

## GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library  
Business Meeting Minutes  
January 31, 2007  
(Approved 2/28/07)

### **PRESENT:**

Ms Cindy Barrett, Secretary  
Dr. Forrest Buzan  
Ms Berta Erickson  
Dr. Paul Funch  
Ms Karen Lofgren  
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Chair  
Mr. Frank O'Connell, Vice-Chair

### **ADMINISTRATION:**

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent  
Timothy Sheehan, Director of Business and Finance  
Dr. Susan Rubel, Director of Curriculum/Staff Development

### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE:**

Lauren Palmacci (left at 8:30 p.m.)

**STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS:** R. Savard, Lowell Sun; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark;  
K. Icenogle, Dunstable News; E. Lazaris, R. Murray, G. Hoglund, P. DiFranco, M. Rososky

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by the chair, C. McKinney.

### **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

None

### **REPORTS**

#### **Report of Director of Business and Finance - Prescott Update**

T. Sheehan reviewed the history of the carbon dioxide problem at Prescott. They have excessively high levels of CO<sub>2</sub> throughout the building on all levels but it is more concentrated in the basement (first level) where the rooms have never had any fixed ventilation supply or exhaust. They believe the problem was exacerbated by the installation of new windows and the replacement of the roof since the building is much tighter than in the past. Students, staff, parents and the principal are complaining about excessive headaches, lethargy, excessive coughing, asthma and a higher than normal rate of absenteeism. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health says carbon dioxide levels should be 800 ppm or below in occupied buildings and the rate of 600 ppm is preferred in school buildings. Readings between 800 ppm and 1000 ppm are generally an indication that the ventilation is not in balance and needs to be addressed. He reviewed the industry standards (700 ppm) and OSHA standards (5,000 ppm for indoor carbon dioxide readings. Normal outdoor CO<sub>2</sub> readings vary with temperature, humidity and the seasons and they have seen readings ranging from 400 to 600 ppm and sometimes higher.

In late summer/early fall, an outside contractor installed dampers and controls in the old univent heaters found in most of the rooms. The maintenance staff repaired or replaced many of the missing or inoperative motors, blowers and filters. An outside vendor did air quality readings in October and there was little or no change from the readings done in May.

The School Committee authorized the expenditure of funds from E&D to install ventilation for the boiler (completed) and the installation of a 3<sup>rd</sup> level outside exhaust fan that would remove air from the upstairs hallway and vent it outside (completed). The Fire Chief insisted this blower be connected to the fire alarm. New basement windows in the cafeteria and music room, to replace the ones that are sealed, are on order with delivery/installation expected to be complete in 4 to 6 weeks. The windows will open inward to allow more air into the rooms.

C. Barrett asked what the start date was for turning on the furnace ventilation and the fan. T. Sheehan said about a week and a half ago. B. Erickson asked when the windows were ordered and was told about a week ago.

When they went to do testing on January 22<sup>nd</sup> through January 24<sup>th</sup>, T. Sheehan said problems were discovered with the univent heaters. The freeze-stat coils were shutting down prematurely and some dampers were not fully opening. Some of the units were also being shut off by the teachers. Test results from January 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> showed better results in the rooms where the univent heaters were working properly and kept on all day. The basement area is still problematic. He reviewed the test results where readings were taken in the afternoon in rooms that were occupied and noted the art room was the big problem on the 29<sup>th</sup> and the music room on the 30<sup>th</sup>. He noted these are small rooms that have never had any ventilation. The other readings are lower than what they have seen in the past and they believe they are on the right track. A spreadsheet showing testing dates and results had been provided by Principal Lavin .

C. McKinney noted the art and music rooms had higher readings on November 7<sup>th</sup> and November 8<sup>th</sup> and C. Barrett stated those readings, as well as those done on October 25<sup>th</sup>, were done by an outside firm with different equipment. T. Sheehan agreed and stated they had questions about the accuracy of some of the readings. The May and January readings were done using the same equipment.

R. Savard asked if the music room is on the basement level and was told yes. She asked if that room is getting a new window and T. Sheehan does not believe there are any windows in this room. There is a sealed window in the art room. The other window will go in a corner of the cafeteria. She asked if there is a possibility that they will not use this room in the future and T. Sheehan said he will be presenting some recommendations. She asked if anyone is still complaining about drowsiness and he said he would have to defer this question to Principal Lavin.

T. Sheehan stated additional testing will take place 2 to 3 days a week for the next 2 to 4 weeks. The visits will be unannounced and the staff is being told the univents must be turned on in the morning and remain on all day. Every room and the hallway will be tested and once they have an idea of where the hot spots are, the number of rooms being tested will be reduced.

F. Buzan asked if the univents are turned off at night. T. Sheehan said yes and he does not know if the custodian turns them on when she opens the building. They are all manually switched, not thermostatically controlled. F. Buzan asked if they are sure the transoms over the room doors are open and T. Sheehan said they are generally open but he does not know if this is a policy at the school and will check. F. Buzan asked if they know what a typical ambient outside CO2 level should be and if these numbers are high. T. Sheehan feels the 400 to 600 readings they have seen in the last few days are typical but noted atmospheric conditions can cause it to be significantly higher.

The School Committee also authorized the expenditure of funds from E&D to hire an engineering firm to do a survey of the mechanical systems. Kevin R. Seaman, PE, President of Johnson and Seaman Engineering, Inc. of Auburn, MA., who also consulted on the PTYC heating upgrade, did a site visit on December 13<sup>th</sup> and his final report was received on January 30<sup>th</sup>. He made six recommendations relative to the air quality problems as well as some broader recommendations about the systems in the building in general. His recommendations, with cost estimates, include:

1. Installing a building-wide energy management system that would involve installing a steam valve in all the radiators and univent heaters in each room, connected to a room thermostat. T. Sheehan noted the univents are not the only source of heat in most of the rooms, there are also radiators. (\$60,000)
2. Modify the boiler so there is continuous operation of the furnace so when the outside temperature is below 60°, the furnace will provide a constant stream of steam for the univents. (\$5,000)
3. Install roof-mounted, powered exhaust ventilators using the existing ducts. (\$65,000)  
When the building was re-roofed, the old wind-powered turbine ventilators on the roof were removed and the vents were sealed. This was done because they were not operating and because the architect considered the flues in the chimney to be a fire hazard.
4. Install a total energy recovery ventilation unit in the art/music rooms (\$15,000)
5. Install a similar, larger capacity unit in the cafeteria (\$23,000)
6. Repair and restore the inactive heating and ventilating units in the gym (\$25,000)

The other recommendations include making ventilation improvements to the kitchen and bathrooms as they are not in compliance with the code (\$16,500) and placing outdoor signage requiring "head-in" parking adjacent to the building (\$1,000).

The total cost estimate is \$210,500 and T. Sheehan stated the recommendations are generally independent of each other and can be phased in over time. He stressed these are only estimates and stated most public project bids come in significantly over designer/engineer estimates. He stated they need to investigate the adequacy of the existing electrical system to see if it can support the additional equipment. It is likely the existing ducts are not up to code and liners and fire dampers would likely need to be installed and are not included in the cost estimate. Floor space would be lost in the art or music room to support the mechanical closet for the ventilation unit.

Mr. Seaman also provided some long range recommendations. Noting that the univent heaters are very old, it is recommended that with the exception of the boiler, the entire heating system should be replaced and that they convert from steam to forced hot water. If the district chooses not to do that, Mr. Seaman recommends they institute a multi-year plan to replace the unit ventilators. Cost estimates were not given.

T. Sheehan said the next steps are to review the recommendations in detail with the Budget and Finance sub-committee and identify the most effective and critical recommendation(s). The funding source(s) would need to be determined and then the plan would be implemented. The School Committee recently established a Facilities Task Force III, charged with doing long-range planning and analysis of the district's facilities. Since they are discussing replacing mechanical systems and possibly upgrading electrical systems in an 80 year old building, T. Sheehan feels it makes sense to bring this before that body as they need to balance the cost of renovating Prescott versus building an elementary school in the future.

Plan milestones include developing a formal scope-of-work, issuing a Request for Qualification (RFQ) to hire a designer, preparing bid documents, advertising the work, evaluating the bids and then awarding the contract. He announced Mr. Feldman of TBA Architects of Waltham will visit Prescott on February 5<sup>th</sup> to validate the mechanical survey results and identify other options, if any.

B. Erickson said her biggest concern is the long range plans for the building and that they will be throwing money away if there is a different use of the building. She said anything they do needs to be a carry-over for any future use. T. Sheehan said this needs to go to Budget and Finance and the School Committee as a whole first and then proceed with the Facilities Task Force.

C. Barrett asked how soon they would know if the existing electrical system is satisfactory. T. Sheehan feels they can bring in some people very quickly. He received a recent survey from the Building Department this evening that noted the school's electrical system did not have the capacity for further expansion. She asked if it would be the same time frame for examining the existing ducts and he said this may take a little longer as he does not know what the code issues are.

C. McKinney said the original roof architect thought the vents were a fire hazard and asked if this engineer thinks it is okay to use the vents with liners. T. Sheehan said Mr. Seaman did not investigate the ducts. T. Sheehan believes work will be needed on them. C. McKinney said it appears they got decent advice twice, just from different perspectives.

F. O'Connell said he would like to see dates next to the milestones. After the windows are put in, he asked if there are any thoughts on when the other trouble spots might be addressed. T. Sheehan said the basement is the trouble area and feels they will have a better idea after they do 2 to 3 rounds of testing. If the art and music rooms are closed and classes are in there, he does not think there is anything they know of that will solve that problem.

F. Buzan said he is not surprised by the results and said the big key is if the windows improve the situation. He feels before they can make any further recommendations, they need to see what the Facilities Task Force response is and he would like to know what the previous two task forces said about the building. F. O'Connell said it was to phase the building out as a school and this was in 2001 or 2002.

If they are looking at putting \$200,000 into the building, Dr. Funch feels they need to do a more thorough inspection of the building so they know what they are up against. He said he is encouraged that a lot of the problem, except for the basement, has been resolved by the small steps they have taken. C. McKinney recalls the FTFII had a figure of \$1.5M to \$2M for keeping the building operational as a school.

B. Erickson asked if there are windows in the music room and was told no. She asked if any could be put in and was advised they would need to modify the foundation. A parent advised there is a sealed window in the art room.

R. Murray read a letter written by his wife detailing the illnesses their children have suffered while in the art and music rooms. He noted the letter was written prior to hearing tonight's update.

E. Lazariz thanked the Committee for putting this on tonight's agenda. She reiterated Mr. Murray's comments and said the music room seems to be where the bulk of the problem is and stated that most of the kids going to the nurse's office with illnesses are when they have been in that room for a certain amount of time. She stated it is not just a couple of kids but is school-wide. She would also like to see dates associated with the plan milestones.

FinCom member P. DiFranco said this was an excellent report but stated statistically, they only have two data points and from an SPC (Statistical Process Control) standpoint, they need to collect more data before taking any more measures and assumes they will do so. T. Sheehan agrees they need ten to fifteen days of testing to be able to draw conclusions.

Although not an ideal situation, Dr. Genovese suggested art could temporarily be offered in the classroom. Dr. Funch said he would like to see a report from Prescott's nurse and compare it with the other schools to see if complaints are higher there and if they are, he said there may be something more than carbon dioxide. Dr. Genovese said he is looking at the attendance.

E. Lazariz said in October she looked at the recommended website that has pages of information about testing done at various schools in the area and stated mold and ultra-fine particulates can be attributed to poor ventilation. T. Sheehan said the firm that did the testing in October also tested for mold and particulates. He does not know if the current testing does but he will look into this. He stated he provided Ms Lavin with a report on the Squannacook Middle School that had similar problems and univent heaters.

M. Rososky thanked Mr. Sheehan for his report. He stated one of his daughter's classrooms is primarily in the basement and asked at what point this report transitions to recommendations for relocating the classrooms to the gym. Dr. Genovese said this has not been given any thought as they wanted to see these results and if

they are moving in the right direction. He does not know if relocation of some classrooms within the existing building is better than relocation to another building. He said they need to collect additional data. Dr. Genovese said he would also like to explore temporarily relocating music.

C. McKinney asked the time frame for the next significant update and T. Sheehan said he will have more testing results in a couple of weeks as well as tentative dates on the milestones. He feels he will also have an indication from Budget and Finance, as well as the School Committee, as to what parts they might be able to implement. Dr. Genovese suggested information can be updated on the website. T. Sheehan said he was very pleased with how the mechanical system survey turned out and it was time and money well spent.

F. Buzan asked how designating Prescott a historic building will affect their potential efforts to renovate the building. T. Sheehan said the Historic Commission is very sensitive to anything that goes on in the front and on the left side of the building. They have more flexibility in terms of locating equipment in the back and on the right side of the building.

B. Erickson asked if there are any other issues about the building that may come up later. T. Sheehan said the building is tired and there are a lot of aesthetic things that need to be improved.

## **PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION**

### **FY08 Preliminary Draft Budget Distribution and Overview**

Dr. Genovese stated the budget process starts in October and is an educational plan. He noted Mr. Sheehan has spent a lot of time understanding how the FY07 expenditures were put together. With the change of leadership at the state level, Dr. Genovese said he is finding information about revenue projections is being kept "close to the vest". In generating the assessments, they are using the revenue assumptions for the year they are in and noted adjustments will be made to those monies. He stated they will probably use a different method for the capital project for the PTYC and noted for the moment, they did not implement the analysis of population.

The executive summary gives an overview of the budget process and Dr. Genovese stated he appreciates the towns allowing the principals and administrators to give a thorough review of what they felt they need and stated they did an excellent job. It is felt an additional twenty-two positions are needed but being a realist, Dr. Genovese said they looked at what things need attention first.

Areas determined to need staffing include a technician for the infrastructure, SPED support at the middle school, help in the area of math at the elementary and middle schools, guidance across the district and a couple of additional staff members at the high school to help maintain ratios. Dr. Genovese said he arbitrarily selected seven positions as being the most critical and this is reflected in the budget. They would also like to implement a technology plan to replace equipment.

The per pupil expenditure has been reduced from 5% to 4% and modifications have been made to electricity costs. T. Sheehan wanted to bring a budget that was less than 10% and Dr. Genovese said it is at 9.96%. As superintendent, Dr. Genovese feels the requests are reasonable, are on point and will address the needs of the district. He stated he supports the budget and will track how the revenue side comes together.

Dr. Genovese clarified how enrollment projections impact the budget. He feels there was an assumption that if the budget overstated the enrollment, it could translate into some serious dollars. He said the number is basically used to derive the per pupil expenditure. He stated particular questions members would like addressed can be sent to himself, Budget and Finance members or to Mr. Sheehan. The budget hearing will be held on February 28<sup>th</sup> and the School Committee will vote on the budget at their March 7<sup>th</sup> meeting. He stated they can expect that many conversations will take place between March 7<sup>th</sup> and the town meetings in late April, early May.

T. Sheehan stated Fran Dillon approached him to talk about the rate he was assuming Groton Electric would apply for the FY08 budget as he thought it was too high. Mr. Sheehan said he talked with Mr. Kelly from Groton Electric in October and based on that conversation, has further reduced the number. He has also

reduced the rate for National Grid. He is trying to correct areas where the budget has historically been under funded and information where they have historically run surpluses and deficits was reviewed.

The E&D balance fluctuates yearly and the DOE has certified the balance at \$1,254,594 and \$104,500 has been committed by School Committee votes. Mr. Sheehan will be asking the committee to cover the balance of the actual cost of the Florence Roche arsenic remediation (\$32,521) and \$371,882 has been reserved to reduce debt in the FY08 budget. They currently have an available balance of \$745,691. The auditors and the Department of Revenue recommend they maintain 3% to 5% in the account. Anything over 5% goes back to the towns and going significantly less than 3% can put them at risk of having their bond rating lowered.

Dr. Genovese said there is a change in the way the budget is presented - it has been divided into the operating budget and debt assessment. He noted there are two ways of calculating the assessments (operating and capital debt) under the regional agreement.

T. Sheehan stated the total operating budget is \$30,666,653, an increase of 9.96% over last year's net operating budget. Revenue assumptions (\$11,722,797) are deducted, leaving a balance of \$18,943,856 to be raised from the assessments to the towns. He stated there are two portions of the assessment for each town for the operating budget. The first is the minimum town assessment that is calculated by the DOE and the Department of Revenue and he is using FY07 numbers (\$8,921,000 - Groton and \$2,557,737 - Dunstable) since the numbers are not available for FY08. This is where the DOE is talking about changing the formula by using aggregate personal income in addition to property value and the municipal growth factor and at some point, these numbers will change. C. McKinney noted these numbers are important as they have to be added together and subtracted before applying the regional agreement which determines how the money is split.

The amount of \$7,465,119 is the figure to be assessed using the regional agreement which is by overall population within the district as a whole. Based on the October 1<sup>st</sup> enrollment figures, Groton's percent is .7707 and Dunstable's is .2293. Dr. Genovese pointed out they back out any School Choice students so there will be a different number when you look at actual kids sitting in seats versus the calculation of kids who reside in Groton and Dunstable.

Via the regional agreement, they will need to raise Groton's assessment to \$5,753,367 and Dunstable's to \$1,711,752. The total contribution for Groton will be \$14,674,367 (17.28% increase) and \$4,269,489 for Dunstable (16.84% increase). T. Sheehan said the change from last year is a sobering assessment based on flat revenue and increased expenses, many of which are beyond the district's ability to control. He thanked Dr. Genovese for helping him understand the process with regional agreements.

F. Buzan asked when the figure for Choice students shows up. Dr. Genovese said in the budget presentation, they will see an actual head count in the building but the number used would not include students that did not live in Groton or Dunstable. F. Buzan asked how many students come in and Dr. Genovese said there are 37 students and ironically, 37 left for Charter. School Choice generates \$5000 coming in but a Charter student going out ranges between \$8,000 - \$9,000. He noted all the Choice and Charter going out gets deducted off the Chapter 70. He stated they will not know how many parents will opt to have their child placed in another setting while planning this budget.

Dr. Funch asked how going below 3% in E&D will be addressed. T. Sheehan said they can go below 3% but they would like to see it go back up the following year. Staying above 3% keeps you safe from any threat of having the bond rating downgraded. If you went significantly below 3% or stayed below 3% for several years in a row, it would be more problematic.

Dr. Genovese read a paragraph from the budget summary commending Mr. Sheehan and his staff for researching specific budget accounts and providing multiple revisions of various budget categories. The principals and administrators were also recognized for their work in preparing and presenting their respective budgets and Dr. Genovese stated the participation of everyone in this process yields a better product: *Together, a Promise to Excel*. He stated they will have a Groton Dunstable Regional School banner behind the table at future meetings.

C. Barrett asked if they will have the opportunity to ask budget questions at the February 7<sup>th</sup> meeting and Dr. Genovese said yes. It is their expectation to have the budget delivered to the libraries and town officials no later than Friday. He wants the assessment page to be labeled as a draft.

B. Erickson asked if there has been any thought at lessening the number of school administrators. She feels they need guidance at this time but she hears in the community that the administration may be top heavy. Dr. Genovese said if you do an analysis of the district and compare it to others, you will find that is not the case and he would not classify it as being that way.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### **Selection of School Committee Representative for High School Principal Search Committee**

C. McKinney said Mr. O'Connell has said he is willing to serve on the High School Principal Search Committee. He asked if any other members are interested in serving and no one offered their service.

K. LOFGREN MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPOINT FRANK O'CONNELL AS A MEMBER OF THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL SEARCH COMMITTEE.  
SECONDED BY C. BARRETT  
**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

Dr. Genovese said the first meeting is scheduled for February 6<sup>th</sup>.

### **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

P. Comtois asked if copies of the budget are available for the media and was told yes.

C. Barrett said the presentations at the February 7<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting will be the Youth Football and Cheering League and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2006 results. There will also be time for budget discussion, review of School Committee goals and policy is scheduled for an hour. It was stated the agenda may be modified. C. Barrett stated the budget public hearing will be held on February 28<sup>th</sup> and there will be a presentation on the three year plan for budget and capital maintenance. F. O'Connell is the liaison and questions should be forwarded to him.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

K. LOFGREN MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 9:04 P. M. SECONDED BY F. BUZAN  
**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith  
Recording Secretary