



PLANNING & BUILDING COMMITTEE

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

Minutes
October 11, 2004

Present: W. Morrison, C. Morrison, J. Vaillancourt, S. Heinrich, F. Rothhaus, T. Koenig
(arrived late) and School Board Liaison E. Coburn

Also Participating: Transportation Coordinator Dick Dumont and Laidlaw Representative B. Ralph

W. Morrison called the meeting to order at 7:39 PM. He noted the purpose of the meeting was to brainstorm transportation options with D. Dumont and B. Ralph.

D. Dumont provided the Committee with ridership numbers for September 30th and October 1st.

C. Morrison stated the only way to get back to two bus runs was to have the 5th and 6th graders ride with other grades during the first two runs. D. Dumont suggested that they could ride with the elementary students, unless the District added more buses to the fleet.

This led to a discussion of whether the elementary buses would drop students at Reeds Ferry and Thorntons Ferry Schools and then proceed to MUES or the upper elementary students would “stage” at Reeds Ferry and Thorntons Ferry and only then a few buses would transport all the upper elementary students to MUES. B. Ralph suggested staging was necessary to avoid delays at MUES. E. Coburn said the traffic tie-up would not be in the morning, but rather at dismissal time. Members suggested that the new parking/bus drop off plan at Masticola Elementary would eliminate or greatly alleviate that concern.

B. Ralph estimated the cost per additional bus would be \$34,685. He provided some history regarding the size of the fleet. There was a warrant article passed at the Annual School District Meeting mandating two students per seat. He stated that means the capacity of an 84 passenger bus is really 56 students.

Members asked if larger buses would have problems on some routes. B. Ralph stated that there are some routes where they would have problems.

Members also asked about discipline issues on larger buses. B. Ralph stated that his experience was that overcrowded buses led to more discipline issues than using large buses.

E. Coburn asked about computer software to determine bus routes. D. Dumont stated he had no such software in his office, but he understood there was a plan to provide some.

Members discussed some traffic problems that have been occurring thus far this year – crossing guards, and bus dismissal at MUES creating traffic jams on Baboosic Lake Road.

S. Heinrich asked about a mixed fleet of regular buses and 6 – 10 large buses. B. Ralph indicated the large buses would have to be ordered by the end of December in order to be ready for the opening of school in fall, 2005.

Members discussed whether additional costs to get back to two runs should be part of the operating budget or placed on a separate warrant article at School District Meeting.

Members reviewed ridership numbers, which indicate that ridership is light on some elementary school runs and very light on upper elementary school runs. D. Dumont noted that this year for some reason, triple the usual number of students is being dropped off by car instead of taking the buses. He also noted that ridership increases 10-15% in colder months for elementary and middle school aged children.

There are 14 buses for Thorntons Ferry, 13 for Reeds Ferry and 9 for Mastricola Elementary.

If two sets of buses ran simultaneously for elementary and upper elementary schools, B. Ralph expressed a concern for bus congestion in the Mastricola circle.

Other issues discussed included late buses for after school activities, having buses available to transport students to away activities, and high school parking enforcement.

The following members of the public offered comment:

Caralee Dalton stated that she wanted a bussing plan to correspond to the parent wishes. She stated the Parent Transportation group was not allowed to look at larger buses as an option. She said that, if grades R – 6 were bused together, that would be okay, but she did not want 5th and 6th graders bused with high school students.

Tina Demember stated she wanted to see the lists of parent concerns addressed. In addition, she stated that the parent group was told that if grades R – 6 were bused together, staging would be required and the parent group was opposed to staging.

C. Morrison made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: S. Heinrich. MOTION PASSED 6 – 0 – 0. W. Morrison thanked everyone for attending and offering input and adjourned the meeting at 9 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Heinrich