

Facility Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 3, 2014
Ray Bjork Learning Center

Present: Terry Beaver, Libbi Lovshin, Kent Kultgen, John Carter, Aidan Myhre

Guests: Don Platisha, Tim Meldrum, Doug Shenkle, Steve Thennis, Chuck Butler, Sumner Sharpe, Tony Perpignano, Ben Tintinger, Mike Dowling, Lisa Lowney, Pete Brown, Jon Rush, Alexander Deedy, Brian Cummings, Betsy Baur, Jan Lombardi, Pam Attardo, Sarah Sullivan, Chere Jiusto, Thomas Judge, and Diane Neff

Mr. Beaver called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. He provided a recap of the last meeting which was a workshop at which time four groups provided different scenarios they felt would provide solutions to the district regarding facilities.

Dr. Kultgen reviewed the goals of the committee. He said that we all know that facilities have everything to do with education. We need to look at all K-12 schools; we need to look at long term views in order to meet future educational needs; we need to maximize use of district assets; we need to address urgent needs first and invest for the future; and look at phases that optimize bonding capacity.

Dr. Kultgen introduced Tim Meldrum who reviewed the K-12 Vision as developed from the December 3rd workshop. Mr. Meldrum said we need to look at what we want to see in 10, 15, 20 years, not just next year. At the workshop on December 3rd, all four groups were represented by a variety of folks. It was agreed that we need to invest in schools and the community.

Mr. Meldrum reviewed the west side schools and the east side schools - all four groups agreed that in order to solve the elementary problems we need to start with the high schools and work down. Both the east side and west side should get a new high school, the middle schools would move into the high schools and the middle schools would then get renovated into elementary schools, including more parking, better drop off areas, etc. Some of the elementary schools would be renovated. What does renovate mean? We don't know for sure yet, but it should include technology and safety, maybe new gym, multipurpose rooms. etc.

Mr. Meldrum next talked about the cost attributes. There is more bonding capacity at the high school level. A new Jim Darcy won't cost as much as building a new high school. Should the bond pass in the spring of next year, it would take at least five years to meet the total vision. We want to invest for decades. Ms. Myhre asked if purchasing land and a new high school was one of the same. Would this be new land? It would be to build a new high school on new land.

Mr. Beaver said that purchasing land for a high school would come out of a high school bond. He asked if we have to have a specific piece of land or can we just set aside a certain amount of money? Dr. Kultgen said we can't be too general, but we want to be specific enough in order to get the community to vote. Mr. Beaver fears that by the time we're ready to build a new high school the demographics may have changed. Do voters have to approve the location of the land? Mr. Carter said he thought it has to be a defined location, but will check for sure. Ms. Myhre said we have to look at city services available and would want to be as specific as possible.

Mr. Beaver said he is concerned about the possibility of East Helena building a high school. We really can't decide on a high school until that is resolved. We wouldn't know how big to build a high school. For us even to attempt to build a school is not prudent at all. We need definitive answers about East Helena. Mr. Meldrum said this is a definite concern. This is one more bump in the road for us. There is much to figure out. Before doing anything we have to define where we want to go, not necessarily how we're going to get there.

Mr. Meldrum described three options. There is changing dynamic by renovating the high schools. The groups at the December 3rd workshop didn't have many options for the west side. There are many, many scenarios as to what we could do and each option will generate a different affect.

Mr. Dowling said there are many pros and cons to the scenarios but if a new middle school is built, that will take a lot of money from the elementary schools.

Mr. Beaver said to purchase land for middle school would be a difficult task because it would be difficult to find land within the city limits. He went on to talk about walkability. Middle school students are the students who walk to school; most elementary students ride the bus or are brought to school by parents. High school students generally drive. The current middle school sites would serve well as elementary sites. The current CHS and HHS sites would serve the middle schools well for walkability. It would be tough to find land that would serve walkability.

Mr. Meldrum said the participants in the workshop said starting at the high schools and working down is the way to go. Everyone was interested in talking about these options. Mr. Dowling said this is what 70 plus people wanted. And with that 85% at each table agreed with these options.

Mr. Perpignano reiterated that we don't want to do a bond and then end up back here in 15 years. What we tried to do with the vision was plan a larger investment for a longer time.

Mr. Beaver asked what happens if you change high schools to middle schools? As far as moving the land from the high school district to the elementary district. Dr. Kultgen said he would have to check.

Mr. Tintinger said he attended meetings regarding the East Helena high school discussion. The concern with most was the distance to the school and the large number of students in the school. We need to be proactive and work with them to help alleviate their concerns, whether it's about location of land or school size or the layout of the school.

Ms. Myhre suggested we invite East Helena parents to participate in our high school discussions.

Ms. Lovshin said she is anxious to talk about timelines for Jim Darcy and displaced students.

Mr. Beaver agreed. The committee needs to tackle immediate needs. Ms. Lovshin went on to say that she is happy to hear that we are talking about touching all buildings and that we don't put ourselves in the position of doing things and then finding out that we can't afford to do them.

Dr. Kultgen said that if we add square footage somewhere we have to cut it another place. We could build a Jim Darcy, renovate Smith, Warren, Rossiter, Four Georgians, Jefferson and Broadwater; add safety and technology to Kessler, Hawthorne, Bryant and Central-Linc. easily in the first bond and then look at the middle schools and high schools in a second bond later. Mr. Beaver added that it's very important that technology also gets completed in the middle schools.

Ms. Myhre asked the public to look at whether this is the right vision or not. Is there merit to doing a bond all at once or should we break this into more than one bond? Mr. Beaver thinks the Vision will work but it won't work rapidly enough. And we can't wait until East Helena makes a decision. He added that we need to solve the immediate problems at hand.

Ms. Lovshin said it would be good to buy land. The idea that this could drag out for years, really bothers her. She added that she is really fond of renovating Helena Middle School into an elementary school. We need to commit to taking care of K-5. Not sure where HMS students would go, but we could work that out.

The committee opened the meeting to General Public Comment:

Mike Dowling said that the East Helena decision doesn't change the plan; it may just change the size of the high school.

Mr. Beaver said that if East Helena builds a high school, the bonding capacity would change. And it's not that easy to convert Helena Middle School to an elementary school.

Mr. Meldrum said we've taken the first step to a big decision.

Sumner Sharpe – This Vision is great. Now we can begin to work through the process. This makes sense to use existing facilities. Closing schools is not being discussed. Technology and Safety are so important to do now. Great value is added by taking care of safety. Don't pre-judge. Neighbors are changing. Tonight was a good discussion and now we have to explain it to the community.

Libby Goldes – Glad to hear that the community was involved with this Vision. Valid concerns have been raised such as the East Helena issue. We need to look at academics as they transition into our schools. We need to work with them. There are concerns about the operational budget and what we can afford. We could also look at our high schools sharing campuses such as a community center. This would enable us to be more flexible.

Sarah Sullivan – She likes the Vision. Community has asked for a large vision and this makes sense to use current facilities. The timeline is a concern. East Helena is a concern. We'll lose bonding capacity. How does that work? Dr. Kultgen said that if we pass a high school bond, and then East Helena gets the okay to build their own high school, they then become responsible for their share of the bond. Nothing is going to stay static.

Betsy Baur – Vision is exciting and community will get behind it. We should reach out to East Helena to help with the process.

Chere Jiusto – We need to have more conversation with community. A couple of other options should be developed. We should look at the library process and how they did that. The bond has to fit the Helena community. Consider 2-3 scenarios and present to community. If Helena Middle School would become an elementary how does that really look? She is disappointed to see that Central dropped out of the picture. We need to get the trust back with the Central community. The Central students are still displaced and need to be addressed. It would only take about \$1.2. to \$1.4 million to renovate Central. Dr. Kultgen said this doesn't cover all the architectural work that needs to be done. Why not sell Front Street Learning Center? Dr. Kultgen asked where those students go if we sold Front Street. Ms. Jiusto said these are options we need to explore.

Mr. Beaver said that most are in agreement that we need a new Jim Darcy so then we need to begin discussion of renovating and adding technology at the middle schools.

Dr. Kultgen asked if we should run one bond or two bonds. Will the community vote for it or not.

Mr. Beaver said that if everyone agrees with the Vision, then we need to decide what schools will become 4/3 schools and which will not, specifically Smith. Currently Smith is the most expensive building in the district to run because of its 13 boilers.

Ms. Lovshin said the principal was in her group at the November 14th workshop and said that Smith should be new so she believes that just renovating isn't the best option.

Ms. Myhre said she doesn't think that the three trustees on the facility committee should be making the decision as to what to do. We've made huge progress. She feels new energy has been put into this.

Mr. Beaver disagreed. He said the community elected them to make decisions. We know what needs to be done. If they aren't in agreement with what we suggest, the voters won't pass it. If we plan to do it all at once, that is too far down the road. We'll be lucky to find two parcels of land in three years.

Mr. Carter said there has been little to no planning for the high schools. If we could look at another model, that would speed things up. He added that it takes about two years to build a school.

Mike Dowling said we shouldn't go out in May and do both high school and elementary school bonds, but they could be separated by 6-9 months. Doing them together doesn't accelerate getting the students where they need to be. It would still be 4-5 years.

Mr. Beaver reiterated the importance of attacking immediate problems. He thought we should just purchase land for the high schools and if we have to be specific as to where we are going to purchase the land, then we shouldn't do it. He feels we should just build a new Jim Darcy and Smith and renovate the others and adding technology and safety to Hawthorne, Kessler, Bryant and Central.

Ms. Myhre asked what we should do about Central School. Mr. Beaver said he still wants to see what the city says about Central. He said he would like to give the proposal to the city. Central is not a bad site for a new school on new footprint. Ms. Myhre said maybe we need to adjust boundaries too. Dr. Kultgen asked how much money we put into a school if we're going to move kids into HMS. Ms. Lovshin asked if we get any return on our investment into Central. Mr. Carter said we'll build it as a school, not a business, so you might get some. Ms. Lovshin asked if anyone would want to buy Central. Dr. Kultgen said this could be a question for the survey if we chose to do one.

Ms. Myhre asked if we should take this to the full board. We've done our work now we should take to the full board. Dr. Kultgen asked what would be the recommendation. Ms. Myhre said we could take the vision – and then ask if we should move forward with phases or run the entire thing. Mr. Beaver said we haven't refined it enough to take to full board.

Ms. Lovshin said we need to figure out if all we want to do is within our bonding capacity.

Mr. Beaver said that's been decided, but it doesn't include the middle schools - we could do K-5. Dr. Kultgen said there are three questions. 1. Do we explore one or two bonds? 2. When do we want to run the bond? 3. Do we need to have a survey?

Mr. Beaver said he doesn't want to do a survey. The way he sees it is we'll survey 400 people. Sixty percent of those surveyed won't vote. So we're looking at 150 responses to decide what we will do?

Ms. Myhre said the community should have a chance to comment on this vision. What about using web sites, newsletter, etc. We need to gather comments from various groups before putting on the ballot.

Mr. Carter asked - Have we reached everyone? It will give us an idea of what people are thinking.

Ms. Myhre said we have to be careful in assuming that all of East Helena parents want a new high school.

General Public Comment was again taken:

Pam Attardo – The workshop on November 14th was a great start, but it wasn't a cross section. We should to invite more of the public. She felt a survey would be good. She thought we should contact other 21st century facilities - nationwide – they may have a master plan guide. Have we talked with staff, students, special education, PAL as to what they think? She felt it is premature to throw this plan out now without getting more input.

Doug Skenkle – There is still one big elephant and that is Central School. The board voted a while back to take care of Central, but there is a site issue. There is a little elephant and that is the middle school renovation. \$73 mill won't go very far if you focus on middle schools too. With the jail, coming to the voters and the elementary bond and high school bond – this is a lot to put on the voters since you haven't asked for anything for 35 years. We have surveys – the Mosaic Report – it focused on the middle schools being overcrowded. The community wants small to medium size schools. If you do a survey you won't get the answers you want.

Ben Tintinger – The master plan – the Mosaic Report - took two years to complete. It identified all problems in the schools. Jim Darcy has been vetted pretty well. But there is still a lot of

work that needs to be done. It's safe to put an elementary proposal out to the public. The whole plan will take some time.

Chere Jiusto – At the workshop there was great spirit and momentum. Some good bridges were built. Don't send survey about this. Reconvene with more information. Find out what the price tag will be. There are too many others asking for money. If you reinvest in Central, there are other mandates coming down the pike – What about PAL, Montessori, pre-K, and Head Start.

Brian Cummings – He's being part of this for six years. He is a strong advocate towards phase one and focus on the elementary schools. Central is always a big factor in this. We need to renovate Lincoln because Central School would take two years. Demographics? We don't know what the enrollment will be three years from now. For six years we defined a 21st century school. We know what we need in the elementary. The middle schools and high schools must be phase two. We need instruction before construction. We don't know what a 21st century high school should look like.

Betsy Baur – We need to continue the community process and continue tweaking the plan.

Greg Upham – In visiting with the teacher and parent councils, most supported doing it all in one bond. In order to get the most votes, they believe we must do k-12. We just can't fix everything in three years. High school bond has to be run with the elementary bond. Billings just passed \$120 mil bond.

Mr. Beaver asked if we should take the Vision to the full board.

Ms. Myhre said yes or reconvene with more numbers.

Mr. Beaver said the committee will take the Vision to the full Board on December 9th.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.