

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

Ray Bjork Learning Center

1600 8th Avenue

Helena, Montana

Tuesday, February 18, 2015

5:30 p.m.

The Board of Trustees Meeting of the Board of Trustees was called to order by Chair Libby Goldes at the Ray Bjork Learning Center, 1600 8th Avenue, Helena, Montana, at 5:30 p.m.

ATTENDANCE – Present unless otherwise noted.

Libby Goldes

Cherche Prezeau

Aidan Myhre

Terry Beaver

Libbi Lovshin

Betsy Baur

Ellen Feaver

Kristina Huffsmith, Trustee for High School District- excused

Joe Cohenour, Trustee for High School District

Taylor Blossom, Capital High School Representative - excused

Madison McLaughlin, Helena High School Representative - excused

Dr. Kent Kultgen, Superintendent of Schools

Greg Upham, Assistant Superintendent of Schools

Kim Harris, Business Manager

Barb Ridgway, Staff & Student Services Administrator

Joslyn Davidson, Curriculum Administrator

Pat Boles, Technology Administrator - excused

Jim Opitz, Activities Administrator - excused

John Carter, Director of Support Services - excused

Bill Rasor, Personnel Service Administrator

Lisa Lowney, Special Education Services Administrator - Excused

Fong Hom, Recording Secretary - excused

GUESTS

Jeff Cowee, Bruce Campbell, Diane Neff, Jilyn Oliveria, Brian Cummings, Pat Boles, Josh McKay, Jan Lombardi, Lisa Lowney, Don Platisha, Lisa Cordingley, Nick Radley, John Carter, Barb Ridgway, Jon Rush, Don Pogreba, Jane McDonald, Jim Opitz, Peggy Hollow-Phelps, Vanessa Nasset, Alexander Deedy, Lona Carter-Scanlon, Tim McMahon, Sue Sweeney, Kareen Bangert, Steve Thennis, Brett Zanto, Chere Jiusto, Adam Eslahpazir, Laura Ferguson, Sara Sullivan, Katie Loveland, Susan Hedalen, Jim Sobonya, Martha Kohl, Chad Lee, Martha Kohl, Karen Finley, Richard Alberts, Jon Rush, Dan Hill, Pam Atardo, Darby Bramble.

I. CALL TO ORDER – Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Goldes called the meeting to order at 5:37 p.m., and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment regarding items not on the agenda.

III. REVIEW OF AGENDA

No changes

IV. BUSINESS:

A. ITEMS FOR ACTION (*The Board of Trustees would accept Public Comment on the following items*):

1) Elementary Bond Discussion

Dr. Kultgen summarized the process of facilities planning over the past several years starting in 2007, the Mosaic Report, operational analysis and demographics, the bond work group, and then by the board sub-committee. All of these meetings solicited input from the public. The current proposal included guidelines for the facilities in terms of square footage and other physical requirements. He summarized the challenges that existed with the current buildings: infrastructure, safety, displaced technology needs. He preferred to stress what the district would gain with the bond proposal and the future benefits for students and educators through better buildings. The goal for the evening was to determine the bond amount, select the projects, and call the election.

Chair Goldes determined to discuss the bond costs to later in the discussion. The first item would be the discussion of the 10 elementary schools. The discussion regarding the options for Central would be later.

Ms. Prezeau asked about the costs for 4 G's and Rossiter. She asked for an explanation of how these were developed. Dr. Kultgen explained that the capacity of the schools compared to the Helena school district guidelines by combining Wyoming and Ohio school standards along with educator input. In the handouts, the size of the current school was compared to the district standards. Then the cost was developed by applying costs to each school where shortages occurred. He noted that functional life skills and other special needs were included in the costs for each school. She felt that the capacity should have included more of a cushion in order to meet future needs. She asked if amounts could be trimmed from the 10 elementary schools to save for future needs. Dr. Kultgen encouraged the trustees to concentrate on the projects and any later direction would be returned to the consultants to change projects utilizing the standards and equity between schools.

Ms. Myhre was surprised at the cost for all of the schools to meet the standards. She agreed that the numbers had to be trimmed. She reminded others that displaced students were the first goal in the past. If the board agreed based on that priority, then that would provide guidance to the staff.

Ms. Feaver stated that standards had been developed and once the decision had been made to touch all schools then it would be difficult to rationalize standards good for some but not other schools. Cutting back on the standards now would make it hard to justify the revised projects. Predicting the future was not feasible – the priority was to improve for students today.

Ms. Prezeau felt the proposal for the 10 elementary schools was short sighted and short changed the Middle School students. The district had to come up with that money for those buildings.

Mr. Beaver explained that the bond recovery of debt capacity would be sufficient to invest in the Middle schools after these projects were completed – in about 10 years. In the meantime, the Building reserve would be used for the Middle Schools; and as a result, they would not be neglected.

Public Comment regarding the proposal for 10 elementary schools excluding Central

Adam Eslahpazir recommended the trustees slow down and take the pulse of the community. The public wanted neighborhood schools. He asked when the middle schools were converted, why throw money at elementary schools that would be closed. He said that this proposal meant consolidation and take pulse of community for all of the implications of the schools.

Laura Ferguson, supported putting money into all 10 schools. This proposal was asking the community for this kind of money but should not if we were closing or selling elementary schools and there was a conversion of middle schools into elementary schools. The proposal was different from the smaller schools that the public wanted for elementary schools. The voter support would not come if middle schools were converted and the trustees would have to start the process over again. She wondered if county transportation, fire, police, and local businesses had been consulted in the planning and warned that closure would affect real estate values.

Ms. Prezeau stated that consolidation was the vision perhaps in 10 years and not a question for the current board.

Sara Sullivan advised that this proposal could include a discussion of middle schools. She reminded the trustees that not all of the community supported small schools. She supported larger schools especially if it meant increased operational funds.

Katie Loveland encouraged trustees to not throw money at schools that would close. She noted that the schools where the lowest income students attended were getting a pittance. She recommended a better decision grid and criteria and a poll to determine the pulse of community.

Susan Hedalen as a teacher was anxious and looking forward to technology and applications in the classroom and to facilities being functional.

Jim Sobonya supported money if it is allowed for special need students to move out of basement of Bryant. He was concerned about student safety when walking to school.

Martha Kohl was confused about plan for Smith and where the 500 students were coming. Dr. Kultgen explained that there were 900 in the area now and the vision would consolidate Bryant into the other schools and this would require boundary changes. The capacity was 500 but it would not be full. She preferred smaller schools and to not invest in schools that would close and wondered if there was community support to close schools.

Karen Finley wondered if consolidation was justified. She asked how the district can afford 1/3rd more square footage. The reality was that 79% of the money in the proposal was for 4:3 schools and 81% of square footage was for 4:3 schools. If the voters pass phase I and no other phases pass, then this plan has nothing for Bryant, HMS, and Hawthorne, then what happens with these schools. The trustees must

be honest that bond was for consolidation. Many voters want small schools and do not want consolidation or giant schools. What would be done with the extra capacity at HMS?

Chad Lee stated that any proposal that increased the 4:3 schools was one that he would vote against. He was against larger schools.

Richard Alberts noted that the question of consolidation happened after the money was spent. If the vision was followed, it would be 3rd phase where HS to MS and MS to elementary schools to accommodate students. The money today was strictly to improve what we have now. Consolidation would be later after the high school.

Joh Rush suggested making Smith same size and invest the savings to restore Central. This plan had deferred spending on roofs. In the past, the building reserve has been used strangely and should be used to fix things that are coming up that have no bonding as a source of funding. By including deferred maintenance in bond projects, it defeated the building reserve purpose.

Laura Ferguson asked if the Jim Darcy and Warren existing buildings would be demolished and if this cost was included. Dr. Kultgen responded that the cost was included in the summary numbers. He continued that Jim Darcy was not built for the long run based on the structure – stick built. It was better to start over.

Dan Hill felt it made more sense to address the high schools first rather than the elementary. They were spending a lot of money on elementary and if it was the other way, the trustees would have a better idea of which schools should be shut down.

Board Discussion

Chair Goldes explained that the reality was 8-10 years was about two generations of students. The obligation was for all students now. Not possible to do everything now because of debt capacity limitations, so the plans had to be broken into phases. Students would be in an environment that met the goals of technology and displaced students.

Ms. Myhre asked about capacity. If the district did not need additional capacity, why not shave some money from Smith and keep it at the same size. This would keep all 4 schools on that side of town. The 4:3 increases efficiency of staffing and she agreed with that goal. Dr. Kultgen agreed that Smith could be done in the future rather than immediately.

Chair Goldes asked the Trustees regarding their level of support for the options for Central Elementary

- 1) Modularity to Central School Location – no support
- 2) Central to stay at Lincoln – leave it open as an option
- 3) Renovate Central – leave it open
- 4) Renovate Central to 4:3 – no support but open for discussion
- 5) New Central to a 4:3 – no support
- 6) Moving Central to Ray Bjork, those to Lincoln site – open
- 7) Change boundaries – no support

Public Comment regarding Central Schools Options

Adam Eslahpazir advised the Trustees that the first bond must be successful for the vision to be successful, he did not want consolidation, the process should be equitable and include Central, that consolidation was for the faculty not students, supported education and want bond will need to take consolidation out and rebuild Central for the students.

Chere Jiusto provided several options for the trustees that she designed to meet the historical goals of the Montana Historical alliance including Central as a school, or an interim school, or an office building. She also listed funding sources that she had researched to save bonding capacity. The trustees were correct to touch all schools. Shaving from other schools would keep it affordable. She stressed that to gain community support, the trustees should be to be open to public.

Richard Alberts when looking at the numbers for the options, it appeared that only option B would be within bonding capacity. With other options, then something would have to be done with to reduce the other construction costs.

Jon Rush noted that little Building Reserve money had been spent on Central in the past which meant it was planned obsolescence and restricted improvement. Option C for Central was the best. This issues was caused by not spending money on the school.

Margaret Hollow-Phelps encouraged Trustees to continue the Preschool at Ray Bjork. The facility at Ray Bjork is the best for preschool students.

Laura Ferguson was concerned with PAL and option B created an issue for that school. And Option F should be taken off because it continued dislocation of PAL. That leaves renovation : option C or D.

Board Discussion

Ms. Lovshin asked about the timing of options. With options C or D, the students would not back until the fall of 2018 and would stay at Lincoln campus.

Ms. Prezeau said that option F did not make sense. Option D did not take into account the HMS in vision to convert and the cost was not affordable. Staying at Lincoln was not viable and reduced alternatives for PAL. She liked option C because it Central had no value right now. If it was renovated and improved, it could be sold or used for other options based on the site. She supported option C.

Mr. Beaver preferred option F to relocate to Ray Bjork for various reasons. The district had such a deep hole to keep what we have and accommodate the neighborhood schools. The trustees recognized the advantages of a bit larger school such as a 4:3 school academically. The 4:3 schools were the ones that were performing better. Smaller schools had combination classes that were not fair to students, hard to teach, and difficult for students. It was a great advantage to have a bit larger schools. As far as Central to rebuild in any fashion is not commensurate with the vision to go to 4:3 schools. Putting money into Central would be a waste. He listed the deficiencies of Central both academically and physically. He would not compromise our students' needs for history and would not compromise the education or safety of the students for a building.

John Carter explained what the renovation option included.

The trustees reviewed the options again.

- 1) Modularity to Central School Location – no support
- 2) Central to stay at Lincoln – no support
- 3) Renovate Central – leave it open
- 4) Renovate Central to 4:3 – no support
- 5) New Central to a 4:3 – no support
- 6) Moving Central to Ray Bjork, those to Lincoln site – open
- 7) Change boundaries – no support

Ms. Prezeau stated that the remaining bonding capacity would not cover phase 2 and 3 so this proposal did not address the cost of Middle school.

Ms. Baur stated that capacity must leave something for the middle schools.

Dr. Kultgen felt that 90% of the capacity for Central and the other projects would be about what could be workable. He advised the trustees to decide projects.

The trustees debated the level of the bond amount – at capacity vs leaving some amount for other purposes.

Motion: Ms. Feaver moved with plan at 100% of capacity and renovate Central – option 3. Ms. Lovshin seconded.

Public Comment on motion

Adam Eslahpazir supported the motion.

Laura Ferguson preferred to keep money for the middle schools at 80% of capacity.

Chad Lee advised to downscale Smith to leave money for the middle schools.

Richard Alberts asked if the plans would meet seismic codes in City of Helena. Mr Carter explained that they would be included and reviewed.

Chere Jiusto had reviewed Building Reserve list and told the Trustees that they should put some improvements into a third bond. She identified pavements and parking lots to save money and advised them to move these to later.

Karen Finley did not support consolidation.

The trustees indicated that they were not in unanimous support of the motion. Ms. Feaver withdrew the motion. Ms. Lovshin agreed.

Motion: Ms. Myhre moved to pass a bond for \$70 million for all 10 schools and option C and district wide communications. Ms. Prezeau seconded.

Public Comment on motion

Pam Attardo was encouraged by discussion and putting money into all schools and Central. The public were not ready for consolidation and needed discussions on it. She told the trustees that there were many tools available for Board and they should engage the community and local government about

what mattered to parents. She explained that consolidation would jeopardize the bond and needed to be addressed with the public. She questioned the advantages of a larger school and the advantages of a 4:3 to parents.

Peggy Hollow-Phelps – Bryant school renovations were low and asked if they elevated it to be a place of learning that it should be?

Amended motion: Ms. Myhre amended the motion to call for a mail ballot election on June 18, 2015. Ms. Prezeau seconded.

Public Comment on the amendment:

Darby Bramble said that the educators support the trustees.

Vote on amendment: the amendment passed unanimously.

Public Comment on amended motion: None

Vote on amended motion: The motion passed with Mr. Beaver and Ms. Baur opposed.

2. Superintendent Report: None

V. ADJOURNMENT

There being no other topics for future meetings and no public comments on issues not on the agenda, the meeting adjourned at 8:57p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Goldes, Chair