

**Merrimack School Board and Merrimack Town Council
Joint Meeting
September 13, 2010
Merrimack High School - Cafeteria**

PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT: School Board Chairman Vaillancourt, School Board Vice Chairman Thornton, School Board Members Barnes and Ortega, Superintendent Chiafery, Business Administrator Shevenell, Town Council Chairman Koenig, Town Council Vice Chairman Mahon, Councilors Flood, Dwyer, and Rothhaus, Town Manager Hickey, and Finance Director Paul Micali

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt announced that School Board Member Swonger, Town Councilor Yakuboff and Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin had been excused from the meeting.

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt called the joint meeting between the School Board and Town Council to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt led the pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of Joint Town Council and School Board Minutes:

March 19, 2009 Minutes:

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt stated that a motion to approve the March 19, 2009 joint meeting minutes at the September 9, 2009 joint meeting had been overlooked.

Town Council Vice Chairman Mahon moved (seconded by Town Councilor Rothhaus) to approve the March 19, 2009 joint meeting minutes. The motion passed 6-0-4. School Board Members Barnes and Ortega, Town Council Chairman Koenig and Town Councilor Dwyer abstained.

November 9, 2009 Minutes:

Town Councilor Rothhaus moved (seconded by School Board Vice Chairman Thornton) to approve the November 9, 2009 joint meeting minutes. The motion passed 6-0-4. School Board Members Barnes and Ortega, Town Councilors Flood and Dwyer abstained.

3. July 4th, 2010 Midway Outcome:

Business Administrator Shevenell reported that a private vendor organized the midway events this year because of budgetary constraints. He acknowledged coordination efforts between the vendor, the School District, and the Town of Merrimack.

Town Manager Hickey and Business Administrator Shevenell reported that the Town and School District both agreed that the midway was a success.

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt appreciated the compromise and joint effort from all parties involved.

4. Community Safeguard Drug Free Grant Update:

Community Safeguard Drug Free Grant Director Abrahams and Officer Prentice reviewed the conditions of the grant.

Officer Prentice reported that the goal of the grant is to reduce substance abuse among youth and, over time, among adults by addressing the factors in the community that increase the risk of substance abuse and promote the factors that minimize the risk of substance abuse.

Office Prentice explained that the Merrimack Drug Advisory Council Coalition is made up of twelve sectors that represent the community. The twelve sectors are youth; parent; business community; media; school; youth-serving organization; law enforcement agency; religious or fraternal organization; civic or volunteer group; healthcare professional; state, local, or tribal governmental agency with expertise in the field of substance abuse; and other organizations involved in reducing substance abuse.

Officer Prentice reported that the grant funds his position as a School Resource Officer/Juvenile Officer. He explained that the Juvenile Officer responsibility provides him with the opportunity to work with families in their homes one evening a week.

Officer Prentice reported that the number of frequently absent students decreased from 30 students in the fall to just two students in the spring.

Betsy Abramson stated that she has been a member of the Merrimack Drug Advisory Council Coalition, formerly known as the Merrimack Drug Advisory Council, since 1996. She assumed the director position after Frank Hoell resigned from the position in June, 2010.

Betsy Abrahams reported that the Merrimack Drug Advisory Council Coalition meets on the fourth Thursday of every month at St. James Methodist Church from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. She extended an invitation to the members of the public, specifically young adults, to attend a meeting.

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt thanked Town Manager Hickey, the Town Council, and Police Chief Milligan for supporting the School District with the Community Safeguard Drug Free Grant. She stated that Officer Prentice's presence at the middle school is noticeable and that the entire community is benefiting from the grant.

Town Council Chairman Koenig noted that the school resource officer was the most visible part of the grant. He asked Officer Prentice which impacts of the grant he felt might expand into the community in the future.

Officer Prentice responded that within the next three or four years he anticipates positive results will be noticeable at the high school level. A reduction in substance abuse will result in fewer theft and bullying incidents.

School Board Vice Chairman Thornton noted a need to expand the awareness of the Merrimack Drug Advisory Council Coalition within the community.

Town Council Chairman Koenig stated that eventually the community will oversee the Community Safeguard Drug Free Grant in the future.

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt emphasized that community involvement will be very important to the success of the grant.

Town Manager Hickey suggested that the Merrimack Drug Advisory Council Coalition consider holding future meetings at Town Hall. He added that the Town Hall meeting room would allow for public broadcasts of meetings, which would help to increase awareness of the Coalition.

Town Council Dwyer asked for clarification on the amount of the grant and where the grant came from.

Officer Prentice responded that the grant provides \$125,000 to pay for the School Resource Officer/Juvenile Officer's salary, a counselor three days a week and a consultant.

School Board Vaillancourt added that the grant requires annual in-kind contributions equivalent to \$125,000.

Town Councilor Flood asked how many in-kind hours have been recorded. Town Councilor Flood asked if the District or Town had provided funds toward the grant.

Officer Prentice responded that each type of in-kind hour has a designated hourly rate, per the grant. Examples of in-kind contributions include the meeting space, volunteers, and business partnerships. He noted that the required in-kind contributions for the first year of the grant had been met.

Town Councilor Rothhaus asked for clarification on how the in-kind contributions were calculated.

Officer Prentice responded that the in-kind contributions needed to match the amount of the grant.

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that the time he spent working on the grant would count as in-kind contributions, even though the time he spent working on the grant occurred during his work day.

Town Councilor Rothhaus asked if the grant would be jeopardized in the event the in-kind contributions were not met.

Officer Prentice responded that the in-kind contribution was a condition of the grant.

Board Member Barnes clarified that the in-kind contributions were tracked and reviewed on a quarterly basis.

Town Councilor Dwyer asked if the federal government issued a \$125,000 check for deposit in the general fund to pay the appropriate salaries.

Finance Director Micali confirmed that a government check in the amount of \$125,000 had been received and deposited.

School Board Member Ortega stated that he was pleased the program was data driven and base lines were being established. He suggested that the incremental progress of the grant baselines be publicized. He asked if the areas to be measured had been identified and if the metrics could be identified.

Betsy Abrahams responded that most of the baseline data came from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey which is published every two to three years by the Centers for Disease Control. She noted that the 2009 survey measured an array of different risky behaviors and health behaviors among youth. She noted that changes should be noticeable when the survey is implemented again in a few years. She noted that it will take 4-10 years before big changes are seen; smaller changes are expected in less time.

Board Member Barnes asked if there was a limit on the number of times the District could apply for the five-year grant.

Officer Prentice responded that the District could apply for the grant only once after the initial five-year grant.

5. Expansion of the Community TV Studio:

Town Manager Hickey reported that renovations to the former District Court space would accommodate a town meeting room and an expansion of the local media services. He explained that the expansion of the local media services included a studio and relocating the media personnel from Merrimack High School to the Town Offices. The existing equipment, with the exception of the head end, will remain at the high school. Nick Lavalley and his staff will be available to the school district when needed to assist with School District media projects.

Town Manager Hickey stated that the existing Public Access Center Agreement between the Merrimack School District and the Town of Merrimack requires at least one school year advance notice before terminating the agreement. He stated that it was his intent to formally notify the School District that the Town would terminate the agreement effective the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that Town Manager Hickey met with Principal Johnson and herself to discuss the expansion of the community TV studio. She noted that the TV studio served the public access needs of the School District and the Town for the past eight years.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that broadcasting and media is important to many students and their future careers. She noted that Town Manager Hickey understood that it was important to the School District to continue to have access to Nick Lavalley, his staff and the equipment during the transition.

Board Member Ortega stated that he was pleased to hear the current equipment would remain at the high school. He asked for clarification on the piece of equipment that would not stay at the high school.

Town Councilor McCarthy responded, simply, the equipment in the air conditioned room would not stay at the high school.

Board Member Ortega asked if the town would incur additional expenses by having to purchase new equipment to replace the equipment that will remain at the high school.

Town Manager Hickey explained that the media budget is funded through cable franchise fees which will purchase cameras and editing equipment for the new studio. He added that new equipment will need to be purchased and that it had been calculated into the budget that was approved by the community last May.

Board Member Ortega noted that the equipment at the high school is eight years old. He asked if franchise fees would cover equipment replacement costs or would there be future equipment costs to the School District as a result of the relocation.

Town Manager Hickey responded that the Town would work with the School District to maintain a level for the current equipment. He noted that it may be a joint effort between the Town and the School District.

Board Member Barnes asked if there would be backward compatibility issues between the new equipment and the old equipment.

Board Member Barnes asked if the head end equipment for the educational channel would remain at the high school or if it would be housed at the new facility.

Town Manager Hickey responded that there would not be equipment compatibility issues, the head end equipment would move to the new facility, and there will not be any complications or impact to the School District.

Board Member Barnes asked if there would be capabilities to have live School Board meetings from the high school cafeteria.

Town Manager Hickey responded that there are no live drops in the high school cafeteria to facilitate a live broadcast. He suggested that the School Board consider holding future Board meetings at the new facility.

Town Council Chairman Koenig stated the new facility would be an expansion to current operations.

Board Member Vaillancourt stated that she views the expansion of the community TV studio as a positive movement for the community.

Town Councilor McCarthy stated that in 2002 there were safety concerns with regards to housing a public TV studio within a school building. Those concerns will not exist when the new facility is complete. He also added that not all the equipment at the high school is eight years old.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the TV studio within the high school went way beyond original expectations. The new facility is in response to a need to expand services to the community.

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt assured the public that the expansion of the Community TV Studio will not impact the TV studio located at the high school nor will it impact any programs at the high school in a negative way.

6. Update on South Fire Station:

Town Council Chairman Koenig reported that on August 19th the Town Council authorized the establishment of a South Fire Station Building Committee. The Committee's charge is to interview and select and work with an architect to design a new south fire station. They are to present their recommended design along with estimated costs to Town Council in December. He explained that it is the Town Council's hope that the committee's recommendation can be utilized during the budget process.

Town Council Chairman Koenig extended an invitation to the School District to have representation on the South Fire Station Building Committee.

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt noted that the voters passed a warrant article last year to gift a portion of School District land to the Town of Merrimack should plans to build a new south fire station be approved.

Town Council Chairman Koenig clarified that five applications were received and accepted for membership on the South Fire Station Building Committee.

Town Councilor Dwyer stated he was appointed to be on the committee. He felt confident that a proposed plan for a south fire station would be available in December.

7. Approval Process for Grater Woods Master Plan:

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt explained that the School Board had questions regarding the Grater Woods Master Plan project and the process in which the plan would be created and how the plan would move forward. She explained that Town Manager Hickey and Town Council Chairman Koenig attended a previous School Board meeting to hear the Board's concerns and answer questions. At that meeting, the School Board asked Town Manager Hickey and Town Council Chairman Koenig for a seat at the table when the final approval of the Master Plan came to fruition.

Town Council Chairman Koenig explained the Grater Woods Master Plan or the Stewardship Plan, as it is being called today, is under the development guise of the Grater Woods Subcommittee which is a subcommittee of the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission is a committee appointed by the Town Council, but operating under state regulations and statutes to develop conservation efforts and preserve the conservation land within Merrimack.

Town Council Chairman Koenig stated that the Town has a goal to get a collective 500 acre piece of land. Grater Woods consists of 480 acres of land which includes a portion of School District land with a conservation easement.

Town Council Chairman Koenig stated that the Conservation Commission created a Grater Woods Subcommittee, which included School District representation. He explained that the

Grater Woods Subcommittee is developing a policy, the Grater Woods Stewardship Plan, to define the long-term management of the Grater Woods Property.

Town Council Chairman Koenig stated that the Conservation Commission will accept the plan then give it to the Town Council to approve as a policy statement for town's portion of the property. He acknowledged that the School District owns a portion of the Grater Woods and questioned if the Stewardship Plan should apply to the entire property or just the Town owned property. He asked the Town Council and the School Board for their input.

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt stated that there are subtle differences between a Stewardship Plan, a Definitive Plan, and a Master Plan. She stated that the Stewardship Plan being worked on now is very different from the Master Plan that Board Member Swonger worked on.

School Board Member Barnes stated that she felt there was confusion between what is development versus what is maintenance. She stated that the School Board is most concerned with safety. The School Board has concerns that the plan is being executed before the plan is developed. She felt that the context of Grater Woods meetings is lost because the meetings are not televised.

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt stated that the School Board should be at the table during the approval process of the plan. She stated that access to the Grater Woods property is through the School District owned portion of the property. Therefore what happens on the town-owned portion of the land impacts the middle school property.

Town Council Vice Chairman Mahon distributed Chapter 36 (a) the Statutes of the Conservation Commissions. He explained that the plan approval process is defined by statute. It is a process that the Town is obligated to follow. He stated that the process is the control of the Conservation Commission until the plan is brought forward to the Town Council.

Town Councilor Flood stated that the purpose of having different views a subcommittee is to make a compelling case. She noted differences between the Town's portion of Grater Woods compared to the School District's portion of Grater Woods. She believes the needs will be satisfied in the subcommittee format.

Town Councilor Rothhaus stated that he doesn't understand school district's issues regarding the trail system and maintenance of trail system.

School Board Member Barnes expressed concern that users of the Grater Woods Property know the boundary lines between the Town and School District properties. She used hunting and motorized vehicles as examples of activities not allowed on the School District property, but would be allowed on Town property.

School Board Vaillancourt stated that the School District would feel more comfortable with allowing access to the Grater Woods property if there was a formal plan that was vetted and approved. She requested that the plan be made public and that the community have an opportunity to provide input. She requested that the plan define trail use and how the land use will impact the middle school property. She stated that the School district is committed to closely monitoring access until there is a plan.

Board Member Barnes added that signage would mark school boundaries and inform users of the land use restrictions. She stated that the School District wanted to slow down and progress responsibly.

Town Council Vice Chairman Mahon stated that the Town Council did not have any authority to act upon the requests from the School Board. He noted that the School Board should communicate its requests to the conservation commission.

Town Councilor Rothhaus stated that if ATV use during school hours is a problem then police intervention may be required. He stated that a two-foot trail or an eight foot trail was still a trail.

Town Councilor Dwyer agreed with Town Council Vice Chairman Mahon that the School Board should address its concerns to the Conservation Commission.

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt stated that attempts to communicate with Conservation Commission have not been successful.

Town Councilor Dwyer noted that the Conservation Commission was doing its work. When the work is complete, it will be presented to the Town Council for approval or not.

Board Member Ortega stated that 35 acres of the Grater Woods is owned by school district has restricted usage and is part of a conservation easement. He asked to see a usage policy for the entire Grater Woods property in order to determine how it impacts the school district property and easement.

Town Councilor Dwyer stated that he felt the Conservation Commission would have the answers to the School Board's questions in time.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that the Town and the School District are equal partners in the Grater Woods property. He expressed his concern that an ATV trail on town owned land might connect to a trail on school district owned land. The trail on school district property could lead to a soccer field. He asked that the Town Council to allow the School Board the opportunity to provide input and take it under advisement prior to a vote.

Town Councilor Koenig welcomes participation by the School District. He stated that the Town Council has the final approval and will do the job it was elected to do. The awareness level of the issues has been raised and communications will move forward. All parties need to remember that they are working for the same community.

School Board Chairman Vaillancourt noted her appreciation for the open discussions.

8. Joint Business Efforts:

Business Administrator Shevenell reported the School District and the Town of Merrimack have worked cooperatively in the past relative to oil bids, electricity, auditing services, and software purchases.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that the School District used the Alert Now emergency notification system to communicate information from the Town to Merrimack residence.

Finance Director Micali reported that the Town and School District communicate and collaborate together when possible. He noted that the Town of Merrimack and the School District have worked together with payroll form purchases, paper purchases, and a previous a workers compensation vender.

Board Member Ortega asked Business Administrator Shevenell or Finance Director Micali to quantify what was gained through the joint buying leverage and cooperation.

Finance Director Micali responded that joint purchases have saved more than \$150,000 over the years.

Board Member Barnes added that if a project doesn't avail itself to a joint purchase, it will be reconsidered in the future.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that a recent paving project was an example of a project that was not appropriate for a joint purchase, but could be in the future.

Next Meeting Date:

The Town Council will host the next joint meeting between the School Board and the Town Council on Thursday, March 17, 2011.

Public Comments:

There was no public comment.

At 9:10 p.m. School Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 9-0-0.