

RCSD passes budget as LeBron, Eagle spar

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Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

The Rochester school board this week adopted a \$931 million budget and moved forward in its search for a permanent superintendent, yet both accomplishments were overshadowed yet again by fighting among its members, and with community critics and candidates for office.

“It’s a clear case of one step forward, two steps back in terms of board functionality,” board member Willa Powell said.

The step forward was passing the budget. Only Judith Davis voted against it, saying there was no sense in having a spending plan without an overarching strategic plan to align it to.

“You have a budget, but no plan exists, and who’s going to guarantee accountability?” she asked Thursday morning.

Fellow board member Beatriz LeBron accused Davis of acting like a political candidate rather than a legislator. Davis’ allies in the audience, including Howard Eagle, leapt to her defense and drew Le-Bron’s ire.

“You guys are grandparent-ages, acting like children every single time, every single meeting,” LeBron said.

Speaking directly to Eagle, she said, “As a matter of fact, you can’t even pay your bills. ... You were sued by the bank a year ago, but you got the audacity to ask the board how they can budget a million dollars.”

She continued, ignoring Board President Van White pleading with her to stop: “Go get that neck checked out, how about that? ... Take care of your health.”

Eagle has a large goiter on his neck, the result of hyperthyroidism. It is growing but not cancerous, Eagle said, and he has been hesitant to have it removed surgically.

“That’s completely inappropriate under any circumstances,” he said. “I didn’t think even she would stoop that low. ... It was hurtful.”

LeBron, a community health worker, said Thursday, “Perhaps I should not have mentioned his neck thing. Because it didn’t come across with the tone ... but that’s a genuine concern. But because we were going back and forth, it didn’t come out like that.”

She stood by the rest of her comments, including regarding Eagle’s finances, pointing out that she, Eagle and Davis are all running for the same seats on the board in the June primary.

“He’s a candidate running, and he came to criticize the board when he can’t manage his personal finances,” she said. “It’s not like Howard Eagle is just some parent that I attacked for no reason.”

Monroe County Clerk’s Office records show a November 2017 judgment against Eagle for \$2,643, filed by Advantage Federal Credit Union.

LeBron called Eagle “the definition of a bully” and said she is no longer willing to let it go by. Eagle in turn called her a “vicious, compulsive liar.”

“I’m a change agent, that’s what I am,” Eagle said. “I’m relentless in terms of fighting for those who have no voice. ... If I appear to be a bully to people, that’s probably because they’re not involved in fighting for change.”

Eagle demanded an apology, and Le-Bron said she will not offer one. He then invited the entire board for a restorative circle with him and his supporters, including fellow board candidates Clifford Florence Sr. and Andria Bryant.

The board already has done some restorative circles internally, apparently to little effect. Cynthia Elliott objected to the general practice at recent board meeting, saying it is inconsistent with her Christian faith.

Later Thursday, Davis requested that the school board make “a formal statement of disapproval of Commissioner LeBron’s participation in the heated exchange that took place Tuesday night.”

The budget proposal now goes to the city for ultimate passage. Mayor Lovely Warren requested, but did not receive, a significant increase in funding for community schools. The school board also has selected four finalists for superintendent who participated in lightly attended public events last weekend. It will now choose its candidate privately and attempt to negotiate a contract.

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“I’m relentless in terms of fighting for those who have no voice,” said Howard Eagle, a former RCSD employee and now a citizen advocate. JAMIE GERMANO/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE



Beatriz LeBron lashes out at critic and school board candidate Howard Eagle during the RCSD board meeting Tuesday. ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT