



OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

BIANCA L. TIRADO, CITY CLERK

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 3:30 P.M.

Committee Members Present:

Ophelia Gooden-Rodgers, Karen L. White,
Sheila Niezgodski, Alice Marie Pickens

Committee Members Absent:

Sherry Bolden-Simpson

Other Council Members Present:

None

Others Present:

Jasmine Jackson, Veronica Pitt-Payne,
Lari'onna Green, Bob Palmer*, Marcus
Ellison, Carlos Leyva*

Presenters:

None

Agenda:

Compact Working Session

Members marked with an asterisk (*) are in virtual attendance.

Please note the attached link for the meeting recording:

<https://docs.southbendin.gov/WebLink/browse.aspx?dbid=0&mediaid=399667>

Committee Chair Ophelia Gooden-Rodgers called to order the Community Relations Committee meeting at 3:31 P.M.

Committee Vice Chair Karen L. White noted that the language in the compact marked in red (e.g., “the City will...”) needs further discussion. She explained that the Committee cannot make commitments on behalf of the City and that they need to clarify the parties involved with the compact. She added that the comments in blue are from School Board Member Marcus Ellison.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers read the compact mission statement and invited discussion.

Committee Member Sheila Niezgodski asked whether the word “City” refers to the Common Council or the mayoral administration.

Committee Vice Chair White replied that this language is repeated throughout the document, and the Committee needs to distinguish whether it is a joint compact with the Council and the City.

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Attorney Bob Palmer suggested adding a definition section to the document clarifying what the term “City” refers to. He proposed changing the language from “the City will...” to “the Common Council encourages the City to...”.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers directed the Committee to page two (2) of the compact.

Committee Vice Chair White pointed out more instances of “the City will...” language. She also noted that the “Martin Luther King Center” is now called the “MLK Dream Center” and the language should be updated to reflect the change. She added that they need to confirm that the South Bend Community School Corporation (SBCSC) and the Board agree on the SBCSC commitments.

Attorney Palmer suggested using “the Common Council encourages the City to...” language again in this section.

Committee Member Niezgodski expressed support for this change and asked if “City” is being defined as the City of South Bend.

The Committee returned to discussing the definition section. Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers confirmed that it would be added to the first (1st) page of the document and include the terms “South Bend Common Council”, “City”, and “South Bend Community School Corporation”. She clarified with Attorney Palmer that “City” will be defined as the City of South Bend.

Attorney Palmer said he will go through the document and add definitions for any terms that need to be defined.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers redirected the Committee to page two (2).

Marcus Ellison read the updated SBCSC commitments and joint commitments for the Committee.

Committee Vice Chair White asked if these commitments need to be approved by the SBCSC School Board.

Marcus Ellison responded that the Board has been involved with the revisions and once the compact is finalized, they will sign it.

Committee Member Niezgodski reviewed the progress metrics and asked if providing data on student access to wellness services would be the responsibility of SBCSC.

Marcus Ellison confirmed that is correct.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers directed the Committee to page three (3) of the compact. She pointed out another instance of “the City will...” language and brought it to Attorney Palmer’s attention.

Attorney Palmer said another option would be to put the compact in the form of a resolution to be passed by the Council and signed by the Mayor.

Committee Member Niezgodski asked if the Committee should seek input from the City administration before passing the resolution.



Committee Vice Chair White suggested reviewing the compact with the Mayor once the revisions are final.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers said that Attorney Palmer will review the compact after the working session and make sure the City administration approves the language.

Committee Vice Chair White reviewed the joint commitments. She pointed out that the Council cannot retain educational consultants and stated that would be the responsibility of SBCSC. She said that Attorney Palmer will need to reword the language in this section.

Marcus Ellison spoke about the progress metrics and noted that SBCSC is already collecting pre-kindergarten enrollment data.

Committee Vice Chair White said this should be reworded to clarify that SBCSC will be providing the data.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers directed the Committee to page four (4) of the compact.

Committee Vice Chair White pointed out more instances of “the City will...” language for Attorney Palmer to review.

Committee Member Niezgodski asked how the open data portal will be used in a way that connects to the social and emotional needs of students.

Marcus Ellison responded that those could be separate bullet points. He said SBCSC would be educating students on how to use the open data portal. He added that SBCSC tracks data that can be an indicator of students’ social and emotional wellness, such as passing rates and graduation rates.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers directed the Committee to page five (5) of the compact.

Committee Vice Chair White reviewed the progress metrics and said the language regarding annual reporting needs more clarity since it is unclear what would be expected from the City or Council.

Marcus Ellison said the data would be collected by SBCSC and shared with the Council.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers confirmed that this would be for informational purposes and would not require action from the Council.

Committee Vice Chair White pointed out more instances of “the City will...” language for Attorney Palmer to review.

Committee Member Niezgodski noted that the language commits the City to facilitating public-private partnerships for funding and stated that the Council does not have that authority.

Committee Vice Chair White said further clarification is needed regarding the expectations for City staff on the SBCSC technology committee. She pointed out that City community centers already have publicly accessible computers and Wi-Fi and suggested changing the language of these commitments to “will continue...”.



Committee Member Niezgodski mentioned that the Department of Innovation and Technology lost a significant amount of grant funding for the 2026 budget year and they should follow up on how that might impact these commitments.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers directed the Committee to page six (6) of the compact.

Committee Vice Chair White pointed out that the joint commitments involve the library and said they would have to be brought into the discussion on a potential partnership. She pointed out other commitments involving partnerships with local arts and cultural amenities and the Chamber of Commerce.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers stated that “the City will...” language will be removed from these commitments.

Committee Vice Chair White clarified the expectations for communication with SBCSC administration and school staff. She said the commitment should be reworded to specify this communication would be with the Board President and Superintendent. She said they can keep the commitment about social media strategies but potentially change the language from “explore” to “encourage”.

Committee Member Niezgodski asked who would be designated to execute the social media strategies. She asked if this would be expected to come from the Council directly or if this would come from administrative staff in the City Clerk’s office. After discussion with Marcus Ellison, she confirmed that the City Clerk’s office would coordinate this.

Committee Vice Chair White asked for further clarification on the Mayor’s volunteer program.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers said this commitment will have to be reworded and approved by the Mayor’s office. Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers directed the Committee to page seven (7) of the compact.

Committee Vice Chair White reviewed the joint commitments related to the Youth Advisory Council.

Committee Member Niezgodski pointed out that the Council’s responsibilities toward the Youth Advisory Council are already defined within the Residential Neighborhoods Committee. She suggested that Committee Vice Chair White make any necessary changes to the language since she chairs Residential Neighborhoods.

Committee Vice Chair White stated that the City could not commit to collaborating on voter registration efforts and this would have to be a partnership with another entity.

Committee Chair Niezgodski pointed out that recent policy changes have created more restrictions around voter registration and suggested striking out this commitment. The Committee agreed.

The Committee discussed the joint commitment regarding field trips to City sites and meeting with City staff. They expressed unanimous support for the commitment. Committee Member Niezgodski suggested changing the language to “South Bend sites”.



Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers said the Council cannot participate in teacher recruitment and this should be a SBCSC commitment.

Marcus Ellison spoke about the teacher recruitment initiatives SBCSC is already involved with. He explained the joint commitment to annual reporting and gave examples of the type of data SBCSC is already collecting.

Committee Chair White said the two joint commitments should be combined and moved under SBCSC commitments.

Committee Member Niezgodski agreed.

Committee Vice Chair White reviewed the progress metrics and said these should also be under the purview of SBCSC.

The Committee reviewed page eight (8) of the compact.

Marcus Ellison explained the purpose of the graduation pathway advisory committee.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers said to leave the City commitment to serving on the graduation pathway advisory committee in the compact and let the City decide.

Committee Member Niezgodski said this would fall under the Department of Innovation and Technology. She asked if City participation in the graduation pathway advisory committee is a state mandate.

Marcus Ellison replied that SBCSC is mandated to form the committee, but City participation is not required by the state.

Committee Member Niezgodski spoke about the Amazon data center and the opportunities available for students interested in technology. She recommended that SBCSC approach them about a partnership.

Citizen Member Alice Marie Pickens expressed support for creating new technology classes.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers reviewed the City commitments related to workforce development.

Committee Vice Chair White pointed out more instances of "the City will..." language that need revision.

Committee Member Niezgodski said the City may be unable to commit to creating internship opportunities due to budget constraints. She added that the City is unlikely to partner with local trade unions.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers said these commitments should be taken out and directed the Committee to page nine (9) of the compact.



Committee Vice Chair White reviewed the language referencing college and career counseling services. She said the word “counseling” should not be used due to the connotation of professional licensure.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers added that the Council cannot make commitments on behalf of City staff. She said the compact will be turned over to Attorney Palmer so he can revise the language, and the Committee will meet again to review his revisions. She informed Committee members that the revised compact would be sent out via email prior to the next meeting. Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers directed Committee Members to page ten (10) of the compact.

Committee Vice Chair White said the Committee needs to determine which parties are entering the agreement. She read the progress metrics language and clarified that these will be coming from SBCSC. She said the Committee needs to verify the date of the end of the school year. She pointed out that the compact needs to be approved by SBCSC, the City, and the Council, and said that the ratification language needs clarity.

The Committee discussed the School Board meeting schedule and Marcus Ellison said the meetings are typically on the first (1st) and third (3rd) Monday every month.

Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers reviewed the governance and public accountability language.

Committee Member Niezgodski stated that this page will depend on Attorney Palmer’s revisions, and they will need to review the final language of the compact before it can be finalized. The Committee agreed.

With no further business, Committee Chair Gooden-Rodgers adjourned the Community Relations Committee meeting at 5:00 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ophelia Gooden-Rodgers, Committee Chair

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