



PUBLIC FORUM NOTES

Date: December 4, 2013

Project: **RSU #19 Major Capital Improvement Projects**

Subject: **Somerset Valley Middle School Public Forum**

Discussion:

1. Darren Briggs gave a quick introduction of the process and timeline and explained that it is a 100% state funded project and that there were a lot of rumors going around and we want to get the truth out. He also pointed out that the elementary school was number three on the state list and the high school was number six.
2. Rob Tillotson introduced OPA and explained how important it is for us to have public input and hear their ideas. Also, we would like to know how the public uses the building. He explained funding and how we can build a great building solely funded by the state but also how local fundraising can enhance the building. He explained a renovated building would be “like new” and everything including technology and FF&E (fixtures, furniture and equipment) was included.
3. Rob explained the straw poll and referendum process and how the concept and budget cannot change once it has been approved and accepted by the voters. He also noted that we are currently doing the new versus renovation analysis and will be finished in the near future.
4. Rob mentioned that we are looking at the district as a whole and looking for district wide opportunities. He also explained the vote process and that every town has its own vote on referendum.
5. Greg introduced the school board and the building committee.
6. Greg announced the email site RSU19@oakpoint.com and “Ask the Superintendent” link on the website. He also explained the bonding process and how school planning is a back and forth process with the state.
7. Greg explained how design fees are reimbursed through the project and that if the district votes no for the project, they as a district will have to pay for the design services up to that point. If they vote yes, the state pays and it will not increase their local share.
8. Several times during the presentation the point was made that if RSU19 does not accept this “gift” from the state, the monies will go to the next community on the school construction list.
9. Education programs offered by the district are also influenced by the public forum process, so input by the public is important.
10. The floor was opened up for questions:
 - Q. How unusual is it for a district to get two projects?
 - A. It is extremely rare to have two projects at the same time.

- Q. Will the elementary school be a new site or a renovation?
- A. We are not sure yet because we are still investigating. The state does not want to rebuild on the existing site or renovate.
- Q. Why did our schools rate so high?
- A. The high school has a lot of portables and the building is very old. Nokomis has applied in the past and has finally made it to the top of the list. The elementary school has three separate buildings which is not ideal. The building is also old and is at the end of its useful life. The train tracks also interfere with emergency vehicles. When you apply for a project, you have to tie the building and the education's needs together to get a project. The team put together a great application.
- Q. How can we save money in the district across the board?
- A. Maybe a centralized heating plant.
- Q. Can two projects be rolled into one mega-school?
- A. Yes. Rob explained how this has happened in the past. He also asked what the questioner thought of this idea and she was in favor of it. However, community members do not want elementary students on busses for long distances.
- Q. How much money is the district getting from the state for these projects?
- A. That is not known yet. There is no minimum and no cap; everything must be negotiated with the state once the scope is defined.
- Q. Has any district ever turned down a project?
- A. Yes, about 20 years ago because the community had a lack of faith in the state and the process. We don't want that to happen here, so get out and tell your friends and neighbors to get involved.
- Q. When is the building assessment done?
- A. January.
- Q. What happens to the old buildings?
- A. They either get torn down, they are given to the town or they are sold.
- Q. How do we convince the state to include tech ed programs in the new school?
- A. The state wants to see one large tech school north of Nokomis combined with Dexter and other northern towns. This option is not on the table. The project will be for RSU#19 only. We will have to get creative and negotiate with the state for programs that are currently in the curriculum at the high school.
- Q. How many years until the project is completed?
- A. 3-4.
- Q. Have we asked any UMaine teaching majors what they think and what do they see as the future in education? Getting them involved may be a great way to keep them in Maine and more specifically in the RSU19 district.
- A. No, but it is a good idea.
- Q. Can the campus be a satellite campus for UMaine, Husson classes?
- A. Yes, we can look into that. It is currently happening on campus now.

- Q. Have you considered sending out a survey to the taxpayers in the district asking for their opinions such as do they want a school, what kind, what is important is the school, do they want to raise any money locally or keep it strictly state funded, etc.?
- A. This could be dangerous because they do not know all the facts. We prefer to speak to them in person to get them informed first. We can make up cards with the web and post addresses for community members to comment and place them in local stores, town halls, etc.

Public comment: We will do what it takes to get opinions. We will go out to all organizations and will get the information out. We will send out a questionnaire if we want and will get the information out there.

Public comment: Serve food if you want to get the community to come out to a meeting. You could also televise the forums on local cable, put ads in the Rolling Thunder, and ask news stations to do story.

Public comment: Make sure whatever is designed has a maintenance plan.

- Q. If the building is renovated, where would the students go during construction?
- A. We would need to look at phasing and if needed, we would have to bring in modular for temporary classrooms. The state pays for these as part of the project.
- Q. Where would a new elementary school go?
- A. Maybe on the high school/middle school campus, but we need to explore the options.
- Q. If the community votes no, who pays and how much are the design services costing the district?
- A. The district would have to pay, and we do not have a number at this time.

11. Meeting adjourned. Public was thanked and encouraged to spread the word about involvement and that the project will not impact their taxes.