

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Unatego Facilities Study Advisory Committee

FROM: Alan Pole and Bill Silky

RE: Meeting Notes-Meeting of March 1, 2016

DATE: March 5, 2016

### **Attendance:**

Committee Members: Terry Brown, Jeanne Butler, Heather Coleman, Ron Decker, Ed Frazier, Scott Garno, Kim Gascon, Patti Hoyt, Katie James, Lew Keyser, Elaine Lowe, Katherine Mazourek, Kelly Poje, Melanie Ruff, Fran Secor, and Kim Trask

Consultants: Alan Pole and Bill Silky

Observers: Ken Olsen, Carol Olsen, David Welch, Sandra Bonczkawski, Kathleen Clark, Courtney Goodspeed, Andrew Goodspeed, Byron McMichael, Chad Angellotti, Ruth Modinger, Dick Downey, G.X. Cramatte, Bert Beames, Buzz Hesse, Karen Gilbertson, Sandy Greenman, Stuart Anderson, Michael Carson, j McDermott, Allison Collins, Gene Schoeck, Brian Davis, and Ernie Kroll

Superintendent: David Richards

Location: Unatego Middle/High School

1. Alan Pole welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the agenda and the procedures for the conduct of the meeting.
2. Alan distributed a letter and a flyer from the Benson Agency Real Estate Company regarding the 81 acre parcel of property that adjoins the middle/high school campus formerly known as Greenie's Auto World. These documents announced that the property is for sale for \$2,900,000.
3. At the last meeting, the committee discussed adding an option 2. b. to the list of future considerations for the use of the district's facilities. This option would close the Otego Elementary School, move the K-2 students to Unadilla Elementary School, and (unlike option 2) keep the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in the elementary school. Alan asked the committee to elaborate on why this is an attractive option. The general response was that 5<sup>th</sup> graders fit much better in the elementary school from a maturation standpoint. The only concern expressed regarding this option was whether or not this would leave room for a possible pre-K classroom in the future.

4. Bill Silky provided updates from the last committee meeting which included the following:

- ✓ The recent NYS Comptroller's Report concluded that the district's financial condition is still not strong for the future;
- ✓ There is room on the middle/high school campus to locate a new elementary school; a *concept* sketch from the district's architects was shown; and,
- ✓ The district had submitted a proposal for a full day pre-K program for 4 year olds that had a half-year budget of \$87,607. The proposal was not funded;

5. Bill Silky then provided the key findings from the draft study. Alan Pole concluded this portion of the presentation by sharing the conclusion to the study that there is a better way educationally and fiscally to reconfigure the grades to provide a sound instructional program. He also shared tentative recommendations from the study that included the following:

1. It is recommended that, effective with the 2016-17 school year:
  - a. The Otego Elementary School should be closed;
  - b. Grades K-2 should be moved from the Otego Elementary School to the Unadilla Elementary School;
  - c. Grade 5 should be moved from the Unadilla Elementary School to the Unatego Middle School.
2. It is further recommended that, upon closing the Otego Elementary School, the school district should implement the staffing savings identified in this study using attrition.
3. It is further recommended that the district secure voter approval to establish a capital reserve account at its earliest convenience.
4. It is further recommended that the district fund its capital reserve account with the monies that are saved from the staffing reductions in #2 above, with any reductions in the district's debt service (\$75,976 in 2016-17, \$414 in 2017-18, and \$49,674 in 2018-19), and any other surplus finds that are generated at the end of the fiscal year.
5. It is further recommended that the district convene a facilities planning committee whose role it will be to develop a long term facilities plan for the district including the design of a new elementary school to be located on the middle/high school campus.
6. It is further recommended that the Unadilla Elementary School be closed in the same year that the new elementary school is ready for use.
7. It is further recommended that the district should immediately explore the possible sale and/or leasing of the Otego Elementary School.

6. Prior to asking for committee reactions to the report, Alan Pole reviewed the four options that are currently before the committee. These four options are as follows:

**Option 1:** Remaining as is (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12)

**Option 2:** Close Otego Elementary School, make Unadilla K-4, move 5<sup>th</sup> grade to the Middle School

**Option 2.b:** Close Otego Elementary School, make Unadilla K-5

**Option 3:** Close both elementary schools and build a new K-5 elementary school on the Middle/High School campus.

**Option 4:** Close Unadilla Elementary School, make Otego K-4, move 5<sup>th</sup> grade to the Middle School

7. The meeting was then opened up to the committee and meeting observers in order to solicit comments and questions on the draft report. These comments and questions included the following:

- If Otego closes, what would happen to the bus garage?
- Keep the buildings open one more year and vote on a new elementary school. If the vote passes, then decide on a timeline for closing and the procedures for closing the elementary schools.
- The greatest benefit of this plan is a new elementary school that is really needed.
- While it is nice to consider using attrition when reducing staff, it is important to realize the savings; therefore even if people are affected, the positions should be eliminated as soon as possible.
- There was concern expressed that the septic tank at Otego Elementary has a very short expected life; therefore it should be replaced regardless of what is decided.
- If the septic tank goes, a question was asked as to where the students would go while it was being replaced.
- Option 2-b is the best option.
- Finding bus drivers will be a problem; there is a shortage everywhere and a number of current drivers will be retiring in the next few years.
- A concern that a closure next year (2016-17) is unrealistic.
- A new school would be wonderful and we want to do what is best for the students.
- A new school would be a draw for people and protect property values; moving it forward is responsible.
- Keep the 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the elementary school.
- Would K-6, 7-12 be a better arrangement than the options proposed?
- A timeline with steps for any changes is needed.
- Think big...do something with the middle and high school as well as the elementary schools.
- The district should have funded a capital reserve a long time ago. The tax cap has prevented this.
- If both schools are eventually going to be closed, the study should contain a statement about the district looking to sell the Unadilla building.
- The Board needs to think about the future of the two villages. Twenty-five to thirty homes in the village (Unadilla) are for sale now. Most residents are 65 or older and can't sell their homes. The flood insurance is a problem also. If the school closes, the tax base will decline.

- A realtor said it is hard to sell homes here. The only people buying homes are second homebuyers from NYC and New Jersey that want large acreage. If Otego Elementary is closed, more people will choose to move to Oneonta and this will affect property values. Also, flood zone insurance is affecting property values.
- We need Pre-K now to get young families to move here; meet the needs of families to increase our student numbers.
- We wanted to build a new school years ago and didn't do it, I am in favor of it now.
- Government is inefficient, but we like this rural life. We need to decide as two towns what do we want this place to be decades from now. Thinks the district needs to keep the schools open for five years until residents can have a community discussion of what they want the communities to be.
- The community needs to discuss this with the Board
- A change has to be made; it is time
- The ultimate decision needs to be community driven.
- The elementary buildings are too old to spend \$3-4 million on each of them.
- I moved here to be near the school for my young children. If the school closes we would look to leave. We want our kids close by and would stay if a new school is built.
- I am impressed with all points of view. Look at real sales of property, not assessed values. Real estate sales have declined dramatically because of assessment issues. The Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) is a problem. It is cheaper to fix the buildings that we have rather than to spend \$18-20 million on a new elementary school.

We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on March 1<sup>st</sup>. If you have questions with these notes, please feel free to contact me.

C: David Richards