



PLANNING & BUILDING COMMITTEE

Merrimack School District
<http://www.isone.com/~merrpbc>

Minutes
September 13, 2004

Present: W. Morrison, C. Morrison, J. Vaillancourt, F. Rothhaus, T. Koenig and School Board
Liaison E. Coburn

Excused: S. Heinrich

Also Participating: School Board Chair K. Coleman and Superintendent M. Chiafery

W. Morrison called the meeting to order at 7:44 PM. He told the Committee that K. Coleman had asked for an opportunity to meet with it.

K. Coleman stated he wanted a discussion about the charges given to the Committee by the School Board; the scope, vision and rules of the Committee; and what the Committee views as the scope of its responsibilities.

W. Morrison shared a copy of the Committee By-laws, which he stated were originally approved, and then amended by votes of Annual School District Meeting. He noted the Committee was established by vote of Annual School District Meeting and the By-laws indicate the Committee assists the School Board on issues of mutual concern, and meets at the call of the School board or at its own discretion.

K. Coleman stated he was unaware that the Committee had By-laws. He noted that there had been times of friction and the School Board would like to move forward in a positive fashion once again. He stated the School Board did use the Committee in regard to the initial plans for the new school, and possibly should have used the Committee more in regard to the bussing issue, but it did not believe the Committee wanted a role in those discussions. He noted the School Board knows how hard the Committee works on the School Board charges and appreciates those efforts.

W. Morrison told K. Coleman that the Committee is well aware it is advisory only and that its function is to make recommendations.

K. Coleman stated that he felt that an issue was ownership of those recommendations. Often the School Board will need to modify Committee recommendations because the School Board has a broader perspective regarding budgetary or other management concerns than the Committee has. He felt the decision of phasing the renovations to MUES was an example of this. He noted the decision to phase the renovations was based on the significant impact the project would have had on the budget had it been funded all at once. K. Coleman stated that the Committee presents the preferred long term plan and that the Committee needs to understand that the School Board might need to revise the plan to meet their immediate, short term needs.

F. Rothhaus stated that he thought the School Board should utilize the Committee for its future vision rather than implement a shortsighted, though less expensive, plan.

K. Coleman stated that a smaller middle school, contrary to Committee recommendations, had been proposed due to declining enrollments. He stated it passed and no one will ever know if the original larger proposal would have passed.

F. Rothhaus stated it might have been better to have the larger school failed, rather than pass a plan that only does half the job.

W. Morrison stated the Committee has had several successes over the last few years. Even considering the friction between the Committee and the School Board, the end result has been positive.

K. Coleman stated he wanted to talk about the purview of the Committee as the School Board has several projects coming up.

W. Morrison stated that if the project was within the bounds of “planning,” the Committee would like to be involved.

K. Coleman asked how the bussing issue could be considered within the bounds of planning.

F. Rothhaus replied that the bussing situation involved planning for traffic patterns and adequate parking at each school, both of which are current Committee projects.

K. Coleman stated he would never have thought to share the space utilization inventory with the Committee.

W. Morrison explained to him that that instrument was developed by the Committee several years ago and is currently used by the Committee to determine if current utilization is appropriate and to plan for future space needs.

K. Coleman brought up the issue of finishing charges “on-time.”

W. Morrison told him that the Committee has had issues understanding the charge when not presented with a formal written charge by a member of the School Board at a Committee meeting where Committee members could ask questions to clarify the intent of the charge as well as determine if the timeline for the charge was sufficient.

K. Coleman suggested that a process be set up so that if the Committee had an issue they wanted to pursue or questions they needed answered, then they could go to the School Board, rather than to the Administration.

W. Morrison answered that the Committee is an elected body, which should not have to get permission from the School Board to act. The By-laws approved by the voters basically allow the Committee to review anything.

T. Koenig stated the Committee has no interest in determining curriculum, just ensuring the school buildings have adequate space to meet curriculum needs and that the space within the schools is appropriately used.

K. Coleman asked about technology and infrastructure needs.

W. Morrison replied that the Technology Committee has come before the PBC for several years to discuss those issues.

M. Chiafery stated the Technology Committee had used the PBC as a sounding board or clearinghouse for ideas.

T. Koenig agreed stating the Committee had discussed long range technology plans and provided input.

K. Coleman asked for a delineation point. He stated he thought the Committee should only be involved in long range planning of permanent infrastructure.

J. Vaillancourt stated the Committee is titled planning *and* building, not planning *of* buildings. She felt that the transportation issue was a complex issue, involving a lot of planning. She felt that the School Board had not given the Parent Transition Group an adequate amount of time to discuss the matter and that the School Board should have taken advantage of the knowledge and ability of the members of the Committee. The issue had been presented to the Committee initially and people in town had assumed that the Committee was involved in the final plans – which they weren't.

C. Morrison stated that the Committee had been asking for information about bussing since the new school passed in relation to the traffic/parking charge that the Committee has been working on over the last several years. She stated Administration knew the Committee wanted information and was interested in working on the bussing plan and that information had never materialized.

M. Chiafery replied that she was unaware of any information that had not been given to the Committee in a timely fashion.

J. Vaillancourt suggested that the School Board liaison should be utilized to keep the lines of communication open between the School Board and the Committee. She also suggested that the liaison not frame any reports about Committee projects by saying the Committee is looking for School Board approval.

F. Rothhaus suggested that possibly the PBC should meet with the School Board once or twice a year. He felt that dialog was absolutely necessary.

K. Coleman noted that dialog would be more formal if the Committee went to a School Board meeting and might be more meaningful if the Board attended a Committee meeting.

W. Morrison told K. Coleman that for several years, the Committee had met with the School Board to share a list of annual goals and objectives. He stated that since planning for the high school addition, the Committee has been so busy with immediate projects that it has not voted on

annual goals. In addition, he asked M. Chiafery if Committee requests to the Administration had been placing a burden on the Administrative staff.

M. Chiafery stated Committee requests were usually not an issue.

J. Vaillancourt asked when the School Board planned to revisit the bussing situation. She noted that last spring the School Board had promised the parents that the bussing issue would be reviewed again.

M. Chiafery suggested that any parents with problems should put them in writing to the Administration and the School Board.

J. Vaillancourt stated that many parents feel they did that in the spring. She wanted to know how much it would cost to return to two bus runs. She suggested the District might want to contract the services of a transportation specialist.

M. Chiafery stated the District is currently using the services of David DeBaie, who is a transportation engineer.

K. Coleman stated that the School Board knew that there had not been one good transportation plan, but they had chosen the best of the available options.

W. Morrison stated he thought there should be a sequential decision process. He noted that when involved in the process, even if the ultimate School Board proposal was different than what the Committee recommended, the Committee has been supportive. However, he stated the Committee wants to be involved during the entire process, not presented with a draft of what some group is going to present to the School Board, which the Committee is then asked to support.

K. Coleman stated that communication is a concern. He stated the Board had not meant to exclude the Committee or undermine Committee projects regarding the approval of the MYA batting cage at the varsity baseball field, but that the Board was unaware of the Committee's work in this area.

M. Chiafery stated that she expected information from NESDEC, which would be shared with the Committee.

K Coleman stated he thought there should be a joint meeting on the bussing issue and that the School Board would develop a specific charge with priorities for the Committee relative to this issue.

J. Vaillancourt made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: C. Morrison. MOTION PASSED 5 – 0 – 0. W. Morrison stated he would email members with the next meeting date – it would either be September 27th or October 11th. The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Heinrich