

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
October 6, 2005 Approved October 19, 2005

PRESENT:

Ms Cindy Barrett, Secretary
Ms Kim Cowie
Mr. Paul Fitzgerald
Ms Karen Lofgren
Mr. Frank O'Connell, Vice- Chair
Mr. Alan Vervaeke

ABSENT:

Mr. Chuck McKinney, Chair

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent
Mr. Craig Young, Business Manager
Dr. Susan Rubel, Director of Curriculum/Staff Development
Ms Joan Endicott, Director of Pupil Personnel

STUDENT ADVISOR:

Kara Cover

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: J. Myers, Lowell Sun; J. Kulesz, Groton Herald;
P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; K. Icenogle, M. Gunderson, B. Erickson

CALL TO ORDER

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by the vice-chair F. O. Connell. He announced the Committee voted to meet in executive session at 6:30 p.m. for the purpose of litigation and are reconvening in open session.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Genovese announced each member received an invitation to Homecoming at the high school on October 14th and 15th. Ms Cover highlighted the activities that will take place.

Dr. Genovese announced the action item to approve the high school field trip to France is being withdrawn. They are now looking at a trip to Quebec.

Dr. Genovese announced the new windows are in at Prescott and he believes the energy efficiency will help reduce heating costs. The fourth grade is involved in Peer Mediation and they are interviewing for a 2.5 K position due to a maternity leave. Thanks to the efforts of Sue Weeks, the elementary school library now has an addition of fiction collections.

A. Vervaeke announced there are maroon collection boxes at Swallow Union, Boutwell and the Dunstable Library for donations of clean and gently used Halloween costumes. They will be sold at the library on October 15th from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (with no costume to exceed \$10.00) and the money will be donated to the Red Cross to benefit the victims of the gulf coast hurricanes.

Dr. Rubel announced an Early Literacy consultant is working with their SPED teachers, reading specialists and K-2 teachers this week. She announced they had their first half day in-service training day a week ago and at the elementary and middle school levels, the teachers examined the student writing assessments. She noted almost every middle school staff member was engaged in looking at the student writing. The high school is continuing their work on their four Theme Teams. Next Tuesday will be their only full day devoted to curriculum and everyone will be working on different things such as examining MCAS results at all levels, AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) results and assessment analysis.

A. Vervaeke announced the MASC conference is in about three weeks and as the Committee's representative, he would like the Committee to discuss the resolutions at their next meeting so he will know how they want him to vote. The resolutions are on-line at www.masc.org.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Budget and Finance - F. O'Connell reported they will be meeting on October 18th. Dr. Genovese reported the budget development calendar is in the process of being finalized.

Policy - K. Lofgren reported they have the first reading of the Food Allergy Policy. Dr. Genovese said they discussed the process of developing a policy at their policy meeting. K. Cowie read the policy. A. Vervaeke asked what the asterisk is for and K. Cowie said she is not sure but feels this relates to something Ms Ireland wanted for referencing some paperwork but it may be more related to the procedures. He would like "as defined by Massachusetts DPH regulation...." inserted after "life threatening allergies".

In the "life threatening allergies" references, C. Barrett would like the word "food" inserted before "allergies". She asked why this cannot be a food and "other allergy" policy since kids are also allergic to bee stings. K. Cowie said this policy is based on a particular Public Health regulation and if they were to make another policy, they would need to sure they include any other appropriate regulations. C. Barrett feels they should also add "and students themselves" after "...bus company personnel" and insert "preventive measures" after the word "monitoring" in (v). She also feels they need training for all school sponsored after school staff (i.e.-drama teachers) and those doing any non-school sponsored event need to know they are responsible for the children's health and well-being.

Dr. Genovese said some of Ms Barrett's comments relate to implementation of the policy. C. Barrett said she would like more detail added to the attachment page. He also recommends a policy for bee stings be separate since that is tied to a different set of procedures.

With respect to adding "and students themselves", A. Vervaeke stated they cannot reasonably expect a young child to be responsible for certain things. C. Barrett said she meant education.

K. Cover asked if this policy is for all the schools and Dr. Genovese said yes but there will be different protocols for the different grade levels.

The Policy Committee will be meeting at 7:00 p.m. at the high school on October 25th.

Building - A. Vervaeke reported they have not met. C. Young reported the modifications to the high school water system are almost complete. An additive to coat the brass fittings and interior of the copper pipes will be added next week and testing will begin with the goal of lowering the detectable lead.

C. Young provided the Committee with an update on the Smith house. He, Mr. Palmer and Dr. Genovese met with Don Black today and discussed salvaging a portion of the house. Mr. Black suggested a plaque or monument be installed depicting the history of the site and Mr. Smith is receptive to this idea. They will proceed with cleaning up the site and taking down the house and then Mr. Smith and Mr. Black will work with the engineer, through their funds, to develop some memorial for the site. Everyone agreed this is a great solution. Dr. Genovese said they may be able to salvage some of the original beams and posts to be included with the presentation.

MINUTES

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 21, 2005. SECONDED BY A. VERVAEKE
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

B. Erickson stated all the executive session meetings being held by the Boards of Selectmen and School Committee are making people very nervous and asked if the Committee plans to have any public hearings to get input regarding the Casella litigation. She feels there are a lot of ideas that would be helpful to the Committee and feels this needs to be done before the town meetings. She asked how much the Committee can share with the public so the voters know where the members are coming from. She also feels the three appraisals were suspiciously low and asked if the appraiser has insurance. F. O'Connell said public input is always welcome but they do not have a public session planned at this time and will take her suggestions under advisement.

A. Vervaeke said the School Committee received tremendous public input when they decided to take the Casella land by eminent domain and the decision was supported by both towns. He is confident all avenues have been/are being looked at and that they will move ahead in a prudent way that is best for both towns. Dr. Genovese stated the Committee is aware the public would like to know more. B. Erickson said she feels there are a lot of missing pieces. He stated there is a definite separation between what the Committee is being directed to do by the Department of Revenue and what the towns are being asked to do - addressing a financial issue so the towns can set their tax rates. The litigation is a separate issue.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Quarterly Report

C. Young stated the district is in a very good financial position. As soon as the audit is done, they anticipate receiving a certified E&D of \$900,000. They also anticipate receiving \$500,000 to \$520,000 of Circuit Breaker Funds. Their revenues are balanced. He stated energy cost increases will likely cause over expenditures in building accounts but they are working to find ways to conserve energy. The high cost of fuel will also impact student transportation and maintenance accounts. An additional bus was added, primarily for the middle school, and an additional bus may be required for SPED transportation. While they generated over \$100,000 in personnel budget savings, he noted teacher negotiations are underway and the approved contract will impact FY06. He also noted SPED tuitions are always unpredictable. Dr. Genovese pointed out they do have some unanticipated expenditures and does not want people to think they have a \$100,000 surplus.

With the exception of the school lunch fund, the Revolving Funds are operating as intended and all Capital Project Funds are within budget authorization. A judgment regarding the eminent domain case, which the School Committee is currently considering appealing, has been rendered with the property judged to be worth \$4.1M. The district applied for \$835,529 in grants and approval has been granted for \$833,103.

With respect to the school lunch fund, C. Young stated the year end report showed an incorrect number and an adjustment has been made. He stated they are looking at ways to resolve the deficit but feels Budget and Finance may at some point decide whether or not they want to infuse some cash into the system.

A. Vervaeke asked how much their income has increased since the PTYC program expanded to the Union Building. C. Young believes they paid \$10,000 to use the facility. If they infuse cash into the lunch program, A. Vervaeke said changes would need to be made so they do not continue the cycle of debt and C. Young agreed. The intent is to get the program to pay for itself.

P. Fitzgerald asked how long it took to get the \$60,000 deficit and when they expect to turn this around. C. Young said the accountants detected they had a negative balance about four to five years ago and the recognized deficit occurred in a one year period.

They are looking to see that they are properly staffed, buying food at the right price and pricing the meals properly.

School Committee Calendar Survey

Members had received a School Committee agenda topic survey in their packets and Dr. Genovese requested they be returned to him as soon as possible. C. Barrett distributed a draft agenda based on the thirty-eight topics members suggested at the last meeting. She sorted the topics into groups (Superintendent, School Committee, Curriculum, PPS, Technology/Library and High School, Middle School, Florence Roche, ECC, Facilities, Budget and Other) responsible for them and inserted the topics into the available dates. A Saturday workshop is suggested to discuss the Superintendent's transition plan and the Committee's goals and objectives. A public forum on Block Scheduling, with focus on educational references and studies that demonstrate its success, is also suggested.

A suggested non-School Committee meeting topic, since it is now being evaluated, is the date and time of high school graduation. K. Cowie wants this discussion to be before the Committee or for them to be provided with an update. Dr. Genovese said the calendar will be brought to the administrative council for their comments to be sure they will have their information in time to make the presentations. Prior to a topic coming up on the agenda, Dr. Genovese said information needs to come from the Committee so the presenters will be able to provide the information members are looking for.

P. Fitzgerald thanked Ms Barrett for putting this together and said next year he would prefer a finished calendar be presented to the members in September. Dr. Genovese agreed this is usually done over the summer.

A. Vervaeke feels they do themselves a disservice limiting their schedule to a September through June calendar and suggested they include July and August and schedule their summer retreat for every year. He feels they need to look at a twelve month approach and K. Cowie, P. Fitzgerald and K. Lofgren agreed. While he does not feel any member would refuse to work through the summer months, F. O'Connell noted many of the presenters are ten month employees and others take vacations. Dr. Genovese said he is not an advocate for summer meetings although having one in July and one in August for Committee business would be okay.

F. O'Connell asked that comments and completed surveys be forwarded to Dr. Genovese.

ACTION ITEMS

Approval of High School Trip

Action item withdrawn

Naming Committee Process

Members had received a copy of the draft of the Process for the Naming Committee in their packets. K. Cowie thanked Ms Endicott for her help putting this together and read the process for the public.

Dr. Genovese suggested adding "publishing the work to date" to the process.

A. Vervaeke asked who the current members are and K. Cowie said herself, Joan Endicott, Marie Sebastian, Sue Tully, Beth Raucci, Diane Rice and Jane Bouvier. Joe Dillon and Owen Shuman resigned. He asked if any attempt has been made to replace those members. He stated the original membership was very specific and has changed significantly. He feels the purpose of the Naming Committee is completely at odds with the School Committee's policy. He stated this process has been going on for almost two years and asked if there is a time frame for this coming to fruition. K. Cowie said Mr. McKinney made the decision not to replace the members who resigned. They are looking at January 2006 and after the Naming Committee met with Dr. Genovese and C. McKinney, the committee feels they will stop the process at that time if they cannot come to some sort of consensus of both towns. She stated it is one middle school and they want to keep that community feeling since it is working quite well.

Dr. Genovese said the purpose of the process is to get people involved and feels the number of people on the committee is not as important as the number of stakeholders who participate. He does not want the process to preclude any other excellent suggestions that are discovered along the way. He looks at this as a basic guideline to make sure this gets out publicly.

Following step 3, C. Barrett said the Naming Committee may have multiple names and asked if they will go to policies FF and FFA to decide what choice is brought forward. C. Cowie said the policy is in place and this is the step they are taking to collect names and their goal is to report back to the School Committee in January and if there is a consensus, the School Committee can act on it. They will also report if there is no consensus. She noted the Naming Committee may recommend stopping the process at that time.

F. O'Connell suggested they take a look at the policy and see if it makes sense as they go through the process and if it does not, they can make it fit. A. Vervaeke asked if Dr. Genovese is chaperoning the process since their policy says the superintendent will propose a process for the naming, bring it to the School Committee, have a Naming Committee take input and give a response back to the School Committee. Dr. Genovese said he endorses the process in front of him and was part of the discussion and knew all the components as it was being developed.

C. Barrett suggested the name be changed to "Potential Process for Collecting Names by the Naming Committee" and that a step 4 be added "Go to policy FF and FFA".

Following discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee that they agree with the process and a vote is not necessary.

Vote to Incur Debt

Dr. Genovese explained that Dunstable was waiting for the Department of Revenue to certify their tax rate so tax bills could be mailed. The DOR had issues around the liability, in terms of a judgment against the district, and how the towns would fund that judgment if it landed in the same fiscal year. A meeting was held with the DOR last Friday to discuss the situation and the Director of Accounts said two things had to occur for the towns to set their tax rate: the School Committee needs to take a vote to incur this debt of \$2.5M (the judgment plus interest at this point) and the towns need to have a town meeting and authorize this debt. Without these two things happening, the Director made it very clear he would not set the tax rate.

Bond Counsel drafted the motion that is in front of the Committee as well as an article for the town meetings. Dr. Genovese said this action is being taken because the DOR is telling them they have to do this. He made it clear this action is independent from the appeal. He highlighted the three parts of the motion. If this votes passes, the towns have sixty days to either schedule a town meeting and have a warrant article to approve the authorization for the Committee to borrow or the Selectmen can choose not to hold a town meeting and no action taken in those sixty days would signal the district had permission to borrow. Groton has decided to have a Special Town Meeting on October 24th and Dunstable is still talking about how they want to proceed.

Paul Fitzgerald moved that

WHEREAS, the Groton Dunstable Regional School District (the "District") is engaged in legal proceedings involving the acquisition of the property for the site of the new District High School (the "High School Site"); and

WHEREAS, in connection with those ongoing legal proceedings, it may be determined that the purchase price for the High School Site when the land was acquired may be increased; and

WHEREAS, the District has been informed by the Director of Accounts of the Department of Revenue of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts that the tax rates for the current fiscal year in the Towns of Dunstable and Groton (the "Member Towns") will not be certified so that tax bills can be sent to residents in each of the Member Towns, unless and until the District authorizes and the Member Towns approve the issuance of debt of the District to be used in the event that a final determination is made with respect to the additional amount that must be paid, if any, by the District for the High School Site; and

WHEREAS, the aforesaid action by the Department of Revenue places a significant financial and managerial hardship upon the Member Towns;

NOW THEREFORE, it is hereby resolved and approved as follows:

1. That for the purpose of paying additional costs of acquiring the site of the new District High School, including the payment of all other costs incidental and related thereto, there be and hereby is authorized, under and pursuant to Chapter 71, Section 16(d), of the General Laws and the District Agreement, as amended, the incurring of debt on the full faith and credit of the District by the issuance and sale at one time or from time to time of bonds or notes in the aggregate principal amount of \$2,500,000, provided, however, that no sums shall be borrowed or expended hereunder in excess of the amount needed to settle this matter, which shall include and all related expenses, including but not limited to interest costs, legal and court fees, and, provided further, that any amounts authorized to be borrowed or expended hereunder that are not borrowed for the purposes of this vote, shall be automatically rescinded following the final payment of the amounts required to be paid in connection with the settlement of this matter.

2. That the amount authorized to be borrowed hereunder is being approved by the District at this time at the direction of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue so that property tax rates for the current year in the Towns of Groton and Dunstable may be approved by the Director of Accounts of the Department of Revenue as expeditiously as possible, and the authorization of this borrowing at this time shall not constitute any concession of any kind by the District with respect to the merits of its pending appeal in this matter, and

3. That within seven days from the date on which the foregoing vote is adopted the secretary be and hereby is instructed to notify the Board of Selectmen of each of the member towns of the District as to the amount and general purposes of the debt herein authorized, as required by Chapter 71, Section 16(d), of the General Laws.

Seconded by K. Lofgren

A. Vervaeke stated he resents being strong-armed by another misguided state employee. He stated they were held hostage in the process of building this building by the Department of Natural Resources and now it is Jim Johnson of the DOR holding a fiscal gun against their wallets. He stated he is only voting to approve this because not doing so would handcuff Dunstable's ability to raise revenue. He stated he is very angry that the state is forcing its will down their throats and stated they are not in this building or in this district but are looking in from the outside.

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL

Dr. Genovese said it has been asked if there will be a vote at town meeting to disapprove. He stated a double negative is very confusing and the motion will be for an affirmative vote to authorize the borrowing. Voting yes means you borrow, voting no means you do not.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

None

HANDOUTS

None

ADJOURNMENT:

A. VERVAEKE MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:53 P.M.
SECONDED BY K. COWIE
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary