

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library

Business Meeting Minutes

August 24, 2005 Approved Sept. 7, 2005

PRESENT:

Ms Cindy Barrett, Secretary
Ms Kim Cowie
Ms Karen Lofgren
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Chair
Ms Patricia Murray
Mr. Frank O'Connell, Vice- Chair
Mr. Alan Vervaeke

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent
Mr. Craig Young, Business Manager

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: L. Worthy, Lowell Sun; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark;
B. Erickson, S. Prendergast, B. McDermott

CALL TO ORDER

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:44 p.m. by the chair, C. McKinney. He stated they met in executive session at 6:00 p.m. for the purpose of litigation and the potential deployment of the high school security system.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Genovese announced they received a letter from DOE congratulating them for preparing a successful Massachusetts Early Literacy Intervention grant proposal. The district will receive \$11,200.

Dr. Genovese announced a Breakfast Meeting will be held for the staff on August 31st and Committee members are encouraged to attend. There will be a two day orientation program for new teachers on August 29th and 30th. September 6th will be the first day of school for grades 1 through 9 and Kindergarten and grades 10 through 12 will start on September 7th. Boutwell will also open on September 7th. He announced Thomas Murray is the High School Assistant Principal, Marisa Brisson is the High School Dean of Students, Michelle Youngs is the Assistant Principal at Florence Roche, Rosemary Vickery and Mark Branco are the Middle School Assistant Principals, Russell Hoyt is the Early Childhood Center Director and Dan Twomey is the Athletic Director.

Dr. Genovese distributed a brochure about Connect-ED. He stated this initiative is an opportunity to provide another venue to communicate with parents. It is a web-based service that would allow the superintendent, principals and authorized personnel to communicate by phone with parents in a short amount of time. It can dial up to six

phone numbers per student. He asked members to review the literature and with their permission, will have a presentation given at the next Committee meeting.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Budget and Finance - P. Murray reported they have set their meeting dates for the third Tuesday of the month at 6:00 p.m. at Tarbell.

Policy - K. Lofgren reported they will be meeting at the high school at 7:00 p.m. on September 15th. Three policies are before them: Substitute Teachers, Wellness and Food Allergy.

Building Committee - S. Prendergast reminded members the HVAC contractor became insolvent during construction of MSN. Others finished the work in a less than perfect manner. Energy bills far exceeded what they expected and in May, the Building Committee received a proposal (\$115,000) from Turner Construction for commissioning services of the HVAC system. They are about 90% finished with their examination of the various facets of the system. He summarized the August 24th report from Turner Construction which states they found one hundred forty-two deficiencies and thirty-three have been resolved. Eight other items are waiting to be retested. He stated the boilers are the biggest issue and they will be operating efficiently by the time the heating season starts in October. Benefits of this work include lower ongoing costs, lower maintenance costs and a higher comfort level.

C. McKinney requested copies of Turner's twelve page report be given to Dr. Genovese. Dr. Genovese asked if some of this work is covered under warranty and S. Prendergast said they are still holding the bond from the insolvent company. He stated there was a sense of urgency in finishing this work. He stated there are no claims against the district for the repairs.

With no new building projects in the foreseeable future, MSN coming to an end, the high school project at an end and the restriction of expenditure authority to the Building Committee, A. Vervaeke asked if there is any reason for the Building Committee to continue to exist as a chartered subcommittee. C. McKinney stated he would like the Building Committee to remain until the projects are complete.

C. Young stated they received verbal approval from DEP to make modifications to the high school water system. The modifications cannot be made until written approval is received but they have been getting cost proposals. They will have bottled water at the high school for at least thirty days. It was noted adding polyphosphates to the water pipes has a high probability of success but there are no guarantees and testing will be ongoing.

A. Vervaeke asked how much pure water will actually be coming out of the well after adding the phosphates and using filters. S. Prendergast stated that although this is a rare and unusual, it is a nationwide problem. Carbon dioxide comes out of the ground and reacts with the brass fittings and creates the lead. C. McKinney clarified that because of

the chemical makeup of the water (carbon dioxide), it is creating a separate issue and they are trying to mitigate the problem of the reaction in the pipes.

With respect to Prescott, C. Young reported the chimney was re-pointed and work started on the roof last Friday and should be completed by the beginning of next week. The windows did not arrive on Monday and will not be arriving until Friday. The contractor will begin work on Friday and go through the weekend. He will attempt to have four crews installing the windows.

K. Cowie noted they are in the position of having construction going on while the students are in the building. She asked what they are doing to ensure the background of the workers while the students are there. C. Young advised the workers will have CORI checks and will have to wear badges. Names have all ready been submitted.

Negotiations - C. Barrett reported they met on August 18th and worked on the Superintendent's evaluation instrument. They have not set a regular meeting date.

Naming Committee - K. Cowie reported they will be meeting on August 30th at MSN at 9:30 a.m., not 9:00 a.m. as previously announced. This will be a planning session. A. Vervaeke asked that their approved minutes be made available to School Committee members.

As they move forward, A. Vervaeke stated he would like the School Committee to discuss the Communications subcommittee and whether or not it is necessary. He feels they are doing themselves a disservice by not using it this year. C. McKinney stated some time will be allocated to discuss this at an upcoming meeting.

MINUTES

F. O'CONNELL MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF AUGUST 3, 2005. SECONDED BY P. MURRAY

In Favor: C. Barrett, K. Cowie, K. Lofgren, P. Murray, C. McKinney, F. O'Connell
Abstention: A. Vervaeke

P. MURRAY MOVED TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF MAY 18, 2005, JUNE 15, 2005 AND JUNE 29, 2005. SECONDED BY K. COWIE
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

K. Lofgren believes the School Committee only rescinded the Building Committee's authority to spend money specifically for the high school project and feels there would still be a valid reason to keep that committee active.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Casella Funding Options

On June 29th, the School Committee voted to appeal the eminent domain judgment and while that process is going forward, C. McKinney stated he and Dr. Genovese felt it

would be prudent to operate in parallel to that process and discuss the funding of the settlement, whatever the amount may be.

C. Young reviewed funding possibilities as outlined in a memo dated August 10, 2005. The current unexpended balance of the high school project is \$523,336.39. Remaining items under consideration include modifications to the water system, the security camera system, additional grandstands and a sound system for the athletic field and demolition of the Smith house. When all items are complete, the unexpended balance should be about \$300,000.

The E&D balance is currently at \$679,425 and it is anticipated the FY06 certified balance will be approximately \$900,000. It was noted they will not know the exact amount until December after the auditors are done. They also have a borrowing capacity of \$400,000, the amount remaining after borrowing \$2M of the authorized \$2.4M for the land. He stated some portion of this \$400,000 could be used after paying legal fees.

Legal counsel has advised the \$700,000 balance from the MSN project may not be used for funding the judgment but the unexpended high school funds may be used.

K. Cowie asked what process they would need to follow to go to town meeting to borrow \$2.5M. C. McKinney said the School Committee would determine how they would pay the judgment from funds they have available. The Committee could vote to redirect the high school funds, to use the E&D balance and they could vote to incur debt for the difference between what they have and what is left of the settlement. Once the School Committee votes to incur debt, the towns have sixty days to hold their town meetings.

C. McKinney asked if any member would not want to redirect the high school funds. All were in agreement to redirect the funds. He assumes the Committee would also vote to apply the balance of the land acquisition funds.

P. Murray stated it was suggested at the Budget and Finance Committee meeting with the towns that they not borrow the \$400,000 at this time but rather use money from the general fund to pay the legal fees.

A. Vervaeke asked if the money spent for legal fees came out of the high school funds or the general fund. C. Young said the costs associated with the case were charged to the purchase of land and when all is said and done, they will have spent more than the \$2M they borrowed. From an accounting standpoint, the Committee would have to vote to allocate "x" amount of funds from the high school capital project to the land acquisition capital fund.

F. O'Connell asked if one is reimbursable and one is not and C. Young said the purchase of land is a non-reimbursable expenditure. F. O'Connell asked if the amount spent on legal fees is reflected in the \$300,000 balance and C. Young said no.

Using a figure of \$2.5M as an example of what they might need to borrow and assuming the Committee decided to pay for legal fees from E&D, C. Young explained they are all ready authorized to borrow \$400,000 and there would be no demands against it for legal fees. Legal fees are estimated to be between \$75,000 and \$130,00. They would then go to the towns and ask to borrow an additional \$2.1M and they would have the \$2.5M. Applying other funds would reduce the amount they need to borrow. Dr. Genovese said they could also tell the towns they are not going to borrow the \$400,000 previously authorized and ask for the entire \$2.5M.

Discussion ensued regarding the use of E&D funds. K. Lofgren asked if the Budget and Finance Committee has recommended an amount. She is concerned about keeping their ability to borrow for an future elementary school. P. Murray said that once they bond the middle school project, the bond issue goes away for awhile and they would not have as much risk by spending the E&D down below the three percent. Dr. Genovese said it is important for the district to be financially solvent when the bond is put out in November or December. Budget and Finance did not discuss an amount.

F. O'Connell said he could not see spending more than \$300,000 from E&D. He noted this amount plus their excess borrowing capacity and the projected balance from the high school project gets them down to about \$1.5M of additional debt they would need to borrow. A. Vervaeke said he would be hesitant to spend a significant amount out of E&D as he feels they would be setting themselves up for failure in the coming years, knowing the towns' fiscal futures are lean and they do not know if state funding formulas will change. He would agree to taking \$200,000 from E&D.

P. Murray said there is a judgment against them and looking at what they can contribute is the right thing to do. She noted they committed \$500,000 to this year's operating expenses. She likes the idea of using \$300,000 and noted they have to look at what they can afford. A. Vervaeke stated borrowing the \$400,000 will affect the tax rate.

K. Cowie said they need to take a good look at the resources the district has available, without compromising their ability to provide a quality education, and show good faith as they move forward with their request.

C. McKinney referred to a debt service schedule for borrowing \$1.5M and \$2M for twenty years. It was noted the difference between borrowing \$1.5M and \$2M is about \$36,000 for Groton and about \$11,000 for Dunstable. If there are operational issues, he noted the E&D account is the only thing they have to fall back on as a safety net since the district does not have a Stabilization Fund.

If they assume the budget stays static and unless Dr. Genovese can find significant savings within the budget, A. Vervaeke said the assumed \$900,000 E&D balance in December is really a \$400,000 E&D as they have all ready spent \$500,00 and their budget has a \$500,000 unfunded mandate. He does not feel this is much of a safety net and takes them into a danger zone.

C. Barrett asked if the interest rate of four and a half percent is dependent on their E&D and C. Young said their bond rating could drop if Moody's saw them as not being as stable as they would like to see them. The rate could mean a difference of a quarter point and over time, this equates to a lot of money.

K. Cowie said they need to have as much information as possible when they go to the towns and she wants to be very conservative with their request.

Dr. Genovese noted they have to be careful when using E&D for an operating expense as it is a one time expense that cannot be replicated or replaced. He stated having a good bond rating significantly saves money when borrowing in the long term. While it might help to use some district money in the short term, it may be shortsighted as the towns will pay more in the long term.

ACTION ITEMS

High School Security System

C. Young stated the Security Action Team unanimously recommends awarding the high school security system for the high school, at a cost of \$91,903.24, to Davco Systems of Saugus, MA. The system will provide surveillance on off hours and will enable positive identification of individuals engaged in misconduct. Groton Police Chief Mulhern sent a letter in support of adding this equipment. Dunstable's Chief of Police also supports the use of this equipment.

Since the Committee has another financial issue before them, Dr. Genovese acknowledged members may be struggling with doing this expenditure but feels it is important to isolate this and look at the benefits of a security system on its own merit and if they believe it is the right thing to do. He said the system would help encourage appropriate behavior and provide the administration the opportunity to correct inappropriate behavior. He noted many groups also use the building.

P. Murray stated the high school is fairly remote from the center of town and sits far from the road. She stated there is a lot of vandalism during the summer and they need to protect their investment. She supports this system.

K. Lofgren agrees the benefits are helpful and supports it provided a policy is in place surrounding its use and implementation. Dr. Genovese said having a policy is very important.

A. Vervaeke stated he likes deterrents and supports this expenditure. However, he stated a presentation should have been made to the School Committee and a group should not have been operating outside the purview of the Building and School Committees.

F. O'Connell said this has not been talked about for two years and when it was, he thought it was similar to an alarm system that would monitor the outside of the building but this is quite a bit more than that. He said he does not know how this fits the security plan for the entire school system. He stated kids in the elementary and middle schools

are more vulnerable and while he wants to protect their investment and students at the high school, he is not sure how this fits into the "big plan". He stated he is not against it but is not in a position to move forward with it as this time. Dr. Genovese agrees there needs to be continued conversations about what are adequate levels of security or protocols. He stated by itself in a vacuum, this would not be a good idea. A. Vervaeke requested a future agenda item be about safety and security.

K. Cowie agrees they need an overall plan and long term goals for security. C. Barrett supports the plan and requested any substantial alterations be brought before the Committee before they are made. She also agrees they need to have an approved policy in place before the system is operational. Dr. Genovese said a policy is critical. It would be his expectation that they would have a review at the end of the year to see what the benefits were.

A. VERVAEKE MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE AWARDING OF THE CAMERA SECURITY SYSTEM FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL, IN THE AMOUNT OF \$91,903.24, TO DAVCO SYSTEMS OF SAUGUS, MA. SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN

SO VOTED BY ROLLCALL

In Favor: C. Barrett, K. Cowie, K. Lofgren, P. Murray, C. McKinney, A. Vervaeke

Abstention: F. O'Connell

C. Young stated the vendor will be installing the wire before school starts.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

P. Murray stated she met with Dr. Genovese yesterday and announced that due to personal circumstances, it is necessary that she resign from the School Committee after tonight's meeting. She read her resignation letter. C. McKinney stated she will leave a hole that will be difficult to fill and he thanked her for all the work she has done.

Dr. Genovese stated he has enjoyed the time he has worked with her and C. Young stated he has worked closely with Ms Murray and will miss her common sense approach. K. Cowie appreciates the help she received when she came on the Committee.

A. Vervaeke said Ms Murray's election to the Committee was exciting and invigorating and he will miss her counsel, common sense, conservatism and energy.

Procedurally, C. McKinney stated they will send a notice to the Board of Selectmen and make a public notice that there is a vacancy. A joint meeting will be scheduled at Town Hall and the Groton members of the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen. Any Groton resident wishing to be considered for an appointment for the remainder of Ms Murray's term may contact the Board of Selectmen's Administrator. Groton School Committee members and the Board of Selectmen will interview and vote to make an appointment. The appointment will serve until the next election.

With respect to the summer maintenance projects, C. Barrett asked if the five year building improvement plan will be modified to take these things into consideration.

C. Young said the items identified in the five year plan are listed on the last page of their handout and many of them are complete. The plan will be adjusted every budget time. She asked about the first part of the roof for the PTYC and C. Young said they hope to get the bids out. K. Cowie asked if the items on the summer maintenance list will be complete before school starts and C. Young said most of them should be done. He noted the main corridor in MSN has been painted with a semigloss paint and the lighting has been changed, both of which make it brighter.

A. Vervaeke asked about Prescott's flagpole. C. Young said it most likely has lead paint on it and could not be sanded down. It also has a 1920 dedication plaque on it. There are plans to have the flagpole refurbished through funds from the Community Preservation Act.

Dr. Genovese asked Mr. Young to highlight the precautions in place when the windows are removed at Prescott. C. Young said the windows were tested for lead paint and the caulking has some asbestos. A certified Massachusetts hazardous removal expert will be on site and a manifest of how the materials were disposed will be provided. The inside is protected with plastic and if necessary, students would be out of the room under construction.

ADJOURNMENT:

P. MURRAY MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 9:46 P.M.

SECONDED BY A. VERVAEKE

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary