

I. CALL TO ORDER

The special meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly was held on September 14, 2010, at the Borough Assembly Chambers, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Mayor Talis J. Colberg for the purpose of holding a joint Assembly/School Board meeting.

II. ROLL CALL

Assembly members present and establishing a quorum were:

Ms. Lynne Woods, Assembly District No. 1 (*Deputy Mayor*) (6:09 p.m.)
Mr. Pete Houston, Assembly District No. 2
Mr. Mark Ewing, Assembly District No. 4
Ms. Cindy L. Bettine, Assembly District No. 5 (6:03 p.m.)
Mr. Jim Colver, Assembly District No. 6
Mr. Vern Halter, Assembly District No. 7

Assembly members absent and excused:

Mr. Ron Arvin, Assembly District No. 3

School Board members present and establishing a quorum were:

Mr. Mike Dunleavy, Seat A
Ms. Sarah Welton, Seat B
Ms. Susan Pougher, Seat C
Mr. R. Ole Larson, Seat D
Mr. Erick Cordero, Seat E
Ms. Colleen Vague, Seat F (*School Board President*)
Mr. Myrl Thompson, Seat G

Borough staff in attendance were:

Ms. Elizabeth Gray, Acting Borough Manager
Mr. John Aschenbrenner, Borough Attorney
Ms. Lonnie R. McKechnie, Borough Clerk
Ms. Brenda J. Henry, Executive Assistant to the Borough Clerk
Ms. Shaune O'Neil, Public Works Director
Ms. Tammy Clayton, Finance Director
Ms. Eileen Probasco, Planning Chief

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Colberg inquired if there were any objections to taking up items B and D together, under Item B.

There was no objection noted.

Mayor Colberg inquired if there were any other changes to the agenda.

GENERAL CONSENT: The agenda was approved as amended without objection.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Ms. Helen Munoz, a member of the public.

V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

The following person spoke to concerns regarding financial literacy education:
Ms. Helen Munoz.

VI. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Building Construction Progress and Review of School Capital Construction Plan (Requested by Borough Administration and Pursuant to MSB 2.12.075(A))

Ms. O'Neill provided a report on building construction progress and review of school capital construction plan.

Assemblymember Ewing:

- queried if the Borough oversees construction projects for the School District; and
- further asked why the funds for the Wasilla High School parking lot were appropriated but the project was delayed.

Ms. O'Neill:

- stated that the Cottonwood Elementary School and Wasilla High School projects were bid together;
- further added that the Wasilla High project came in higher than what was allocated in the bond;
- related that the Borough had to go to the state of Alaska to get permission to reallocate funds from the security portion of the bond into the Wasilla High School project; and
- noted that this took a month to two months before the work could be awarded.

Assemblymember Ewing queried if the project was not awarded in July.

Ms. O'Neill stated that it was awarded in July, excepting the Wasilla High School portion, which was just awarded.

Assemblymember Ewing queried when the additional funding was awarded.

Ms. O'Neill:

- stated that she did not have that information before her; and
- related that the project was moved forward as quickly as possible.

B. Charter School Sites Road Access Issues *(Requested by Assemblymember Houston)*

D. Charter Schools

Assemblymember Houston:

- stated that he is the one who requested this be on the agenda;
- spoke to concerns with previous road access issues with school site selection;
- opined that the Assembly needs to do an after-the-fact review of how well the site selection process worked; and
- stated that he would like to ensure that the process was streamlined as possible.

Ms. Probasco provided a report on charter school site selection road access issues.

Assemblymember Bettine queried how much the Borough is involved in transportation issues with the latest charter school site selection.

Ms. Probasco;

- stated that she worked with Mrs. McCauley of the Birchtree Charter School so that she was aware that traffic was a main concern;
- further added that they recognized that the school being located on the Palmer-Wasilla Highway was a concern due to the high volume of traffic;
- advised that together, it was determined that traffic would enter and exit at the light; and
- stated that there was an opportunity for the Public Works Department to do a site review and provide suggestions.

Assemblymember Bettine queried if the School District left it up to the principal of Birchtree to secure any information necessary regarding transportation.

Ms. Probasco noted that Ms. McCauley was present to answer the question.

Ms. Susan McCauley, Birchtree Charter School Principal:

- stated that she did have an opportunity to work with Borough staff throughout most of the RFP process;
- further added that she also received a lot of assistance from School District Administration;
- related that the traffic feasibility information on the proposed site came from Borough staff;
- stated that the revised ordinance does specify that a proposed site needs to consider appropriate road access based on many factors;
- further added that the previous ordinance specifically said that the director of planning would prepare a report regarding traffic feasibility;
- noted that a week prior to the Assembly meeting, staff had questions about traffic feasibility;
- opined that the meeting felt very last minute;

- related that if the meeting had not been held, that staff would not have felt comfortable recommending the site to the Assembly;
- noted that the process does not require collaboration; and
- opined that collaboration works well and should be formally added.

Assemblymember Houston stated that he would like to underscore that staff conducted activities that were outside the scope of the ordinance and that if staff had not stepped up to the plate that it might have delayed the process.

Assemblymember Colver:

- stated that he recognizes the hard work and efforts of Principal McCauley;
- related that he is hearing good things;
- opined that rather than a re-write of code, that the Borough should create a policy that collaboration occurs;
- opined that the Borough needs to recognize that the expertise of the Planning Department and the Public Works Department need to be provided to school site selection;
- stated that it might become necessary to set a deadline for opening schools;
- spoke to many complaints that were received regarding submitting RFP's for the school sites; and
- stated that he is pleased with the charter school model.

Assemblymember Ewing queried where the new school is located.

Principal McCauley advised that it is located across from the ATT sports center on the Palmer-Wasilla Highway.

Assemblymember Ewing:

- stated that the Borough requires businesses to do traffic impact studies; and
- queried why traffic impact studies are not required for school site selection.

Ms. Probasco stated that it is due to this not being a Borough building or site, it is a lease.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- Birchtree Charter School being the first school to go through the new site selection process;
- the need for a policy to require collaboration;
- the need for a traffic impact analysis; and
- charter schools having to pay property tax.

C. Long Range Financial Plan *(Requested by Assemblymember Woods)*

Assemblymember Woods:

- stated that she requested this to be on agenda; and
- stated that as soon as she received the information she immediately began to wonder what could be reduced.

Superintendent Dr. Burnley requested that Mr. Ken Forrest provide the Assembly with a fiscal overview.

Mr. Ken Forrest, Assistant Superintendent, and Ms. Terrie Irwin, Chief Financial Officer, provided a fiscal overview for the School District.

Assemblymember Ewing queried the increase from 18.82 percent to a 23 percent increase in the Borough portion for the School District budget.

Mr. Forrest:

- stated that the State uses two names interchangeably, being the operating fund and general fund;
- related that the District will be referring to it as the operating/general fund in order to be consistent; and
- advised that State resources are 77 percent and Borough resources are 23 percent of the projected budget, as there is no federal budget component.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- the Borough's contribution to the School District's projected budget; and
- fiscal overview as a whole.

(The special meeting recessed at 7:55 p.m. and reconvened at and reconvened at 8:10 p.m.)

E. District Director Pay Increases *(Requested by the Assembly)*

Assemblymember Ewing spoke to seeing promising results from Superintendent Dr. Burnley.

Superintendent Dr. Burnley spoke to the need for director pay increases.

Discussion ensued regarding the possibility of director pay increases.

F. School Board Resolution Serial No. 11-002, School District Fund Balance; and School Board Resolution Serial No. 11-003, Lapsed Funds *(Requested by School Board Member Cordero)*

Superintendent Dr. Burnley and Mr. Forrest spoke in support for the School District to retain all of the School District's lapsed funds.

Assemblymember Ewing:

- stated that he would like to be assured that the fund balance would be something that could be rolled over and used to offset the following year's budget; and
- stated that perhaps a percentage of the funds could go into a savings account; and
- advised that he would like to encourage frugal spending.

Mr. Forrest:

- spoke to new accounting regulations that are coming forward referred to as Gasby 54; and
- stated that it is the intent of the School District to provide better information in support of full transparency.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- the possibility of new legislation for the District to retain their fund balance;
- the possibility of adjusting the numbers within the current legislation;
- the necessity for the Borough to retain the lapsed funds for school site selection; and
- the need to be able to purchase sites for schools.

D. Student Count Update *(Requested by School Board Member Welton)*

Dr. Deena Paramo, Assistant Superintendent, provided a presentation regarding the student count for the School District.

School Board Member Cordero:

- stated that last year some schools had more students than what was projected; and
- queried if that is happening this year.

Dr. Paramo:

- affirmed the query;
- related that the principal sets class sizes;
- further added that class sizes are set smaller when children are younger;
- stated that the District did remove teachers as quickly as possible from under enrolled schools to the over enrolled schools in order to alleviate overcrowding.

Superintendent Burnley stated that he will be providing class size numbers to the Assembly.

Assemblymember Ewing requested actual numbers from last year to this year and the percentage increase.

Dr. Paramo stated that there are approximately 100-150 students over last year.

Assemblymember Ewing requested dropout rates at winter semester break.

Dr. Burnley stated that the School District would like to have those numbers as well.

Assemblymember Ewing queried the total number of students enrolled in the District.

Dr. Paramo advised that there are 16,830 students in the School District

School Board President Vague spoke to the way student counts are affected.

E. School District Opening Day Review *(Requested by School Board Member Welton)*

School Board Member Welton:

- stated that the teachers celebrated coming back to school;
- advised that the schools were ready for the students and there were no incidents; and
- spoke to the activities conducted around the School District on the first day of school.

F. Adequate Yearly Progress Report *(Requested by School Board President Vague)*

Dr. Deena Paramo provided a report on the adequate yearly progress within the School District.

School Board Member Cordero queried if the trends regarding children with special needs have improved.

Dr. Paramo affirmed the query.

Assemblymember Woods queried if the figures included charter schools.

Dr. Paramo affirmed the query.

School Board Member Welton requested graduation rate clarification.

Dr. Paramo:

- related that the numbers are calculated from four years;
- further added that the rate is calculated by comparing the number of students that enter as freshman and compared to the numbers of students that graduate as seniors.

Assemblymember Ewing queried the graduation rate of Wasilla High School.

Dr. Paramo:

- apologized that she did not have individual school data with her; and
- stated that it is probably a little lower than seventy percent.

Superintendent Dr. Burnley noted that there are several initiatives that are in place at Wasilla High School.

Assemblymember Bettine queried if the District is busing kids to different schools when parents request it.

Dr. Paramo affirmed the query.

Assemblymember Bettine:

- noted that Houston High School and Palmer High School were unenrolled last year, but had made adequate yearly progress; and
- queried if that would be announced.

Superintendent Burnley:

- stated that this would be announced;
- noted that the announcement would be an effort to get kids back into their home school; and
- spoke to the International Baccalaureate Program at Palmer High School.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- the International Baccalaureate Program at Palmer High School;
- drop-out rates in the Borough;
- how drop-out rates are calculated; and
- special needs students.

(Assemblymember Ewing exited the meeting at 9:19 p.m.)

G. Joint Borough/School District Efforts *(Requested by School District)*

1. Information Technology
2. Transportation
3. Maintenance and Operations
4. Purchasing
5. Archive Systems/Records Management

Ms. Gray provided a report regarding the possibility of reducing duplicity within the Borough and the School District.

Superintendent Burnley:

- stated that he is in favor of collaborating on a joint meeting space;
- spoke to the possibility of collaborating on fleet maintenance; and
- related that he is in favor of promoting efficiency and effectiveness to reduce spending.

Assemblymember Colver:

- opined that technological collaboration may not be feasible;
- stated that the model is out there for collaboration on fleet maintenance;
- opined that it would have to come down to a mandate, due to the numerous road service and maintenance facilities that are in use; and
- advised that the former Manager, John Duffy had wanted to restructure and collaborate with fleet maintenance.

H. Review School District Needs/Items to Request from Legislature *(Requested by School Board Member Pougher)*

1. Mat-Su Central School Building
2. Valley Pathways Building
3. Mat-Su Day School Building
4. Iditarod Elementary School Building
5. Libraries

School Board Member Pougher provided a report on what she would like to see the legislature consider.

Assemblymember Bettine queried if the list that was reported on had been approved by the School Board.

School Board Member Pougher stated that it had not.

Assemblymember Bettine:

- stated that due to the preliminary list, she can see where two more schools would be needed; and
- further added that in light of an earlier discussion, it would be great to get a comprehensive list of areas that are in need of schools.

Discussion ensued regarding the tentative legislative priorities for the School District.

I. Su Valley High School Wood Burning Furnace and Forestry Update *(Requested by School Board Member Thompson)*

School Board Member Thompson spoke to the presentation regarding the Su Valley high School Wood Burning that was provided to the School Board.

J. Bond Projects for Next Year *(Requested by School Board Member Thompson)*

School Board Member Thompson:

- advised that he is the one that requested this be on the agenda, but cannot recall the reason;
- queried if the School District had any plans for bonds for next year.

Assemblymember Houston:

- stated that he thought it was established that the Joint Assembly/School Board Committee on School Issues was going to have a subcommittee to discuss these kinds of issues; and
- queried if the committee was formed and the status.

Assemblymember Colver advised that the committee was formed and just dealt with this year's bond projects on the October 5 ballot.

Assemblymember Bettine:

- requested that when the Assembly begins looking at bond construction projects, that everyone review the Joint Use of Public Schools document;
- stated that she thought that the committee would look at how that might affect the site selection process;
- stated that she would like to get ahead of the game regarding new schools;
- opined that it is important to get community input as to where the new schools are located;
- related that Palmer is interested in keeping their schools centrally located; and
- further added that it is good to know the community's position in order to garner support.

Assemblymember Houston:

- stated that he had requested a long range projection and a bond schedule;
- noted his agreement that the Borough needs to divert from the current process of what is put on the ballot each year; and
- opined that it is better to be prepared with an outline as to where the Borough would like to go in the next five years.

Superintendent Dr. Burnley:

- stated that the School District is in favor of working with the Borough regarding community usage; and
- related that Mr. Forrest and himself have both lived in communities where parks are attached to the schools.

VI. SCHOOL BOARD, MAYOR, ASSEMBLY, AND STAFF COMMENTS

School Board Member Cordero:

- thanked the School District for the presentations that were provided;
- stated that they are very helpful;
- pondered if life skills could be incorporated into existing curriculums; and
- requested that the School District Administration look into this.

School Board Member Dunleavy:

- thanked everyone for a productive meeting;
- stated that he enjoyed the presentations; and
- spoke to concerns with bonding for School District projects.

School Board President Vague:

- stated that this is the School District's last meeting with Mayor Colberg;
- further added that she is looking forward to working with him in the future;
- congratulated Assemblymember Halter on Assembly District 7 schools meeting adequate yearly progress;
- stated that there are kids in 83 portables throughout the District, which can be very uncomfortable;
- related that the District is woefully out of floor space;
- opined that the District will need ten schools in ten years; and
- further added that it will be necessary to look at alternative funding sources; and
- stated that it was a good meeting with good dialogue.

Assemblymember Houston:

- noted his support of School Board Member Cordero's request to include life skills to the current curriculum;
- opined that the Assembly will need to grapple with the funding formula;
- stated that he disagrees that the population is not going to be willing to tax themselves more to fund schools better; and
- further added that he would like to see the joint body engage in dialogue on that subject.

Assemblymember Halter:

- thanked the School Board for their support of the Susitna Valley High School's wood fired boiler;
- related that this project means a lot to constituents in his district;
- requested that legislation be drafted that suspends Ordinance Serial No. 09-089 for a period of three years or \$5 million dollars, whichever comes first.

Assemblymember Bettine:

- opined it was a good meeting; and
- stated that she wanted to extend apology to Assemblymember Ewing, the joint body, and audience for her side chatter.

Assemblymember Woods:

- stated that she finds the joint meetings informative and people knowledgeable;
- opined that it is a good way to look at the issues; and
- stated that this is her last joint meeting as her term will end in October.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The special meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.



RONALD ARVIN, Deputy Borough Mayor

ATTEST:



LONNIE R. McKECHNIE, CMC, Borough Clerk

Minutes approved: 10/19/10