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## Toxic metals found at site for 2 schools; council defers action

■ The City Council puts a hold on a proposed \$39.7 million bond issue for the Hartford schools project until it gets detailed results of environmental tests and DEM approves a cleanup plan.

By GREGORY SMITH  
Journal Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE -- The proposed site of two schools in the Hartford neighborhood is contaminated by toxic metals such as arsenic and lead and small amounts of gasoline and oil, City Councilman Kevin Jackson disclosed at a council meeting last night.

But the degree of contamination is no worse than might be encountered on any given property in an old industrial city like Providence, Jackson said.

Nevertheless, the council put a hold on a proposed \$39.7 million bond issue for the Hartford schools project and other purposes until it can get more definitive information from the Cianci administration about the contamination.

Jackson said that Alan R. Sepe, city acting director of public property, is preparing a plan for submission to the state Department of Environmental Management to have the contamination cleaned up. Sepe generally described the nature of the contamination to him, Jackson said.

But until the council is given the detailed results of environmental testing of the site and DEM has approved a cleanup plan, he said he does not want to proceed with the bond issue.

"I think we have a responsibility to the taxpayers" to make sure the council knows what it is buying before it acts, Majority Leader Ronald W. Allen told his colleagues.

The administration proposes to borrow \$36 million to build a middle school for 800 students and an elementary school for 450 pupils on 10 acres at the intersection of Hartford Avenue and Springfield Street. There was an old city dump on a portion of the property.

The council voted 14 to 1 to send the bond issue resolution back to the Finance Committee for further consideration. Dissenting was Councilman John J. Iglizzi, who represents the area where the schools would be built and has spent considerable time allaying the fears of his constituents about the proposed construction.

The project cannot be built without DEM approval, he said, so it

Some members began talking about voting against McClure, but the 15 days were about to elapse. Council President John J. Lombardi said that if enough members were concerned, there were two ways around the 15-day law: He could have called a special meeting of the council, or the council could have waived its rule requiring advance notice of the agenda for its regularly scheduled meeting on March 4 and voted on the nomination.

The city clerk routinely scheduled the nomination for belated action last night.

In her interview, McClure said she favors hiring the best possible teachers, regardless of where they are willing to live, and that she opposes a residency restriction "unless someone can really show me it has a beneficial effect." But as long as it is the law, she will do her part to see that it is enforced, McClure assured council members.

McClure said that it has been her experience that children do not know or care where their teachers live and that they identify their teachers only within a school setting. But Councilwoman Balbina A. Young has likened non-resident teachers to "an invading force" who take their pay out of the city and are disconnected from the public and students they serve.

Lombardi said of McClure, "She surprised some people" with her position. But then McClure telephoned some council members the next day and clarified her position, he said. "I don't think she's an enemy of residency," he concluded.

Majority Leader Allen said that a School Board member's position on residency is very important, but it is not a make-or-break "litmus test." Members must be judged on their overall qualifications and dedication to the city, he said.

The residency law is under assault at the State House, where teacher unions and others are trying to have it overturned.

The council blundered earlier this year regarding the 15-day law when Mayor Vincent A. Cianci Jr. nominated two members of the city Board of Licenses for reappointment. The appointments of Margaret DeFelice and Andrew Annaldo took effect before the council acted on them.

Some council members concerned about ethnic and racial diversity in city appointments talked about voting against DeFelice and Annaldo, both of whom are white, but the issue became moot.

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seems like a waste of time to send the matter back to the Finance Committee for further consideration. He called for the borrowing to be approved as swiftly as possible so that the public can be assured that everything is all right.

"I think we have to be very cautious because this is a school building," commented Councilwoman Rita M. Williams. Williams, who works for the North Providence School Department, said a school in that town was built on an old dump and when people began getting sick in the area, it provoked public-health fears.

On another track, however, the council continued laying the legal groundwork for the Hartford schools as well as a proposed new Robert Bailey Elementary School in South Providence.

It okayed the addition of the prospective sites of all three schools to longstanding formal redevelopment plans, clearing the way for the Providence Redevelopment Agency to take the properties by negotiated purchase or, if necessary, eminent domain.

Officials are hustling to build the Hartford schools in time for the 1999-2000 school year.

The council added to the "Hartford Avenue Renewal Project" 121 lots on Hartford Avenue, and Springfield, Seton, Emperor, Stanfield, Thornton, Woodfall, Wright, Diana, Milo and Ophelia Streets.

Officials say they will only take vacant properties for the project. But if anyone with a house or business within the area is interested in selling, then the city will offer a price, Thomas E. Deller, deputy director of planning and development, said last month.

"We have no intention of putting anyone out of his house," he declared at a public hearing held by a council committee.

Some neighbors have been skeptical of the school project, pointing out the presence of the old dump and asking about lingering contamination. In some cases, they appear to be reluctant to live near a school or worried that if they sell their property to the city they will not get the money they think it is worth.

In other business last night, the council went through the motions of ratifying the appointment of Mary E. McClure, of 15 Rose Court, to the School Board. McClure's appointment became effective March 5 after the expiration of the 15 days allowed by the Home Rule Charter for council action on a mayoral nomination.

McClure was assured ratification from the outset, but in a council interview on March 2, she said she opposes the city residency law, and that upset some members.

The council strongly supports the residency law, which requires city employees, including teachers, to establish residency in Providence within six months of their hiring. Except for seasonal and temporary help, the law covers all employees hired since 1993.