

MINUTES
McLean County Unit District No. 5
BOARD OF EDUCATION
Town Meeting
April 11, 2005

The Board of Education of Community Unit School District No. 5, McLean and Woodford Counties, Illinois, held a town meeting on April 11, 2005, at approximately 7:05 p.m. at Sugar Creek Elementary School, 200 North Towanda Avenue, Normal, Illinois.

**1.0 Welcome/
Introductions**

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

Administrators present: Superintendent Dr. Alan Chapman, Assistant Superintendent of Operations/Human Resources John Pye, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Jim Braksick, Executive Director of Secondary Education Bruce Boswell, Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer Tod Altenburg, Director of Instructional Support Linda Chizmar, Director of Technology/IMC Donna Lutkehaus, Director of Special Education-Instruction Cory Tello, H.R./Community Relations Specialist Meghan Leiseberg, CJHS Principal Dawn Green, Pepper Ridge School Principal Tim Arnold, and Sugar Creek School Principal Scott Peters.

Others present: Approximately 15 public attendees, including newly elected Board Members John Puzauskas and Jay Reece; CAC members: Marie Bobrosky, David Cobb, Krissy Ort, and Karen Zook; Pat Schlehober, Don Basen, Paul Vogel, Ted Ratajski, Todd Vincent, Joann Steinberg, Greg Reichert, George Ellis, and Robyn Pemberton.

Gail Ann Briggs opened the meeting with introductions of District representatives. In welcoming participants Briggs commented that the meeting was designed to provide information of a timely nature and to offer an opportunity for a public dialogue concerning issues of interest with representatives of the District. She mentioned that this meeting was the fourth such event held during this school year.

**2.0 State of the District –
A Unit 5 Update**

Superintendent Chapman addressed the group regarding the District's financial status and projected growth.

Chapman described the current and anticipated financial standing of Unit 5 using a series of data sets and figures to illustrate expenditures, fund balances, and projected fiscal trends. Chapman also addressed anticipated growth at the elementary and secondary levels and described the impact of increasing student enrollment upon facility capacity.

In general, projections indicate that expenditures will increase at a faster rate than revenues, increasing the difficulty of achieving and maintaining balanced budgets. Projected enrollment growth will begin to exceed current facility capacity at all three levels within the next three-five years.

Chapman indicated that the presented financial and growth data would be made available on the Unit 5 website (www.unit5.org) for public review.

**3.0 Community
Conversation -
Questions & Input**

Chapman opened the "*Community Conversation*" portion of the evening and encouraged questions and input from meeting participants.

Q: What is the probability of instituting a system by which builders are taxed to assist with the growth their developments create? Have builder impact fees and school land dedication ordinances been put in place?

A: The Town of Normal has instituted a School Land Dedication Ordinance that requires builders to contribute land or a set dollar amount to account for increased growth. The Town of Normal's Ordinance has been in place since 1997. So far, one school site, located near Ironwood, has been donated. The District has until 2009 to decide if a school will be built on this site. If the District decides against using the donated land as a school site, the land will be sold and Unit 5 will receive the funds from its sale.

Generally, builders and developers have chosen to pay the fee to the School Land Dedication fund, rather than donate land. Currently, these accumulated funds, held by the Town of Normal, amount to over one million dollars. These funds may be used to defray the costs of future school construction or land acquisition in Normal and can be requested only for those purposes.

It is the District's plan to continue discussion with the Town of Normal to determine if current Ordinance fees are being assessed at an adequate level. Since the fees were originally established in 1997, they may need to be increased. Currently, the City of Bloomington and McLean County do not have Ordinances. The District continues to have discussions with both of these entities in favor of the establishment of such programs. We have asked PTO leaders to assist the district in promoting the importance of establishing Ordinances in Bloomington and the County. PTO leaders have been encouraged to build relationships with aldermen and county board members and to stress the importance of implementation of these fees. The Unit 5 community is an invaluable resource in our pursuit of the establishment of School Land Dedication Ordinances. The voice of the community will be the most important factor in determining the outcome of these discussions.

Q: Are new tax dollars reflected in the growth projections that have been presented this evening?

A: We have projected a 6 percent annual increase in our Equalized Assessed Valuation. This figure will be updated each year as actual amounts become available in order to insure that projections remain as accurate as possible. Our community continues to experience a great deal of development. While we have heard some concern that builder impact fees and School Land Dedication Ordinances are deterrents to development, growth has increased in the Town of Normal every year since their Ordinance was adopted.

Q: I understand that the District is attempting to plan for long-term growth, but I am currently more concerned with how the district will handle more immediate growth. For example, Grove's large student population influences the students at Northpoint as well. I have heard that the entire early childhood program may have to be moved to accommodate growth. How will this be handled?

A: We are going to use last year's plan for open attendance areas and growth management for this coming school year. However, beyond the 2005-2006 school year, we aren't certain how we will manage these more immediate growth issues. We are aware of the need to maintain consistency for students, however, it is sometimes least disruptive to move an entire program, rather than to rearrange neighborhood attendance patterns. Ultimately, a move towards centralizing specialized programs (like early childhood education) is frequently beneficial as it allows more clustering of services and collaboration among instructors.

Q: Upon what year were the estimated facility capacities figured?

A: These estimated capacity figures are based upon identified, known development. If we are aware of upcoming development, it is reflected in presented figures. We have

based our development projections upon the number of home sites that are anticipated in new areas as well as on development timetables. Regardless of how these data are interpreted, the same basic trend is apparent.

Q: Is the District planning additional budget cuts for the 2005-2006 school year? Is the District anticipating a referendum in the near future?

A: There have been no additional program cuts for next year. Co-curricular activities will be reduced. Those reductions were approved last month and will be implemented in the fall. Referenda in one or more funds may serve as potential solutions to some fiscal issues. The Board has not discussed the possibility of referenda at this time. The Citizens Advisory Council recently completed a report on the feasibility of future referenda, which will be considered.

Q: Chapman has mentioned that he has been working with other superintendents to lobby Springfield regarding the public education funding crisis. Considering the state of governance in Springfield, I have more confidence in how funds are managed at the local level. What are the chances of seeing significant educational funding reform at the state level in the next five years?

A: At this point, it is difficult to anticipate if there will be significant education funding reform at the state level in the near future. Current legislation does not have the support to overcome a governor's veto at this time. Our tax structure is inadequate in almost every way, which makes it difficult to be optimistic about future funding, unless significant systemic changes are made. As it currently stands, the wealthiest are taxed the least, when measured as a proportion of income, and the entire tax structure is imbalanced. The system of educational funding also creates vast disparities across the state relative to the amount of educational resources students receive. By no criteria other than the geographical location where they reside, students receive educations that are either adequately or inadequately funded. The entirety of the state's revenue system must be altered in order for these situations to be corrected.

Q: How can we justify paying more for a transportation program that does not increase the efficiency of service? Why aren't we reopening the topic of cuts to full-day kindergarten to ease our current financial situation?

A: We must continually balance the topics of transportation and full-day kindergarten with a plethora of others that are pertinent to district operations. No outcome of our attempts to balance these issues will please everyone. We have made a change to the transportation program that will improve busing services, but will not aid our financial situation. None of the solutions we've developed are considered to be permanent. As the District continues to evolve, we will constantly evaluate where we stand with programs and services. It is our ultimate responsibility to assess every situation as it impacts all Unit 5 students.

Chapman thanked participants for their attendance and involvement and encouraged all individuals to remain engaged in the District by attending events, asking questions, and speaking with administrators and Board members.

4.0 Closing

Mickens-Baker provided participants with suggestions for continued communication with the District. She encouraged participants to register for the *Unit 5 Connect* email listserv and cited the Unit 5 website (www.unit5.org) as a source of a vast array of relevant, timely information. Mickens-Baker indicated that Unit 5 is interested in continuing to hold "*Community Conversation*" events and would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with community organizations to plan and conduct future programs. Additionally, she suggested that participants consider applying for membership in the Unit 5 Citizens Advisory Council and offered attendees the opportunity to complete Participant Response Forms in order to provide additional feedback.

Mickens-Baker closed the meeting by thanking participants for attending and Scott Peters for the use of the Sugar Creek facility.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:32 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: _____