

MINUTES
McLean County Unit District No. 5
BOARD OF EDUCATION
Intergovernmental Meeting
January 31, 2005

The Board of Education of Community Unit School District No. 5, McLean and Woodford Counties, Illinois, held an intergovernmental meeting on January 31, 2005, at approximately 7:00 p.m. at Shirk Center, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois.

Welcome/

Introductions

Unit 5 board members present: Gail Ann Briggs, Tom Ellsworth, Meta Mickens-Baker, Steve Whittington, and Board Vice President Scott Lay. Members absent: Martin O'Connor and Rick Percy.

Unit 5 administrators present: Superintendent Dr. Alan Chapman, Assistant Superintendent of Operations/Human Resources John Pye, Executive Director of Secondary Education Bruce Boswell, Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer Tod Altenburg, H.R./Community Relations Specialist Meghan Leiseberg.

Town of Normal officials: Mayor Chris Koos, Councilman Jason Chambers, Councilman Jeff Fritzen, Councilman Adam Nielsen, Councilwoman Sonja Reece, Town Manager Mark Peterson, and Assistant Town Manager Pamela Reece.

City of Bloomington officials: Mayor Judy Markowitz, Alderman Skip Crawford, Alderman Kevin Huette, Alderman Mike Matjeka, Alderman Tom Whalen, Alderwoman Karen Schmidt, and City Manager Tom Hamilton.

Others: About 15 members of the public were in attendance including McLean County board members Terry Baggett, George Gordon, and Bette Rackauskas.

Lay called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m.

Lay opened the meeting with introductions and expressed the District's appreciation to Bloomington Aldermen and Normal Town Council members for being in attendance. Lay indicated that the meeting would serve as a productive forum that would allow the involved entities to explore issues of common interest. Lay also suggested that the meeting would provide an opportunity to discuss issues of particular importance to Unit 5 in a public arena.

Chapman addressed the agenda for the evening and noted its collaborative nature. The agenda was developed with the help of both public bodies and is indicative of a mutually beneficial experience.

Discussion Topics

Unit 5 Strategic Plan

The Unit 5 Strategic Plan was discussed in terms of its development and content. The Mission Statement was introduced as a major facet of the strategic planning process. Chapman also summarized the Strategic Plan Progress Report and indicated that the administration had just made its half-year report to the Board of Education regarding Strategic Plan advancement. It was noted that the Strategic Plan is a working, dynamic document that will always be in flux as Unit 5 continues to look five years into the future.

Q: Crawford – Last year, when we had this meeting, a comment was made that roughly 50 percent of Unit 5 students are Bloomington residents. Is that still the case?

R: Chapman- Yes, that figure remains accurate.

Growth Concerns

Lay introduced the issue of growth and explained that Unit 5 has gathered a number of projections in terms of enrollment, facility usage, etc. Three documents were provided to illustrate the growth issue. Chapman explained several models of potential growth in terms of enrollment, classroom usage, and percentage increase.

Pye discussed the various options for dealing with and managing growth throughout the District. In order to balance school populations, students may be redistricted, although this is often considered to be a drastic measure. Attendance exceptions also relieve some growth issues. On a case-by-case basis, exceptions may be considered and potentially granted to relieve growth pressures. Finally, open attendance areas that designate a particular area as a zone within which students may attend one of several schools of the District's choosing help to balance class size and school-level enrollment.

Q: Markowitz – What is the property tax rate?

R: Altenburg - \$4.43

Q: Markowitz – Is that the maximum rate?

R: Altenburg – In some funds, the rate is at its maximum amount. In other funds it is not. We are at the maximum rate in the Educational Fund.

R: Lay – The total tax rate is currently 2 cents higher than it was last year.

Q: Fritzen –Redistricting is always controversial, but open attendance sometimes causes individuals to feel that neighborhood identity is lost. Have you had feedback that open attendance is not positive, or is it preferable to redistricting?

R: Pye- Parents have responded well overall, but the biggest negative we've had is that we can't make the open attendance decisions until after registration in the fall. This causes parents to be unsure of what school their child will attend until mid-August. Prior to that time, the necessary information is not available.

Q: Neilsen – In my area, there is a lot of development (around Prairieland). Every time a new development begins, people are convinced that they will be pushed out of their current schools. When will you redistrict again?

R: Chapman – We think current planning and districting will suffice through the next school year. We cannot make any guarantees past that time. We are now looking at what we can do to adequately place students in classrooms. Portable classrooms in specific locations may provide temporary relief. We are tracking developments out of the Unit Office to have an accurate handle on how and where the growth is taking place and how it will impact our schools. I don't have a good answer to the question of how or when we will redistrict.

Q: Hamilton- At which schools can we add capacity?

R: Pye – We could physically add onto Grove. They are experiencing a huge amount of growth even though we've used open attendance areas to divert children. We could easily add an addition to Fox Creek. Fox Creek is currently underutilized, but could be added onto. Portable classrooms have been used in the District before, so it would not be difficult to re-add them.

Q: Markowitz – Can we add onto Prairieland?

R: Lay – Some of our schools were built in a pod system that could accommodate additional growth. We may be able to make an addition to Prairieland.

Q: Neilsen- Is there a map that we can use that shows open attendance areas and elementary boundaries?

R: Lay- Yes, you can use the maps on the website. They are up to date and show all of the District's boundaries.

Q: Markowitz – Are there currently any sites that could be used for the construction of new schools?

R: Chapman – There is a 25-acre site in Bloomington at the corner of Ireland Grove and Hershey and 11 acres in North Normal that could be used as potential school sites. Unit 5 is always looking for new land for future school sites.

Q: Ellsworth – Can you address our relationship with realtors as we attempt to manage growth?

R: Chapman – We’ve tried to stay connected to realtors so they can have accurate information regarding school attendance areas. We are working hard to make sure that timely, accurate information is communicated.

Q: Markowitz – Are you talking to the Regional Planning Commission, to plan for community-wide growth?

R: Chapman – Yes, Lay is the Unit 5 board representative on the Commission and sits as vice-chair. We are well connected with that organization.

Q: Reece- What are we to say when citizens contact us with questions regarding growth or requesting that new subdivisions be prevented to preempt redistricting?

R: Chapman – We don’t want to prevent growth and don’t feel that we have a right to try to control growth. We simply want to accommodate children as best we can.

R: Lay – Challenges are in existence and we have a finite amount of space in which to educate children. However, please keep our needs in mind.

R: Chapman – Growth is not a new problem. We’ve always been growing and will continue to do so. Sometimes our response is later than is comfortable and we are crowded in the meantime, but sometimes we build “too early” and don’t fill schools immediately. This is a long-term problem that will continue to arise.

Q: Reece- What is your long-term level of comfort when the doors of a new school open? 70 to 80 percent?

R: Chapman – Instead of percentages, I like to frame the question in such a way that we are able to accommodate kids long-term in the same facility. You face criticism at whichever end of the spectrum you decide to build.

Q: Whalen – What is the statewide average for class size?

R: Chapman – I don’t have a solid figure to supply, but there is a large range across the state. There are some districts in which the class sizes are exorbitantly large with 35 to 42 students in each class.

C: Fritzen – Current class sizes are right at the range that we projected would be appropriate in the context of the Educational Task Force recommendations in the fall of 2003.

C: Lay- As recently as the March 2000 referendum, we had projections pertaining to school development that suggested that Grove and Fox Creek would grow at a similar rate. However, Grove has grown much more quickly and is full, as opposed to Fox Creek, which is currently underutilized.

School Land Dedication Ordinance

Chapman addressed the school land dedication ordinance. In the fall of 2003, there was an Educational Task Force (ETF) appointed by the Unit 5 Board that explored revenue enhancements and expenditure reductions for the District. It was the ETF’s opinion that those fostering the growth should be responsible for bearing some of the expense of the growth. The CAC recently suggested that more study be given to land dedication and/or impact fees to help the District to ease the impact of growth. Chapman asked that Peterson address this issue as it is handled in the Town of Normal.

Peterson indicated that the Normal Town Council developed the School Land Dedication Ordinance in 1996 or 1997. This ordinance is similar to the dedication of park land when subdividers develop plots of land. Developers must set aside land for future school development, or at the discretion of the Town, the developer must pay a fee in lieu of land. School land dedication funds are dedicated to capital investments related to school development (i.e. land, construction, and/or improvement to school facilities). Unit 5 has

not used these funds yet. A sophisticated analysis was used to determine the land donation requirement per dwelling unit. The cash contribution is based upon an average fair market land value. Land prices have gone up since the ordinance was adopted, so we may need to re-evaluate this range and increase it appropriately. We need to review the cash value portion periodically as well. To access these funds, Unit 5 would forward a request to the Town for payment from the fund, the Town would then decide if the request is an eligible use of funds, and if so, the funds would be given to the District.

Q: Chapman – Has this ordinance impacted development in the Town of Normal?

R: Peterson – No, I don't think that it has had an adverse effect. We've actually had several record years of development since it was enacted.

C: Chapman – Citizens asked that Normal evaluate the rate to make sure that it is fair and that Bloomington consider adopting a similar approach and land dedication ordinance. I realize that this is not an easy topic or question, but want to make everyone aware of the issue.

C: Hamilton- This issue has been on the table in the City of Bloomington a number of times. There hasn't been consensus among City Council members to determine whether or not we should proceed with the land dedication ordinance. However, we have a change in council members coming up, so we may have a change of opinion.

C: Matjeka – We hear from the developers against the idea, but we don't hear from parents in support of a land dedication ordinance. We hear much more of the "this will put a significant damper on development perspective" than parents asking for these fees to be instituted.

C: Hamilton – We are also challenged by the fact that there are two districts serving students residing in Bloomington and the fact that both districts demonstrate different and disparate needs. This is a complicated allocation scenario.

Q: Neilsen – Are there any large areas for development in District 87?

R: Hamilton – No, there are really only redevelopment projects in District 87. We would be able to pay out only a small amount to District 87 from a fund of this kind.

Q: Lay – How much money is held in the Land Dedication Fund currently?

R: Peterson – About \$1.1 million.

C: Reece – Families are concerned when they hear about growth and don't realize that growth is taking place now. They may know in a less concrete sense that growth will have an impact upon them. It may be a general lack of awareness that is preventing Bloomington from hearing more feedback in support of land dedication agreements.

C: Chapman – The Unit 5 Citizens Advisory Council is a collective, representative voice of parents and community members who do not have any children in our schools, and they are in support of land dedication agreements.

C: Fritzen – The ETF also expressed a strong opinion regarding the impact fees as a means of increasing revenue. There are two separate groups who have endorsed this method. Land impact fees are a long-term solution, so it may not seem like an immediate-enough solution for a lot of parents. Long-range forethought and planning are needed to appreciate the land dedication ordinance issue. Parents often don't stay engaged once their student is out of the district, so we need to hear their voices as they say that they want these fees. We need to realize the Normal works to keep property taxes as low as possible, but have to explore other options. We can't say what Bloomington should do, but we can't wait for someone to raise the issue. Instead, we have to be leaders and take the initiative to make it happen. Some developers will not be in favor of the land dedication ordinance, but we need to consider the fact that it has not had an adverse effect so far and that it's simply the right thing to do.

C: Lay –Our Board of Education is very aware of the issue and has an interest in collaborating with the City of Bloomington to make this proposal a reality.

Joint Response to Critical Incidents

Chapman indicated that schools have been focusing on the issue of emergency planning and that this planning is directly linked to the towns and cities in which our schools are located. New multi-hazard training will impact our district and cities.

Boswell provided an overview of crisis planning in Unit 5. Unit 5 has reviewed crisis plans, made sure that we have standardized plans in place, and have provided an extensive crisis document to each law enforcement agency. The crisis plan includes emergency contact information, a school map, entrance information, and other critical data.

Pye summarized Unit 5's involvement in statewide Critical Incidence Response Team Training. Unit 5 was 1 of only 14 districts in the state to learn advanced crisis management techniques. This approach will train a core group of schools that will then train other public and private schools in their areas. A team of a cross section of professionals attended a formal one-day training that is to be adapted for district-wide use. The model stresses the need for a cooperative approach with local governments and public agencies in responding to emergencies. It is our hope that our district team can collaborate with the various agencies that exist in our communities to meet needs that may arise.

Q: Reece – How much awareness do the hospitals in the community have of these crisis plans? Should we initiate this dialogue?

R: Pye – Yes, this seems like a great idea.

C: Reece – I would invite you to expand your circle to other agencies. The hospitals would welcome this collaboration.

C: Hamilton – I am aware that our police department has been involved in crisis planning and looks forward to continuing the conversation along these lines. Safety is a key issue, and we would like to collaborate to continue to improve this area for our students.

Proposed Unit 5 – Community Liaison Committee

Q: Koos – The Strategic Plan indicates that more community collaboration would be positive. We all have different goals around the table, but we share a common interest. We share the same taxpayers, but we often move in different directions. Should we develop a liaison committee between Unit 5, the Town of Normal, and the City of Bloomington to discuss these issues on a regular basis? We could then seek to share a common vision. The committee could have two council members from each entity, two board members, and associated staff. We might also want to share facilities amongst us – consider building extra large schools that could be intended as community grounds. Shared library, recreation, and adult education facilities could also be considered. The town and school could share the space. In the evenings and summers, buildings don't see the use that they could, so there is an opening for enhanced collaboration. Koos cited a number of practical examples in which cities and schools collaborated to realize a cost advantage from new facilities. Shared facility usage could be considered by a liaison committee.

C: Hamilton – There has been a great deal of collaboration between the school districts and cities in terms of construction benefits. Central Catholic High School has a less formal agreement with Bloomington for the use of park and school facilities currently. We are definitely in support of this kind of collaboration.

C: Neilsen – I volunteer to serve on the committee if it is formed. This is a wise idea due to the number of issues that come up. We are all in contact with a number of community members and could do better communicating this feedback to others.

C: Koos – I've approached Neilsen and Chambers with the idea of joining this committee due to the fact that they have school-aged children.

C: Fritzen – This is a great idea. There is a great deal of communication and cooperation in our community, but we can always do better and could share an enhanced vision. It would be a great benefit to our community.

C: Markowitz – We will discuss this issue to see if we are interested in participating.

C: Chapman – If all entities are interested, we will coordinate the committee's development at a later time.

C: Ellsworth – This committee could also address the changes our community has experienced in the last ten years. Dealing with race and income issues could be a focus of the group. These issues impact our entire community and should be given more attention at the macro-community level.

C: Lay – We would certainly have an interest in becoming involved in a collaborative committee of this nature.

C: Reece – A committee of this nature would help us stay in touch more directly and would be beneficial to all as we pursue projects.

Future Joint Meetings

Q: Chapman – We also wish to poll the group regarding the level of effectiveness of meetings of this nature. Should we continue to hold these meetings?

R: Crawford – We should have another meeting of this nature, but one a year may not be enough. We may need to hold these meetings more frequently.

C: Markowitz – There are many school systems in Bloomington-Normal. We should be inclusive and welcome District 87 and parochial schools to the table.

C: Koos – We should continue to hold these meetings at least a couple of times a year and/or as needed.

C: Fritzen – Markowitz's suggestion that all be included may be an issue for the small proposed representative committee. Too many people around the table will be too confusing and unproductive. If circumstances stay as they are, we need more than one meeting a year. If they change and we add the smaller committee, an annual full meeting may be adequate.

C: Lay – Chapman, Peterson, and Hamilton can discuss this issue at greater length to come to a conclusion. They will make a decision and inform the rest of us.

Other Items

C: Matjeka – In 15 years on the council, I've never been invited to a PTA meeting in one of my neighborhoods. Maybe I need to knock on the door at the schools, but I'd like to hear directly from the school in my neighborhood.

C: Chapman - We will follow up with Bloomington aldermen who have Unit 5 wards to make connections with principals. Schmidt and Crawford may be the only ones who are not associated with Unit 5 schools. Principal-to-alderman connections would be possible, and we will facilitate them.

Lay mentioned the Unit 5 Connect email listserv and encouraged attendees to register for the service.

Hamilton indicated that the Unit 5 Connect icon could be linked to the City of Bloomington website to allow individuals to sign up for the service.

Closing

Lay thanked all in attendance and adjourned the meeting at 8:25 p.m.

Scott Lay, Board of Education Vice President
Community Unit School District No. 5
McLean and Woodford Counties, Illinois

ATTEST:

Meghan Leiseberg, Recording Secretary

Approved: February 9, 2005