

I. CALL TO ORDER

The special meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly was held on December 11, 2007, at the Borough Assembly Chambers, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 6:17 p.m. by Mayor Curtis D. Menard for the purpose of holding a joint Assembly/School Board meeting.

II. ROLL CALL

Assembly members present and establishing a quorum were:

Ms. Lynne Woods, Assembly District No. 1 (*Deputy Mayor*)
Mr. Pete Houston, Assembly District No. 2
Ms. Michelle R. Church, Assembly District No. 3
Ms. Cindy Bettine, Assembly District No. 5
Mr. Robert Wells, Assembly District No. 6

Assemblymember absent and excused were:

Ms. Mary Kvalheim, Assembly District No. 4
Mr. Tom Kluberton, Assembly District No. 7

School Board members present and establishing a quorum were:

Mr. Jim Colver, Seat A (*via teleconference*)
Ms. Sarah Welton, Seat B (*School Board President*)
Ms. Patricia Purcell, Seat D
Ms. Colleen Hamblen Seat F
Ms. Sandra White, Seat G

School Board members absent and excused was:

Ms. Susan Pouger, Seat C
Ms. Cheryl Turner, Seat E

Borough staff in attendance were:

Mr. John Duffy, Borough Manager
Mr. Nicholas Spiropoulos, Borough Attorney
Ms. Lonnie R. McKechnie, Deputy Borough Clerk
Mr. Keith Rountree, Public Works Director
Ms. Tammy Clayton, Finance Director

School Board staff in attendance were:

Mr. George Troxel, Superintendent of Education
Ms. Susan McCauley, Director of Education

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Menard inquired if there were any changes to the agenda.

GENERAL CONSENT: The agenda was approved without objection.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by School Board Member Sandra White.

V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

(There was no one present who wished to testify.)

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Building Construction Progress *(pursuant to code)*

Mr. Rountree:

- advised that the Public Works Department is currently working on 87 projects, 23 of which are School District projects;
- spoke regarding the design options for the Susitna Valley High School;
- noted that the School Board approved the 35 percent design package on December 5, 2007;
- stated that the insurance company has declared that the new construction will be equal in size to the former school;
- spoke regarding the new design verses the old design;
- noted that the School Board supports the funding of the school through the sale of bonds; and
- spoke to what the insurance company will and will not fund.

Assemblymember Church queried whether the skating rink would be an outdoor rink.

Mr. Rountree responded that his understanding is that it will be an outdoor rink.

Assemblymember Church queried the cost overrun.

Mr. Rountree:

- advised that the skating rink would run approximately \$1,000,000;
- commented that this is above what the insurance company will be willing to pay; and
- spoke regarding the process that will occur with the insurance company once the cost estimate is received.

Assemblymember Bettine queried the insurance replacement value.

Mr. Rountree:

- advised that the replacement value is undetermined, as the budget for the design is not set; and
- noted that there is an approximate cost estimate of \$27,000,000 to rebuild the school; however, at this time it is not known what the cost estimate will be from the architectural firm.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- the design and cost estimate for the school;
- whether bonding for the construction will be needed;
- if Governor Palin's budget contains funds for the construction of Susitna Valley High School;
- the outdoor ice rink;
- items that the insurance company will cover;
- what the options may be for funding should the insurance company not fund the total construction cost;
- whether the insurance company will reimburse teachers for personal items that were lost; and
- the issues with the suggested rock wall and fireplace.

Mr. Rountree provided updates on the following projects: South Palmer Elementary School, Wasilla High School Phase III, Houston High School Glycol, Academy Charter Gym, and the Career Technical Center.

B. Status of Districtwide Portables *(Requested by: Assembly)*

Mr. Troxel:

- advised that 57 portables exist at schools districtwide;
- noted that 28 more portables would be needed to fill the requests from principals;
- stated that the School District is making due with the portables they have; and
- spoke to the issues that the lack of portables have caused.

Assemblymember Wells queried the cost of portables.

Mr. Troxel:

- advised that the cost of a portable is \$100,000;
- spoke to the schools that are in need of more portables; and
- noted that the 18 portables that are at Susitna Valley High School can be used elsewhere once the school is finished.

(School Board Member Colver arrived at the meeting at 6:50 p.m. and ended the teleconference.)

Assemblymember Bettine queried whether funds that are left over from other school projects could be used for portables.

Ms. Clayton:

- advised that portables would not qualify for those funds; and
- provided the reasons that the portables would not qualify.

Discussion ensued regarding the portables that are needed.

C. Student Drop Out Information *(Requested by: School District)*

Ms. McCauley:

- provided an update regarding the “Dropout Factory” report;
- advised that the Johns Hopkins study based their assumptions that high schools with a low promoting power will have a low graduation rate and a high dropout rate; however, Johns Hopkins acknowledges that promoting power is not a direct measure of either;
- spoke to how the measures are utilized;
- commented that Wasilla High School’s drop out rate is not significantly higher than some other schools in the district;
- spoke to reactions of Governor Palin and the Alaska State Department of Education have had regarding the study;
- noted that Johns Hopkins, as of yesterday, retracted the dropout factory label for fifteen schools;
- advised that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District has approximately the same graduation rate as other large school districts in the State;
- spoke to the School District’s dropout rate within the last couple of years;
- reported on the characteristics that lead to students dropping out of school;
- advised that a Dropout Prevention Team has been put together for the middle schools and high schools;
- reported on of how the pyramid of support will be used to help prevent students from dropping out of school;
- stated that there are encouraging early signs that progress is being made;
- noted that there are 35 less students that have dropped out this year compared to last year; and
- spoke to the next steps that the Dropout Prevention Team will be taking.

Assemblymember Houston queried the purpose of the Johns Hopkins study.

Ms. McCauley:

- advised that the study was requested by the Federal Department of Education;
- noted that the states do not calculate graduation rates the same way; therefore, Johns Hopkins was not able to use each states data;
- reported that the School District did discuss whether to pursue a formal correction of the dropout label; and
- stated that Johns Hopkins is not backing off their suppositions; therefore, an error needs to be found in their data to request a correction.

Assemblymember Houston queried if the information from Johns Hopkins will have an affect on the federal funds that are received.

Ms. McCauley advised that she does not know of any connection to funding.

Mayor Menard stated that he has heard that failing third grade readers has a direct indication on how many prisons will need to be built in the future.

Discussion ensued regarding literacy programs.

D. Demographics Report *(Requested by: School District)*

Mr. Troxel:

- spoke to a demographics meeting that was held on October 30, 2007, and to the other agencies that were involved;
- spoke to the construction and retail markets and their affects on demographics;
- advised that there has been a decline in students in the Municipality of Anchorage and the Fairbanks North Star Borough;
- advised that the School District's numbers do not show that more students are moving into the district;
- noted that new construction is slowing down compared to last year;
- stated that in the future the largest concentration of high school students without a high school will be in the Knik Goose Bay area; and
- noted that if the current trend continues, that a flat enrollment will be projected for next year.

Assemblymember Woods queried when more information on the prison will come forward.

Mr. Duffy:

- advised that more definitive information should be available in January; and
- spoke to meeting with the Commissioner of the State of Alaska Department of Corrections.

Assemblymember Bettine queried whether a middle school in her area should be built prior to a high school.

Mr. Troxel:

- opined that the School District has enough middle schools at this time;
- noted that while the high schools are full they are not stretched to the limit;
- advised that at this time the School District could not support a new high school in the area; and
- spoke to middle schools and high schools that already exist in the area.

E. Budget Process *(Requested by: School District)*

Mr. Troxel:

- reported that the budget teams are finalizing the budget studies;
- advised that the School District will be reviewing the budget on February 16, 2008, with public hearings to take place on February 20, 2008, and March 5, 2008;
- noted that the School District will deliver the budget to the Borough at the end of March; and
- commented that the Legislature will set State funding levels in May.

Assemblymember Woods queried whether Governor Palin's proposed education funding meets with the School Board's approval.

Mr. Troxel advised that the School District does approve of Governor Palin's proposed funding; however, the School District would like to see block grant increments.

Assemblymember Houston queried the impact of forward funding.

Mr. Troxel:

- advised that the biggest impact would be on staffing levels;
- spoke to the calculated risks that have been taken in rehiring staff, so that good teachers are retained;
- noted that schedules need to be finalized by the end of year; however, it is hard when you do not know what the staffing levels will be; and
- commented that forward funding will help alleviate these types of issues.

School Board Member Colver:

- spoke to the joint meeting that the Assembly and the School Board held with the State Legislative Delegation;
- opined that the Legislative Delegation had trepidation with the idea of forward funding; and
- spoke to the need to emphasize this issue with the Legislative Delegation.

VII. SCHOOL BOARD, MAYOR, ASSEMBLY, AND STAFF COMMENTS

School Board Member Purcell thanked the School District for the dropout presentation

School Board Member White:

- noted the importance of the dropout report; and
- thanked everyone for their support on the Susitna Valley High School issues.

School Board Member Colver:

- congratulated the School District on their staff; and
- spoke to funding the new Susitna Valley High School.

School Board President Welton:

- spoke to the issues with the cost of rebuilding Susitna Valley High School; and
- opined that the cost of \$1 million for a new hockey rink is too high.

Assemblymember Bettine:

- stated that she appreciated the dropout information that the School District provided; and
- spoke to the need to make the demographics information public.

Assemblymember Church expressed her appreciation for the dropout report.

Assemblymember Houston:

- spoke to the dropout report provided by the School District;
- stated that there are issues with labeling children;
- spoke to the need to put together a statement to correct the information from the dropout factory labeling; and
- opined that the dropout factory labeling could be devastating to the school culture.

Mayor Menard stated that he hopes that the joint meeting that the bodies had with the Legislative Delegation will be fruitful.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The special joint meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

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CURTIS D. MENARD, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:

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LONNIE R. McKECHNIE, Acting Borough Clerk

Minutes approved: 01/15/08