

JOINT WORK/STUDY SESSION - SCHOOL BOARD AND CITY COUNCIL

March 20, 2007

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The Port Townsend School District Board of Directors and the Port Townsend City Council met in a joint work/study session in the conference room of the Fire Station at 701 Harrison, Port Townsend, WA. The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by Mayor Mark Welch, who also led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present for the City were Council members Mark Welch, Michelle Sandoval, Frank Benskin, Geoff Masci and City Manager David Timmons. Laurie Medlicott was excused. Catharine Robinson arrived later. Present for the School District were Board members John Eissinger, Beth Young, Tracy Reinhart, Loren Monroe, Rita E. Beebe, and Superintendent Thomas Opstad. Also in attendance were City and School District staff, community members and a member of the press.

Mr. Welch opened the session by stating that there is no historical precedence for a joint meeting between the School Board and the City Council. He also stated that because this is a work/study session, there would be no Public Comment period.

Superintendent Opstad presented a history of the school district. Mr. Opstad then spoke about the Study and Survey done for the School District by BLRB Architects. The report stated that three of the District's four facilities are outdated and need major repairs. Mr. Opstad said that the School Board has reviewed the recommendations of the Long Range Planning Committee and has determined the need to close Mt. View Elementary as soon as educationally possible, consolidating students at three school sites.

Mr. Timmons spoke about critical needs for the City, which include long-term plans for the pool, and relocating the police station. He said that initial studies on the use of the Mt. View site for a new police station are favorable, and it would work with possible future pool improvements. Mr. Timmons expressed a desire for a coordinated, well thought out process that would be complimentary to the needs of both the City and the School District, and would send a message to the community that both entities wish to work together to address critical needs in the community. He also stated that the Quimper Foundation voted last week to endorse underwriting a unified Parks and Recreation program, which would focus on the needs of the community rather than on political divisions.

Discussion followed.

Questions by the City Council members:

- Is there is a plan of action with the Quimper Foundation as lead, and where does the pool fit in?
- What is the timeline for a decision?
- Is the City taking a "big bite" obtaining the Mt. View property alone? Should the City spend the next six months to a year involving all community organizations to develop potential partnerships?
- What parts of the process can happen concurrently?
- Which of the recommendations presented to the School Board by their Long Range Planning Committee does the Board prefer?
- What are actual facts and figures regarding a possible land swap?
- How quickly could the City obtain ownership of the 80 acres from the DNR? Would legislative intervention help?
- Is there a way to pursue the 80 acres with the DNR and on a parallel track work on the land swap with the School Board?
- What are the costs for bringing utilities to the 80-acre parcel?
- Why does the School District want the 80-acres? Is it geographically central?
- If the School District built a new elementary school on the 80-acres, what would happen to the Grant Street property? Would the current Grant Street School become obsolete?
- Could a new school be built on the Grant Street property without interrupting school in the present facility?
- Has the School Board reviewed the feasibility of building on the 80-acres in the near future?

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Mr. Opstad stated that the district would need to run a voter-approved bond to make any substantive changes to school facilities. The School District anticipates the earliest it could run a bond measure would be spring of 2008, and that it would be three years before construction could begin. Mr. Eissinger stated that the School Board plans to hold several community meetings about consolidating schools and dealing with aging facilities, and there will be ample opportunity for community input.

Questions by the School Board members:

- Is the City interested in the Mt. View property?
- Is the City interested in swapping the 80-acre parcel for the Mt. View property?
- What is the possibility/timeline for the City to annex the 80-acres, bringing it within the city limits?
- What is the timeline and what are the costs involved to get streets open and utilities to the site?
- If an arrangement for a land swap with the City isn't possible, what is the process and timeline for rezoning the Mt. View property so the District can sell it outright?
- If a land swap takes place can the District continue use Mt. View to house students until a new facility is built?

Comments by City Council members:

- Recommended that the School Board determine their preferred option from those offered in the report of the Long Range Planning Committee before holding public meetings.
- Several Council members expressed interest in pursuing the land swap idea, one was undecided.
- Suggested the School Board land bank the 80-acres and build a new school on the Grant Street property because of the time it would take to prepare the 80-acres.
- Commented that student enrollment may increase if the District built a new school that is future oriented and high tech.
- Although a land exchange of equal value seems reasonable, appraisals would need to be done on both properties.
- Recommendation that the City Council to have a separate conversation about the City's need for the 80-acres in discussion, as it was originally envisioned as a place for higher education.
- The School Board is working from a mandate based on the recommendations of the Long Range Planning Committee. Council members need a paced conversation, with time to talk amongst themselves.
- Cautioned about taking on another property that is in sore need of rehabilitation.
- Annexing the 80-acre parcel into the City would require county approval.
- It's appropriate for the City to keep the Mt. View property in public use, even if the City is not itself using all the property.
- There is a need for concurrent discussion with potential partners.
- The City needs to make a timely decision about two critical issues: relocating the police station and the future of the pool.
- Recommended the Council schedule a Workshop soon on these issues.
- Cautioned that the City does not yet own the 80-acres. The City can't promise something it doesn't own.

Comments by School Board members:

- The District needs to maintain equivalent assets if swapping land with the City.
- Expressed a need to review relevant RCWs regarding closure of a school and surplus land.
- Need to research fire codes for egress for the 80-acre parcel.
- The District cannot ignore that there are issues with the high school facilities as well.
- The challenge with moving Mt. View students to the Grant Street School while constructing a new building is that the current gym is too small, and there is no cafeteria.

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City Attorney John Watts stated that the state legislature has been favorable to inter-governmental cooperation, however he recommends that the School Board consult with their attorney.

Mr. Timmons showed the group a map with pending residential projects platted on it. As these projects are developed infrastructure will be brought into the area surrounding the 80-acre parcel. He also stated that it is critical for the School District to look at where families are locating before planning the site of an elementary school.

Mr. Eissinger thanked all of the individuals attending for taking the time to meet together.

Mr. Welch stated that the City will continue their discussion, requested that Mr. Timmons and Mr. Opstad investigate the answers to the questions presented during the work/study session and then schedule another meeting between the City Council and the School Board.

The meeting was adjourned by consensus at 8:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas A. Opstad, Superintendent

ATTEST: _____
John Eissinger, Board Chairman