials can call 911 and using a code can advise police about locking down a school in case of an emergency. Superintendent Goren also wants a system whereby school officials can hear about safety issues when they occur. It was suggested that incidents should go out to the community, not just into 911. Mr. Bobkiewicz stated that the City is committed to following through with 2-way communications, both in and out notifications. With social media, there is little time to “discuss” what information to release or when. While recognizing the need to deal with a situation first, responsible notification should be essentially simultaneous. Superintendent Goren suggested a meeting with City staff and communication teams of each school district. He expressed the goal to make people safe first, and then quickly decide about public communication. He suggested a meeting for a small group to exchange phone numbers of key people within all three entities. Superintendent Witherspoon recommended the importance of responding to the emergency situation first, and that initial information is often inaccurate which would indicate a need to limit what information is released immediately. Alderman Grover suggested that a message could re-set expectations. Safety is 1st priority; 2nd is to keep everyone informed.

Deputy Chief Pickett noted that new police officers are touring ETHS to get to know the layout. Superintendent Witherspoon appreciates this. Superintendent Goren would like to have officers tour District 65 schools as well. Mr. Bobkiewicz added that the City’s Fire Department will take a lead role in emergency preparedness. Division Chief Dwight Hohl will manage this for the Fire Department. Superintendent Witherspoon appreciates the new mid-level lighting around the school grounds and would like it along Church and Dodge. Lighting is attractive and effective.

FY2016 Budget Updates
Mr. Bobkiewicz stated that the City’s FY2016 proposed budget was released two weeks ago. A public hearing on the budget is this coming Saturday morning, October 24, 2015. A 2% increase is proposed to help pay for pensions. Expenditures overall for City services remain the same as last year. The City is putting money and plans in place to meet the eventual unknown state funding.
Superintendent Goren stated that the District 65 School Board passed the FY2016 budget. Looking forward they have no idea what to expect especially if a property tax freeze passes. That would have significant hit to District 65 budget.

Superintendent Witherspoon explained that District 202 has tightened their budget in many areas including travel, conferences, and outside specialists. They are bracing for when the shoe drops and are pessimistic about tax caps, shift of pension payments to school districts and redistribution of the funding formula. Evanston is already a net loser regarding taxes. Suggested changes at the state level would leave a very deep hole in the D202 budget. Alderman Grover suggested totaling up everything Evanston would lose if state proposals pass. Mr. Stafford added that of the $6,000,000 Oakton Community College usually gets from the state, they expect to get only $1,000,000 this year.

Homelessness: Coordination of Services
Ms. Bartz explained that there are about 255 homeless children registered in District 65 this year, which is down about 100 from last year. (It is assumed that of the 100, 50% found homes and the other 50% left Evanston.) About 1/3 of the current homeless students are political refugees, primarily from Africa and the Middle East. Many have housing near Custer and Brummel. Children have had no formal education; staff must guess at their grade level. The most immediate need is safety. They need a sense of security and belonging and to establish relationships. There are language barriers. A medical clinic on Touhy Avenue is used for health care until they are eligible for Medicaid and are then eligible for ERIE.

Superintendent Witherspoon stated that the high school has seen an increase in refugees. Language and lack of formal education are barriers. Families are given three months temporary housing. Many families are living together. Alderman Grover stated that the federal government is allowing 10,000 more refugees in this year, and agencies cannot keep up. Affordability of some Evanston housing may be a reason for recent influx. Settlement agencies expect to continue to see an increase throughout the year.

The next regular City-School meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 17, 2016 at ETHS.

Meeting adjourned at 6:25 pm

Submitted by Kate Todd
Executive Assistant, City Manager's Office