

MORTON UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709

AUGUST 18, 2015

Minutes of the Committee of the Whole Meeting of the Board of Education of Morton Unit School District 709 held August 18, 2015, at the Morton Education and Administration Center.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING -

President Michelle Bernier called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Members present: Mrs. Michelle Bernier, Mr. Clint Heinold, Mr. Shaun Bill,
Dr. Shad Beaty, Mr. Tom Neeley, Mrs. Kelly Scarfe, Mr. Jeff Schmidgall

Dr. Hall opened the meeting by reviewing the urgent needs list compiled by the Board at recently held meetings. She noted that the Jr. High and High School urgent needs have been added to the cost sheet.

Discussion included:

- The need to prioritize the urgent needs in order to downsize the list
- Long term building plans – when and if to build a new building/how long to continue using the current Jr. High building
- Options to finance the projects

When polled about individual views for future plans, board members shared the following:

- Mr. Schmidgall – A new building is not in the near future; the Jr. High has more life in it. Short term improvements are needed at Grundy and Lincoln, Brown is okay for now. He would support a new gymnasium at Grundy. The Board needs to decide how much debt it is willing to take on. He is not in favor of alternative revenue bonds, but would support working cash bonds as currently issued.
- Dr. Beaty – The District is a long way from building a new high school, probably 20 years. If it is the will of the Board to build sooner, it should go to a referendum. The current buildings need to be maintained as best as possible and that includes keeping the Jr. High.
- Mr. Heinold – Because of current needs, a new school building is not in a 5-year plan; need to address the shorter term needs at this time. It would be okay to have a long-range building plan for the future, but there is no need to tie the district's hands financially at this time. The highest priority is at the elementary buildings with needs at Grundy and Lincoln being higher than the others. A question to be answered is if gyms at Grundy and Lincoln can be downsized to make it possible to do work at Brown, also. He is in favor of working cash bonds for a duration of up to five years, but would not want to encumber current revenue streams with alternative revenue bonds.

- Mr. Neeley – He is not in favor of portable classrooms (as suggested earlier in the meeting). The environment is not right at this time for raising taxes to build a new school. He would like to extend the life of the current Jr. High building. He is leery of issuing bonds beyond the current practice of working cash bonds.
- Mrs. Scarfe – She doesn't believe the current Jr. High building is viable for 20 more years. The administrators have made the environment at the Jr. High the best it can be for the students given the space available. The land it is on is not viable to add an addition to the building. She would not support putting millions into the current Jr. High building. A plan for a new building in 10 years is feasible; need to move toward a referendum – it would need to be done properly. The entire Board needs to be in favor of a new building for the referendum to be successful. Not adding a gym on to Brown if gyms are added to Lincoln and Grundy would not be equitable. She suggested that a phased-in plan for gyms at Lincoln, Grundy and Brown be considered if all could not be done at one time.
- Mr. Bill – he agrees that the current Jr. High building is not viable for 20 more years and millions of dollars should not be spent on it. He is more inclined to build a new building and close the Jr. High. A 5-8 middle school would relieve the pressure at the elementary buildings. He doesn't foresee a time when the district would not have the need for four elementary buildings. There was a need for gyms at Lincoln, Grundy and Brown five years ago and that need has not gone away. Additional classrooms were added four years ago, and there now is a need to add more. Gyms at the elementary buildings could be phased, but he is inclined to add them all at one time. Money may need to be borrowed, but should not be financed for more than a total of five years.
- Mrs. Bernier – Children in the hallways is unacceptable. Five years ago, after visiting a school with portable classrooms, she was in favor of adding the new classrooms using the reserves that were available. At this time, she would be willing to entertain a discussion on using portable classrooms. The current Jr. High building could possibly survive another 20 years, but given the size and locations of some of the Jr. High classrooms being used, she asked if that is how we want to educate our children. As a parent, school board member and resident of the community, she believes that is not what our children deserve. Her vision includes a new high school within ten years. Eventually, interest rates are going to rise and she does not want to spend down all of the reserves given the unknowns with the state of Illinois. The Board needs to reach an agreement on how to finance a building project. She agreed that the needs at Lincoln and Grundy are urgent. Gyms should be built to serve the district well into the future – do not make the mistake of the size of Bertha Frank. The band room at the high school is a safety issue. She challenged board members to visit the band room during class time while it is in use by students. Morton is thriving, homes are selling, enrollments are up and Caterpillar is making a huge investment in a new headquarters in Peoria. Board members need to be flexible and honest with one another and plan for increased enrollment in years to come. She respects everyone's opinions and hopes all can come together to plan for the future of District 709.

Mrs. Getz reviewed three possible scenarios for financing building projects that included issuing working cash bonds and alternate revenue bonds for up to 5 years.

Mrs. Scarfe asked the Board members to think about what the philosophy of the Board is concerning

financing. Do Board members trust the Business Manager and her suggestions for financing; or, is the Board willing to have students in the hallways in order to not have any debt? Board members need to eventually come to an agreement, even if it means moving one way or the other from their current views.

The Board asked the Administration to prioritize the urgent needs to a 5 – 7 year issuance of debt. This will be discussed at the next Committee of the Whole meeting, to be scheduled soon.

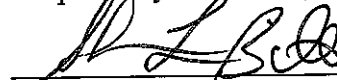
Adjournment -

Motion by Mr. Neelley, second by Mr. Schmidgall, that the meeting be adjourned.


Voice Vote: Yea 7 Nay 0

Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Shaun Bill, Secretary


Michelle Bernier, President