

MONT VERNON SCHOOL BOARD MEETING MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING
January 30, 2007
MONT VERNON VILLAGE SCHOOL

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Leo White opened the Public Hearing at 7:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Present:

ATTENDANCE

Mont Vernon School Board: Howard Brown, Jayson Darula, Peter King, and Leo White.

Administrative Team: Dr. Mary Jennings, Meredith Nadeau, Elizabeth Shankel and Kathy Skoglund

Other: Dr. Mark Joyce, Director NHSBA

Minutes Recorder: Lyn Jennings

Leo White introduced himself as Chairman of the Mont Vernon School Board and welcomed meeting attendees to the Public Hearing.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Leo introduced members of the school board, which were present at the Public Hearing – Howard Brown, Jayson Darula, and Peter King.

Leo introduced members of the Administrative Team, at the Public Hearing – Dr. Mary Jennings, Superintendent; Porter Dodge, Principal Amherst Middle School (AMS); Meredith Nadeau, Principal Mont Vernon Village School (MVVS); Elizabeth Shankel, Business Administrator; and Kathy Skoglund, Director of Special Education.

Leo also introduced two members of the Amherst School Board who were in the attendance – Pam Dudoff and Dwight Brew.

Leo said he understands there is a rumor being circulated that Amherst does not want to renew their tuition agreement with Mont Vernon. Leo said members of the Amherst School Board as well as the Mont Vernon School Board have met regularly and it is clear Amherst is open to renewing the tuition agreement with Mont Vernon.

Leo explained the purpose for the Public Hearing was to discuss whether the citizens of Mont Vernon wanted to extend or renew the tuition agreement for the 7th and 8th graders with Amherst. Leo said clearly, this decision is a town decision.

Leo explained the school board wanted to begin discussing the issue of extending the Amherst Tuition Agreement now so they could present something to the Mont Vernon citizens on the 2008 Warrant Article.

Leo introduced Superintendent Dr. Mary Jennings who provided an introduction.

Dr. Jennings explained the Amherst – Mont Vernon Tuition Agreement expires in June 2011. Dr. Jennings explained the purpose of tonight's Public Hearing is to look at the issue from an educational and cost point of view. She said both points of view should be evaluated.

Dr. Jennings also spoke about the Amherst Master Plan, currently in Phase 1, which involves renovations to Clark, Wilkins, and AMS if approved by the voters. Dr. Jennings explained if the voters approve Phase 2, it would involve the expense of a new facility, which would be for the fourth and fifth graders.

Dr. Jennings said Mark Joyce, Director of the New Hampshire School Board Administrators Association would present the Facilities Planning for Mont Vernon.

Dr. Jennings emphasized all community members should be involved in this decision.

Dr. Jennings said Porter Dodge, Principal of the AMS and Meredith Nadeau, Principal of the MVVS would be addressing the educational question. Dr. Jennings said Porter Dodge would present the current programming at AMS, and Meredith Nadeau would be addressing if Mont Vernon brought the 7th and 8th graders to Mont Vernon what the changes and impact would look like.

Dr. Jennings said currently, the Mont Vernon Village School is a K-6 school, which is led by a dynamic

principal, Meredith Nadeau. Dr. Jennings said this year, there are two half-day Kindergarten sections and all the other grades have two sections.

Dr. Jennings said based on the NHSBA study, they agree, enrollments at the Village School would increase and decrease over the next ten years.

Dr. Jennings said the tuition for the 7th and 8th graders at the Amherst Middle School for 2007-2008 is \$12,414 per pupil.

Porter Dodge presented the Current Programming at the Amherst Middle School.

Porter said there are currently 458 7th and 8th grade students at AMS. He said there are approximately 80 students per year from Mont Vernon.

Porter explained there are 36.5 FTE teachers at the AMS.

Porter explained the Middle School Philosophy involves teaming and adolescent development/socialization. Porter also explained all teachers have their Highly Qualified Teacher Certification.

Porter highlighted the current programming for the 7th and 8th graders at AMS. Porter explained they like to keep the student to team population at 80 or fewer because they want to challenge the children and it is a lot harder to accomplish if the classes are larger.

Academic Teams: 5 staff for 80 students – teach English, Math, Social Studies, Science, and Foreign Language.

Porter said the Special Offerings include: Art, Music, Physical Education, Health, Computers, Comp. Technology (Shop), Life Skills, and Band/Chorus.

Porter explained Extra-Curricular Offerings include Fall Sports, Winter Sports and Spring Sports.

Also available at AMS is Class Trips / Environmental Schools. Porter said the 7th grade Environmental trip would end after this year.

AMS also offers Social Events – Dances and Co-curricular events with the Boys and Girls Club and School Clubs.

Porter provided a handout detailing the extra-curricular activities available to AMS students.

Porter ended his presentation by saying if anyone had any questions they were welcome to call or e-mail him at any time. Porter said he enjoys having the Mont Vernon students at the AMS.

Meredith Nadeau presented information to meeting attendees as to what it would look like if the 7th and 8th graders of Mont Vernon remained in Mont Vernon and the tuition agreement was not renewed between Mont Vernon and Amherst.

Meredith said the average number of students is 40 7th graders and 40 8th graders. Meredith said based on the number of students, it would be difficult to offer everything the Amherst Middle School does.

Based on the number of students, Mont Vernon would need 6.1 FTE 7th and 8th grade teachers. The teacher breakdown would be as follows: .8 Math, .8 English, .8 Social Studies, .8 Science, .8 Foreign Language, 1.6 Specials, and .5 Special Education.

Meredith said by having the 7th and 8th graders in Mont Vernon, the students would not have as great a variety of teachers as they do at the AMS. She said, often times they would have the same teacher for subjects in 7th and 8th grade. Meredith said based on the number of teachers needed for 80 students, it would limit the students' exposure to the number of teachers they see.

Meredith said the K-6 Philosophy is very different from the 7th – 8th grade philosophy and based on the number of 7th and 8th graders in Mont Vernon, it would be

difficult to achieve teaching the middle school philosophy to only 80 students.

Meredith said if the Mont Vernon 7th and 8th graders remained in Mont Vernon the school offerings would be as follows:

Specials – Art, Music, Physical Education, and Computers/Library.

Extracurricular – Limited clubs, Sports – One sport/season, Limited Class Trips/Social Events, and Co-Curricular Activities.

Meredith explained with only 80 Middle School Students, the offerings would most likely remain the same as in their Elementary Education Experience.

Laurie Hayes, a member of the audience, asked if the Administration found any reason why the 7th and 8th graders should remain in Mont Vernon rather than go to AMS.

Meredith said to meet the Middle School requirements; it would be very challenging for the administration since they have to limit the number of offerings. Meredith said it is really an Economy of Scale issue.

Dr. Mark Joyce, Director of the NHSBA explained he presented an Assessment of Educational Facility Needs for K-8 to the Mont Vernon School District dated January 20, 2006. He said this study represents the best estimate for future growth. Mark said the school district has a copy of it and welcomed all to review the document. The document is posted on the SAU Website.

Dr. Joyce said the study showed an ever so slight increase in the school population over the next five years. Mark said they looked at five feasible options. Mark said they identified advantages and disadvantages for each option.

Dr. Joyce highlighted the NHSAA Facility Study Recommendations:

1. Build an addition onto MVVS.
2. Build a larger addition for grades K-8.
3. Build a cooperative middle school with Amherst for grades 6-8.
4. Add portable classrooms to MVVS to meet K-6 needs.
5. Adopt a year round calendar for K-6 MVVS.

Dr. Joyce said he would discuss the NHSAA Facilities Study Recommendations under consideration.

The first alternative under consideration was to Build an addition to the MVVS.

Dr. Joyce said this alternative represents a basic recommendation designed to accommodate the anticipated enrollment for grades K-6 in the next ten years and to have the students in grades 7-8 remain at the Amherst Middle School.

Dr. Joyce explained this alternative includes two regular education classrooms, a pre-K integrated special education classroom, a music room, an art room, and a classroom for foreign language and more storage.

Dr. Joyce highlighted the Advantages and Disadvantages for this alternative.

Advantages:

1. Provides the needed classrooms to accommodate projected enrollment and existing programs for the next ten years.
2. Each grade 1-6 will have at least two classrooms.
3. Adds two additional classrooms that will allow flexibility to meet large grade groupings.
4. Provides needed special instruction spaces for the next 10 years (art, music, etc.)
5. Allows instruction to occur in appropriate and productive learning environments.
6. Adds a pre-kindergarten classroom, which allows the district to meet mandated pre-school

SPED requirements while possibly sharing existing staff.

Disadvantages:

1. Alternative 1 has an estimated cost of \$1,157,650, exclusive of site development and renovations and upgrades to existing building.
2. Renovation and construction on an occupied building will require careful planning in order to minimize disruption to the educational process.
3. Tuition rate and contract provisions for grade 7-8 students will need to be negotiated and extended with the Amherst School District.

The next alternative under consideration was to keep the MVVS a K-6 school, have the 7th and 8th graders remain at AMS and to add portable classrooms to the MVVS to meet K-6 needs.

Dr. Joyce explained this alternative has four essential elements:

- Adds portable classrooms to the school site.
- Impacts the use of site for play area and/or other needs
- Temporary solution to long-term needs
- Questionable economic benefit and use of financial resource in the long-term.

Dr. Joyce presented the Advantages and Disadvantages for this alternative.

Advantages:

1. Provides for expanded educational program facilities and reduces crowding.
2. Keeps options open for permanent additions in the future at the Mont Vernon Village School as enrollments grow and/or program offerings expand.

Disadvantages:

1. Per pupil operating costs at least during the short term, are likely to be higher when operating disconnected structures rather than one school.
2. Issues concerning the location of the portable classrooms and related infrastructures need to be resolved.
3. Creates crowded site, may further limit parking, cause problems with traffic circulation, and interfere with field access and/or availability.
4. Not a sound investment for community resources given the nature of the need and the acquisition of a depreciating asset.

Dr. Joyce said the estimated cost for this alternative is \$455,000, exclusive of site preparation/development and building upgrades.

Dr. Joyce explained this is a useful solution for school facility needs if there is an emergency or an uncertain temporary need. Dr. Joyce also said if a school district finds that it has had a history of sporadic and unpredictable growth in school enrollments that have or may lead to so-called “bubbles” or “blips” in grade enrollments, it may be prudent to choose this temporary solution.

The final alternative presented by Dr. Joyce was to build a larger addition onto the Mont Vernon Village School for grades K-8. This recommendation is designed to accommodate the anticipated enrollment (up to 400 students) in grades K-8 during the next decade plus adding specialized teaching areas that would offer a middle school curriculum. Areas include: technology education (IA), family and consumer science (HE), a science lab, special education, gym/PE offices and conference rooms.

The advantages and disadvantages for this alternative were presented:

Advantages:

1. Should provide needed classrooms to accommodate student enrollment for the next 10 years.
2. Each grade 1-8 will at least have two grade divisions and some needed flexibility.
3. Provides needed special instructional spaces for grades K-8 (art, music, technology ed., etc.)
4. Allows instruction to occur in appropriate and productive learning environments.
5. Creates an “in town program” for students in grades 7 and 8, saving transportation costs.
6. Mont Vernon School District would control its educational programs and costs for students in grades K-8.
7. Adds a new gym that can be used as a rich and valued community resource.

Disadvantages:

1. Costs are estimated to be \$4.3 million for this alternative exclusive of site development and renovations and upgrades to existing building.
2. Potential loss of certain opportunities in the instructional and co-curricular programs that are currently available in the larger Amherst Middle School.
3. Renovation and construction on an occupied building will require careful planning in order to minimize disruption to the educational process.
4. Limits opportunities for future additions since the existing building with additions may maximize the limits of core facilities and may require a waiver from the NH department of Education.
5. Special attention will need to be given to effectively transition the district’s 8th grades to 9th grade at Souhegan High School.
6. Need to develop an exit plan to leave the long-term, grades 7-8 relationship/contract with the Amherst School District.

Dr. Joyce explained they did not see Building a K-8

school in Mont Vernon as an economically viable or cost effective option. Dr. Joyce explained the Village School serves the population well and they didn't believe it would be prudent to eliminate the structure.

One of the meeting attendees questioned why year-round schooling was not considered to be one of the acceptable alternatives. Dr. Joyce explained often times, siblings are not on the same schedule, and this presents problems for families with multiple children. Dr. Joyce said it does not save on operational costs but it does save on your debt service and capital costs. Dr. Joyce said he does have experience in running a year round school, but in his experience it does not work. He explained often times, parents are working and the children are left alone to fend for themselves, which causes behavioral problems, etcetera.

Dr. Joyce presented the ten-year cost comparisons for each of the alternatives presented.

To add modular classrooms to the Village School, keep the Village School a K-6 school, and continue to tuition the 7th and 8th graders at the AMS the estimated 10 year cost would be \$10,874,301.

To build a new addition to the Village School, keep it a K-6 school, continue to tuition the 7th and 8th graders at the AMS the estimated 10-year cost would be \$12,086,671.

To make the Village School a K-8 school with a new addition, the estimated 10-year cost would be \$12,109,167 with \$3,324,549 remaining on the bond to pay.

To create a new K-8 school in Mont Vernon, it would cost an estimated \$17,014,792 with an additional \$12,014,792 on the bond to pay.

Meeting attendees were asked if they had any questions or comments about the information, which was presented at the Public Hearing.

One of the meeting attendees asked if Mont Vernon thought about having the students from the sixth grade go to Amherst, thus making the Village School a K-5 school.

Pam Dudoff said they are trying to get the Amherst 5th graders out of AMS because it really is not appropriate for the Middle School to house the 5th graders. Pam said Porter Dodge does an excellent job at segregating the 5th graders from the rest of the school, but it is challenging and their goal is to get them out of AMS. Pam said in the future this might be an alternative worth looking into.

Peter King said members from each of the districts school boards looked at different aspects of the tuition agreement to see if they could expand the Co-Op. Peter said there are many obstacles, and there is a huge amount of work involved. Peter said if this process were to move forward, it would have to be led by Amherst, not Mont Vernon.

Kim Roberge asked how many other New Hampshire towns in the area offer a K-8 program.

Dr. Joyce said he knows of Exeter and Brentwood. Other meeting attendees thought of Whitefield, Lancaster, Nottingham, and Keene.

Meeting attendees asked what the protocol is if Amherst builds a new Middle School, what is Mont Vernon's financial responsibility. Peter King said if Amherst builds a new Middle School, Mont Vernon is responsible for negotiating what their fair share of the cost would be.

One meeting attendee asked if in all the discussions a separate 6th-8th facility in Mont Vernon was discussed. Dr. Joyce said this option was not considered because of the limitations of school enrollment. There would only be about 120 students.

Eileen Naber asked what the school board's timeline was for a decision on whether to go forward with

extending the tuition agreement past 2011.

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Leo White said they would like to put something on the warrant in 2008.

Eileen asked when would the new agreement take affect if it were extended.

Leo said if the Amherst Tuition Agreement was extended, it would go from 2011 until the agreed upon expiration date.

Meeting attendees questioned what would happen if one side agreed to the tuition extension but one side rejected it.

Peter King said he didn't think either side would want to move forward with an extension they felt would fail by the voters.

Pam Dudoff said whether or not Mont Vernon decides to extend the tuition agreement between Amherst and Mont Vernon, would affect their future plans.

Dr. Jennings thanked everyone for attending the Public Hearing and told meeting attendees a copy of the complete NHSAA report could be accessed on the SAU Website along with the information presented tonight.

The Public Hearing was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT