

Facility Committee
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 20, 2015

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

Mr. Beaver called the meeting to order at 5:38 p.m. He said the committee is close to reaching a decision. The three phases of the Vision are in line with the needed accomplishments. Decisions still need to be made which are critical. Central School is an obstacle and primary concern along with the 8,000 students throughout the district. Different groups want different things. There are parameters and we must be fiscally responsible. We want to find a home for the displaced students. It's necessary to reduce buildings so we can accumulate greater funding in the operational budget. The district currently has computers sitting in warehouses that can't be used because we don't have the electrical outlets to support them.

He continued to say that the middle schools have been deprived for quite a while. There are 100 students at the middle school level that are in need of reading interventions but in order to serve them we have to increase the operational budget. We currently don't have sufficient funds.

Dr. Kultgen reviewed a prior document outlining the phases of the bonds. There are 3,400 students K-5. We must focus on K-5 and then begin with the next section. We also need to talk about Central. That's the elephant in the room. Do we keep the students at Lincoln or put them in modulars at Central. The committee asked for another option - split the Central students and put at all schools. Dr. Kultgen said he met with Central parents and they want to stay together. Should we rebuild Central? Do we sell or keep Central? What are the thoughts of the committee?

Ms. Myhre asked if we can put students back at Central. Dr. Kultgen said yes. Dr. Kultgen said if we keep the students at Central for 8-10 years it means more than retrofitting the building seismically. We would still have to do technology, ventilation, taking walls out - this is the perfect time to do wiring and plumbing, etc. What would it take to make Central a good bridge to fit into the Vision? It has to be a dual purpose building with options on how to use the building after the students move out.

Dr. Kultgen said he sees Central to be a 2-2 school including Montessori. Retrofit the building to meet the current enrollment needs.

Mr. Beaver said an additional option would be to place students at Ray Bjork Learning Center (RBLC). The Central community could remain together. Modularity could be moved to RBLC and would be an interim for Central students. The problem with students at Lincoln is the train/tracks as well as Malfunction Junction. The solution of moving to RBLC would eliminate those concerns. This is still a less expensive option. 100% of students in RBLC are transported by bus and would be able to be accommodated by transportation if they were to move to Lincoln. Pre-school students wouldn't experience the difficulty of Central students.

Ms. Myhre said continuing to move kids other places is not good. A 7-10 year fix accommodates the neighborhood students. Ms. Myhre asked if we could move PAL back to Lincoln and sell Front Street. Looking at Central as a 5-8 year solution fixes the building and makes it available for other uses.

Ms. Lovshin said that the cost of fixing Central puts us over the bonding capacity. What is best for ALL students? Are we going to compromise other schools to get students back into Central?

Dr. Kultgen said we can trim back through deferred maintenance.

Ms. Lovshin said so we're going to stretch things out over a longer period of time when we don't have to.

Mr. Beaver said the problem with putting modularity at Central is the majority of the campus would be covered with structures – bus drop offs, and the playground would be compromised. There would be little or no green space. If modularity is put there, we can't sell the building. We would have to fence the building for the children's safety.

Ms. Myhre said if the first bond is 75 mil, in 2020 we would have 21 mil bonding capacity and in 10 years we would have 42 mil. We need resources to retrofit the middle schools. Can we shave back the bond so we have more resources in phase II and III?

Dr. Kultgen said that Mr. Carter developed building standards at each school which is how he generated the needs at each school.

Ms. Myhre asked if we could move some of the Functional Life Skills from Four Georgians to C.R. Anderson. We would like to expand FLS at 4 g's which could be moved to another school.

The fate of Central must be decided – do we sell it or do we keep it?

Ms. Lovshin said we shouldn't shave from other schools to save Central. She would rather put money into the middle schools.

Ms. Myhre said maybe we should the middle schools and then look at the elementary schools.

Ms. Lovshin said we need to focus on displaced students.

Ms. Myhre said she just wants equal treatment for all the kids.

Ms. Lovshin asked what the timeframe for trimming would be.

Dr. Kultgen said if you trim you have trim equally across all schools.

Mr. Beaver added that if we trim back we compromise all buildings for Central.

Ms. Lovshin asked to have 10 minutes to review the documents.

The committee took a 10 minute break

Mr. Beaver called the meeting to order after the 10 minute break. He said there were some experts in the crowd that wished to speak to the committee. Teachers would only be allowed to speak; it would not be a full general public comment.

Elly Driggers – Kindergarten teacher at Central – She said Helena is a strong community that cares about every child at Central and in Helena. Teachers are there because of the students. Central is 250 students and those children deserve a good learning environment. The only way to achieve that is to make a decision. Once a decision is made then the teachers can rally behind the committee and talk about the details. The delay of the decision is delaying the students the opportunity to walk to school, technology, air quality in the schools, resources, etc. Every school has issues and they are impacting our ability to get services to our students. My plea is to move forward.

Elaine Messmer – Bryant – She concurred with everything Ms. Driggers said. In delaying the decision holds back all of us. The sooner a decision is made, the sooner we can get going.

Sus Bristow – Rossiter – She concurred with everything said. We are losing credibility and the kids are losing out.

Tina Brothers – Jim Darcy – She concurred. We need a decision sooner rather than later. Start the process. Jim Darcy's needs are different from the other elementary schools. We are a 4-3 school that supports a 2-2 school. Making a decision will benefit everyone.

Ashton Broadhead – Capital High School – The high schools have their own needs. We have a K-12 Vision. High schools lack common areas, gym space, etc. When a decision is made the high schools will benefit in the long run.

Marla Unruh - Librarian - Broadwater – She said she loves it here but she is in the basement. Two days before Christmas we got a lot of dust in the basement. The students are in a dry and dusty environment. We, as a district can do better? We don't teach like we did in the old days. Teaching today, we can target each child's weakness and strength. Small groups have to meet in a dark corner or hallway. Or near the front door where there is cold air. In years past, trustees would not have let us work in those conditions. Digital devices are capable of giving students instant feedback. This helps kids. Digital learning is helping our kids. Don't forget that you want the very best for our kids, not a do over or a make do. They need us. We want every student to be a prepared citizen.

Jennifer Schaefer – Broadwater – She said she is parent and soon to be a parent again. She realizes it's not easy to make a decision, but it's so critical for our students.

Tammy Jendro – Jim Darcy – The staff and students are really feeling the crunch at Jim Darcy. It's time to move forward.

Jill Putnam – Jefferson – She agreed with everything said. Each school has their unique problems. We can't fix those problems until the committee comes together.

Rhiannon Tague – Broadwater – Please, just make a decision and the staff will support you.

Susie Hedalen – Warren – Helena is a great place to live and raise a family. She loves the district. The trustees have a big job – and the facility plans have come a long way. The Superintendent's Teacher Advisory Council has looked at the facility recommendations multiple times. The staff is doing the best they can with what they have. Principals give us as much of what we need as they can. Students have to leave the room to take a test for Math because they require computers. It took the entire afternoon to give the test to 27 students in her classroom. The district has large technology

needs. The nurse at Warren is in the closet. Diabetes is growing among students and we have increasing numbers of students with counseling needs. We can't teach students until their health needs are addressed. She thanked the committee for the work they do.

Rose Ferriter – Smith – She thanked the trustees for all they do. She said she loves her job and wouldn't want to be a trustee. Someone is going to be unhappy with the decision made. What is in a building that folks don't want to get rid of? They are just buildings. What did I want for my kids growing up? I wanted it all but I had to look at what I could afford and what I couldn't. Everyone will rally behind decision. We have a positive community and a positive staff.

Mary Pat Pennl - Jefferson – She said she was on the ELA committee. Many of decisions the committee made, were based on technology.

Alison Horn – Warren – She provided a professional and personal perspective. She has two boys that going to attend Warren. It's falling apart and she looks forward to it being updated. She told about a family that moved to Helena but because of the lack of opportunity for their children, they moved. The district takes pride in educators but it is sad to see the state of our buildings. When students attend Warren she knows the teachers there will be doing the best they can with what they have, but they could have better accommodations.

Lynn Trenary - Warren – She said when she took the job, there was plenty of room. Seven years ago a kindergarten class was added. Her space shrunk and now is the smallest in the district. Students have no elbow and leg room. They are sitting at her desk. There is no room for laptops. Students have to sit on the floor. She runs a book fair each year which is held in the teacher's lounge which forces the teachers into another space.

The committee thanked the teachers for their comments.

Mr. Beaver asked the committee if they should consider options for Central.

Dr. Kultgen asked to hear from the committee about a smaller amount? If so what should it be?

Ms. Lovshin said we should make efforts to trim down by using deferred maintenance.

Ms. Myhre said she could accept a remodel to Central keeping the cost under \$8 million. The plan may need to be trimmed back. Then in 2020 the next

phase would occur which would be the high schools. Then the next phase would be the middle schools.

Ms. Lovshin asked if PAL would move back to Lincoln or would we need that campus while other buildings are being built.

Mr. Carter said it will take a 2 ½ years to renovate Central. So we would need to retain students at Lincoln.

Mr. Beaver said we are in need of consolidating schools so we have more operational funds. If we rebuild Central for \$8 million it puts us in situation of not acquiring additional operational costs. We've talked about when we should consolidate schools. The older buildings could fail at any time. When a building fails, we were to consider consolidation. We would end up with fewer elementary schools and more money in the operational budget.

We didn't consider if enrollment drops then a school should close. We have that situation in a number of schools – three maybe four schools that are teaching combination classes. It's hard to live with knowing that kids are in combo classes. Combo classes are not a good learning environment. If we were to consolidate when there are combo classes at schools that would involve four schools. There is more opportunity to handle students in a regular classroom. Mr. Beaver said he would like to see a 4-3 south of the tracks. To rebuild Central and put students back in same situation they were before and run combo classes is not fiscally responsible or educational responsible. He said he is not opposed to tearing down Central and building a 4-3 school. It could accommodate a failure of Hawthorne or Bryant. It is a very Complex issue. The only way to put students back on the Central campus is to put modular at RBLC. We could build a 4-3 at Smith because that area is going to grow. A 4-3 on the west side of town could be C.R. Anderson. The geographic position of Kessler is not ideal.

Ms. Lovshin said if we trim the bond, schools will be impacted. There are such significant needs in all the schools. We can't allow ourselves to get in this position 50 – 75 years from now. That's why we are maximizing our bonding capacity.

Ms. Lovshin said that this is a vision for the future. The proposals speak to overall vision. How do we touch as many students as possible? She said she struggles with maximizing our bonding capacity. It would be a long time until we touch the middle schools. It's disheartening to see what all there is to do.

Dr. Kultgen said we are predicting what is going to happen in five years. We're worried about the middle schools. We can free up money to help the middle schools, but if we cut the bond back, we're not doing one thing great but everything mediocre. Every building is hurting and affecting each child. We just need to do one phase at a time.

Ms. Myhre asked why we aren't looking at a 4-3 school at Smith, redrawing boundaries and enlarging Jefferson. She said she can't support putting kids in modulars for seven years.

Mr. Beaver said if we put Central students at RBLC they don't have to spend their career in a modular. One downfall of RBLC is the restrooms are not accommodating for older children.

Mr. Beaver said they need to come to a resolution. Everyone in town wants a solution. He said he would open up to General Public Comment but asked that the public to speak only if they had something new to present to the committee.

Cherche Prezeau – 907 State Street – The board has had many conversations. Can we put a 4-3 at Central and connect to the gym. This would free up funds and for a little more we can fix Central. This was considered months ago.

Dr. Kultgen said the Vision says that we would turn Helena Middle School into an elementary school with four of the current schools going to HMS. If we did that what would happen to Central as a 4-3 school?

Ms. Prezeau said that ten years down the road we may not have the money to finish the vision. We should look at what is best for our kids now.

Chere Jiusto – 4529 Union Hill Road – She appreciated the comments from the teachers. They are the heart of the schools. She went on to say that Central is always on table. The notion to renovate Central to a 4-3 is a great idea. The school and gym can be linked together and a great playground and drop off area could be available. If a seismic retrofit was done, kids could be back in the building by September or January. Start work on the gym now and get them back sooner. Billings renovated phase projects so kids could be in building while things were being completed.

Tina Brothers – Jim Darcy – She was an early supporter of renovating Central. She was so excited about after the planning session when they came up with the K-12 Vision. We're down to one issue. You have all the information. We're here to support you. Modulars are not good. Central

students don't want to come to RBLC and go to the middle school as an elementary school.

Greg Upham – 55 south Rodney – He thanked the teachers. Their voices have not been heard up until this point. They give education and students the voice. He went on to say that there are two teachers here tonight that plan to retire this year and they are still here fighting for their students. Keep the fight.

Ms. Myhre said when someone comes into Helena, it's important for them to see a large beautiful school. It's in close proximity to so many things. The Vision experience was a great start. It makes much sense for the west side, but not enough clarity for east side. She thinks keeping a 4-3 option at Central should be a top option.

Ms. Lovshin said we don't have recent costs for this option. There are many costs that are not thought of. She expressed concerned about the cost of renovating Central on the existing footprint to 4-3. She prefers renovating Helena Middle School to a K-5. The architects did the walkability and where HMS is located is ideal for Central and Bryant.

Dr. Kultgen said he doesn't want to be negative but if we build a 4-3 at Central, where do kids come from. We need to answer these questions before looking at this option. He said he still believes the K-12 Vision is good.

Mr. Beaver said structure determines function and function determines structure. If Central is not functional so to put students in the existing building, we'd have to tear out all the entire interior walls. This is seismically challenging. If we rebuild Central back to what it was, we end up with historical bricks on the outside and nothing historical on the inside. It's not the right structure to make the eagle fly. It's a compromise. The district is not in a position to accommodate the history of the building but rather we are here to educate students. I want a structure that is functional as a school. The 7th Avenue Gym is bad too. We can't build an eagle out of the gym either. You can't gather different body parts of various animals and expect to build an eagle that can fly. In Mr. Beaver's opinion it just won't work. The first thing we have to do is build two new high schools and then move the middle schools to the high schools. Do we really think the high school taxpayers are going to pay higher taxes to support the elementary schools? Do we think East Helena or Wolf Creek want to pay higher taxes to support elementary schools? He doesn't think so. We're not going to get that kind of support.

Ms. Myhre said she hopes the community would look at the district as a whole. We need to look at elementary needs. We need sound long term solutions for elementary students.

Ms. Myhre said she doesn't feel the committee has to be unanimous with a recommendation.

Dr. Kultgen said he disagreed. He feels everyone needs to be excited about the recommendation.

Ms. Myhre recommended the committee have two or three options to take to the full board. She said this committee is only three members of a seven member board.

The options that will be presented to the full board will be:

1. Current scenarios in which all 11 elementary schools would be either built new or renovated with information on:
 - a. Redrawing boundary lines on the East side allowing Central students to attend other schools
 - b. Moving all Central students to Ray Bjork Learning Center
 - c. Complete a retrofit upgrade of the existing Central
2. Create a new scenario expanding Central to a 4-3 school

Dr. Kultgen said he would ask Diane to review schedules with the trustees and get a Board meeting set.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.